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16<sup>th</sup> August 2018

## **18/03750/PREAPP**

### **The Society's response to a pre-application consultation for proposed Cardiology Research Unit (CRU) at the BRI for University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust.**

#### **Introduction**

The Society is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this pre-application. Public consultation is effective when it occurs early enough in the planning process to affect the final development. The Society approaches all development proposals with a positive attitude, seeking to ensure they lead to a clear net gain for the area and for Bristol.

#### **The development**

The development will provide new research offices and laboratory space for the Bristol Heart Institute. A new building is proposed with accommodation over five floors:

- entrance level on Marlborough Hill / Cottage Place with a reduced footprint
- three main floors
- plant level.

#### **Summary**

The Society supports this development as set out in the Design and Access Statement 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018 (the Statement) but would like to see new trees planted nearby to offset the loss of trees on this site. In our view this building when viewed from Marlborough Hill – the main viewpoint - would largely appear as a free-standing structure (although linked to the BHI behind it), and so the design should be free to use modern architecture and materials.

#### **Uses**

The Society welcomes the expansion of the Bristol Heart Institute, a major centre for the study and practice of cardiac surgery in the UK, and the expected increase in local employment.

## **The Site**

The site is all within the precinct of the BRI on Marlborough Hill, a steep hill on the southern slopes of Kingsdown and immediately adjacent to Kingsdown Conservation Area. Currently the site is largely covered by trees of no particular value, although any tree cover locally can be seen as a welcome feature in what is a very built-up area. The site has a pronounced slope to the south. We would welcome the planting of new trees in the local area to replace the loss of tree cover from this site.

On the opposite side of Marlborough Hill is a small piece of land also largely covered with trees. There are no residential houses facing the site, but the site is overlooked from the rear of houses further up the hill. Marlborough Hill is a public road which carries little motor traffic but is a popular pedestrian route linking the upper areas of Kingsdown to Maudlin Street and central Bristol. There are walkways running east west through the BRI site from Marlborough Hill to St Michael's Hill, including Cottage Place which runs along the N side of the BHI and forms the N side of this development.

## **Mass height and design**

The design images in the pre-application statement are of a cube-shaped building, faced in stone at the ground floor and with metal clad elevations on the upper floors. The building fully occupies the site, going right up the pavement line on Marlborough Hill presumably with the aim of making full use of the available land area. The new Cardiology Research building would be connected on the west side to the existing BHI building which is a striking modern building of architectural merit having a copper roof now weathered to an attractive shade of blue-green. The mass of the new building is in proportion to the BHI building. The Statement claims that this building "... effectively completes the (BHI) building providing a presence on Marlborough Hill." However in our view the BHI building would be largely hidden behind the new building. This suggests the new building should be judged on its own merits. In our view the mass, height and indicative design are of an appropriate scale and appearance for this site. A taller building would be problematic.

## **Materials**

In the right context the Society welcomes high-quality modern architecture using new materials or old materials used in new ways, and in this case the use of metal cladding for the upper elevations we think makes a strong statement of modernity and function. Brick or stone at ground floor level would match the brick wall immediately to the north of Cottage Place facing Marlborough Hill, and so provide a good link to the streetscape. Although use of brick is mentioned five times as a facing material in the Statement, as far as we can see there is no brickwork visible in the illustrations.

## **Access and the streetscape**

Lower down Marlborough Hill are other modern and generally low-rise hospital buildings while further up the hill are 18C and 19C houses; however, in the immediate vicinity there are no other buildings (other than the BHI) with which this building would have a visual relationship. The new building would sit at the edge of the hospital estate facing onto the Kingswood Conservation Area. That said, we do not see that this proposed building would have an unwelcome impact on the area. Access by car appears to be quite cramped given the small amount of space in front of the entrance. This is a function of the small site. We note that patient access from Marlborough Hill is not envisaged.