



an independent force for a better Bristol

6th June 2019

The Society's response to the planning application - 10 Feeder Road St. Philip's - 19/01881/F

The proposal

- 1 Summix FRB Developments Limited (the Developer) proposes to demolish the existing industrial buildings to construct a mixed-use development of purpose-built student accommodation and employment workspace. 641 student rooms will be in blocks of 7, 8 and 14-floors tall. The commercial floorspace will be in a separate 5-storey building. The commercial building will have separate parking and public realm Improvements are proposed in Feeder Road and Albert Road.

Summary

- 2 The Society supports redevelopment. The whole area of St. Philip's Marsh that lies between the railway and the River Avon, has recently begun to attract major redevelopment proposals. It is critical that major developments, of which this is one, integrate into a wider development framework. The Society regrets that it does not support the 14-floor above ground tall building of the proposed design in this location and considers that the architectural design requires rethinking to comply with the Council's design aspirations.

Demolition

- 3 The site is outside any conservation area. The Society is unaware of proposals that Mott McDonald may make in their framework document to retain structures that have a heritage value. The current buildings on the site have no architectural merit. However, in the early 19th century an oil mill stood on the site, some of its walls and paving survive and could be included in the redevelopment. We welcome the setted paving proposed in section 6 - the landscape. The scheme would offer more efficient use of city centre land.

Use

- 4.1 Current planning policy protects the existing employment use. The site lies in the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone. The overarching policy of the Temple Quarter Spatial Framework (Framework) is to provide employment space. The Council must decide whether the new employment space adequately compensates for the loss of the existing employment space and/or whether the provision of large-scale student

accommodation close to the new Bristol University campus outweighs the net loss of employment space.

- 4.2 The Society questions the use of the whole of the upper floors for student accommodation. The Society refers to the emerging Council policy ULH 6: 'Specialist Student Housing'. The Society would support the inclusion of residential space within the scheme. A development of this size should contribute to the local housing needs as part of a mixed development. The new University Campus will employ many new academic and non-academic staff who will require accommodation. The area needs a permanent residential population not least to support retail uses throughout the year.
- 4.3 Whilst the Society supports purpose-built student accommodation the Council must balance the citywide need for student accommodation with competing local needs for commercial space and housing
- 4.4 The Society supports commercial uses at ground level to provide more active frontages and mitigate the flood risk. At this early stage of redevelopment, the commercial uses should be as flexible as possible to reduce the risk of vacant units.

Height and mass

- 5.1 This is a prominent and highly visible corner site, at a gateway between Temple Quarter and St Philips Marsh. Its contribution to the urban design of the area is crucial. The Society supports the Council's decision to produce a framework to unlock the development potential of St Phillips Marsh. The development area is too large and important to be developer led. Piecemeal development of individual sites would be a disaster.
- 5.2 The scheme includes a tall building. The Society does not oppose the construction of tall buildings in appropriate places subject to all the tests set out in part 3 of the Urban Living Special Planning Document (Urban Living). The starting point for any proposal should be referred to the Framework which remains current and which sets an appropriate form and scale of development for sites. The Framework sets out urban design factors that relate to each character area to inform planning decisions. The Society acknowledges that the Council has decided that there are special factors that apply to approve the height and mass of the new University Campus. Those considerations do not apply to private commercial student accommodation.
- 5.3 If a tall building is to be justified the Council must assess its impact on the existing views. In this scheme 's context the critical consideration is the views from medium distances and at street level. A 14-floor building would be a radical departure in the current streetscape. If future redevelopment to the east of Albert Road, follows the Urban Living advice and is of medium height the tall building would overbear and potentially shadow that new development.
- 5.4 The Society would support a cluster of buildings of 7/8 floors that would be a transitional height between Bristol University's student accommodation and the anticipated medium redevelopment area to the east of Albert Road. Buildings of the suggested mass would provide a high degree of densification.

Design

- 6.1 Without imaginative design, student accommodation with its standard rooms, creates repetitive elevations. It is disappointing to make a negative response about the design. The buildings would be anonymous and indistinguishable from Bristol's many other 'value architecture' student accommodation blocks. These orthogonal blocks have minimal articulation. The tall building element has no 'top' or 'podium' as Part 3 of the Special Planning Document suggests; it rises directly from the ground. The Society dislikes vertical cliff faces that descend directly to pavement level. These 'anywhere' commercial structures fail to create a sense of place or local character and lack recognisable character or distinction.
- 6.2 On this prominent site, which has no architectural context, the Developer has an unconstrained opportunity to design a cluster of buildings to create a landmark of contemporary architecture. The quality of the design does not justify the construction of a tall building. The Society supports the use of brick but there is an opportunity to use other modern materials. An example of an imaginative design for bespoke student accommodation is the Print Hall on Temple Way; which the Society has given an award. This building offers the contrast between brick and seamed metal in a unified palette.

Public realm

- 7.1 We regret that this site cannot be aggregated with the Homes England site next to the River Avon. The Council will need to be satisfied that the development maintains a flexible relationship to permit future residential development and to promote a green space to the west. There is an opportunity to widen the riverside path and create better pedestrian linkages back to Albert Road.
- 7.2 Bespoke student development should be adaptable to other uses if there is a fall in demand. The spacing of the structural walls and windows should be sited to enable the purpose-built student housing to be converted into residential apartments in a manner that minimises modification to the external envelope.

Conclusion

- 8.1 The Society supports redevelopment of the site as a significant step towards the area's social and economic regeneration. Subject to our reservations about the quantity of commercial space and whether the mixture of uses should include ordinary residential accommodation, the Society supports purpose-built student accommodation.
- 8.2 The scheme promotes a 14-floor above ground tall building that is distinguished only by its height. The application lacks consideration beyond the site boundary; it should consider the future development of sites to the south and east to promote coherent redevelopment. The scheme represents a lost opportunity to design a high-quality modern building cluster on a prominent site that faces Totterdown Basin and the river Avon and is at the heart of a developing commercial area that will transform and reunite this run-down area with the economic life of the city. The design and massing of the proposal requires rethinking to comply with Bristol City Council's design policies.