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November 2018

The Society's response to planning application - 18/05310/F – St Catherines Place Shopping Centre East Street Bedminster

The proposal

Comprehensive redevelopment of the site to provide mixed use development comprising residential, new retail, leisure and commercial space including a cinema, refurbishment of existing retail facilities together with parking and amenity space, vehicular access, servicing arrangements, public realm, landscaping and associated works. The proposal would build approximately 270 new homes in five blocks between 4 and 22-floors tall.

Summary

The Society welcomes the proposal to demolish and redevelop buildings that do not contribute to the vitality and appearance the area. The redevelopment of the land around Dalby Avenue is a once in a generation opportunity to deliver an imaginative new district quarter. This opportunity will be lost if each of the five development sites are treated as a stand-alone development. The site offers a significant potential for intensification. The Society regrets that it cannot support the scheme in its current form in the absence of a 3D area-wide spatial framework informed by detailed context appraisal.

Change of use

The Society supports the principle of mixed-use redevelopment of the site. Bedminster is an important local centre and is well placed to attract high quality development to create more sustainable local centre. The refurbishment of the neglected shopping arcade would be a significant planning gain.

Height and mass

The critical planning question remains the extension of the permitted tower from 17 to 22-floors and the change of design. The proposal is to build 208 one and two-bedroom flats which raises significant issues relating to urban design which are not addressed. The

application must be considered as part of a larger development. The illustration on page 32 of the Design and Access Statement shows the anticipated redevelopment of neighbouring sites.

The aggregate delivery of these high-rise developments would create a flood of one and two-bedroom flats in East Bedminster, a mono-culture of small flats. There must be an evaluation of the proposed accommodation mix related to the East Bedminster housing need assessment. The declared intentions of the developers of the other sites, Pring Street and Little Paradise are relevant planning considerations.

Would all these developments of small flats be marketable? The planning application documents offer little information about the impact on the social and economic infrastructure on the neighbourhood and the demands that the aggregate development would place upon it. There is little information offered about how the scheme would integrate within the wider character area. The proposal concentrates on development within the red line of its boundary.

Given its location, size, urban aspirations and density, the proposal is critical to the creation of a new urban quarter. This is a massive piece of urbanisation. A development of the proposed scale together with the succeeding developments will transform the physical, social and economic character of the Bedminster town centre. In terms of urban design, it would be a mistake to restrict the assessment of the proposal within its boundary. It is essential to have a clear urban design proposal from the applicant and the other developers of the interconnection of the several developments and of the aggregate development to the town centre.

The Society has the same concern about the development of the other sites, their relationship to each other and to the wider townscape. The Society appreciates the benefits of higher density levels, but the proposal lacks information on the non-residential aspects of the scheme. How would the development respond to the needs of the community? How is the housing mix determined?

The aggregate sites are too large and important for the development to be entirely developer led. It is not intended as a criticism, but it is inevitable, each developer wishes to realise the maximum development value. The public interest requires an overall framework to enable an overview of the integration of the development within the city. There must be a public/private partnership. The aggregate development has aspects in common with the Kings Cross redevelopment process; it will transform East Bedminster.

The Society understands that a developer syndicate has instructed the Nash Partnership to produce an analysis of the heritage and character of the aggregate development area and its relation to the East Bedminster character area. The Society proposes to contribute to the public consultation of the spatial strategy for the wider area when arranged.

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Density

We acknowledge that density is a product of design, not a determinant of it. This type of development intensity always questions the quality of the residential offer. This is already a

higher density figure for the average in this part of the city. A design-led approach faces serious challenges managing this kind of density. An outstanding omission is the consideration of what is an adequate provision of public/private open space for a development of this density.

Design

Given the Society's larger concerns we do not propose to make detailed comment on the design before the publication of the Nash Partnership advice. There are however matters to draw to the Council's attention.

- 1 Post-Grenfell, the 22-floor tower has only one access column and there is a car park beneath the tower.
- 2 The ratio of single aspect flats to double aspect flats is nearly 2:1.
- 3 The development contains a number of long artificially lit access corridors.
- 4 There is no affordable housing. The inclusion of affordable housing is an essential qualification for maximising the site value.

Conclusion

There are significant reservations from the urban design point of view which do not allow the Society to support the current iteration. The application fails to consider or provide information about the integration of this massive proposal with the other development plots of its integration within the local character area. From the point of view of urban design, the assessment of the impact of the whole Dalby avenue development area should be assessed from street-level in the development area and for its impact and integration into the immediate streets of traditional buildings that adjoin the scheme.