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Former Esso Garage Bath Road Totterdown - 18/04620/F - the Society's response to the planning application

1 The proposal

Bath Road Property Development (the Developer) proposes to build 152 new dwellings in three buildings comprising of a 15+2 storey tower, a central block ranging between 6 and 7 storeys and a 3-storey eastern block including ground and lower ground floor commercial space, car & cycle parking, refuse storage and landscaping.

2 Summary

2.1 The Society welcomes the regeneration of this site, which has been a long-standing negative feature in the Bath Road. The Society is disappointed with quantity of employment space, opposes the tall-building element of the development (the Tower) but otherwise supports the height mass and design of the central and eastern blocks, the proposed mix of uses, open space and the sustainable approach to development.

2.2 The Society assumes that the application has reached its final stage and that the Developer is confident that the design will persuade the Environment Agency that its objection dated the 12th October 2018 can be withdrawn.

2.3 The Society recognises that this will be a demanding site to develop. The difficulties involve the demolition, the site topography and piling in the uncertain geology of the riverbank.

3 Uses

The site falls within the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone where the Temple Quarter Spatial Framework (the Framework) creates the expectation that every site will make a substantial contribution to the overall employment space. The Society is aware that the Paintworks management say that they have a waiting list of potential business occupants. The Society suggests to the Council that this development should provide a greater area of employment space. It is one of the few sites in the Enterprise Zone whose access is not compromised by barriers created by waterways or the railway.

4 **The height and mass of the middle and eastern blocks**

The Society supports this aspect of the proposal with which it has no issues.

5 **The height and mass of the Tower**

The Tower is a tall building that engages part 3 of the Urban Living Special Planning Document (Urban Living) Guidance for tall buildings checklist.

5.1 **Q3.1 Is the tall building well located?**

The site will give the future residents easy access to the centre of the city and public transport. However, the Tower would have the disadvantage for many of its residents of being sited above a busy, light-controlled junction on an arterial road with the added nuisance of industrial noise from the north side of the Avon River.

5.2 **Q3.2 Does the scheme make a positive contribution to the long-range, mid-range and immediate views to it?**

The view of the Totterdown escarpment from the north is a valuable landscape asset. The Tower would harm the mid-range and immediate views. At 65 metres, the height of the Tower would break the skyline of the escarpment. From the south the Tower would have an unmissable impact on the views to the north for many Totterdown residents. The Tower would dominate the local character of the Bath Road and Totterdown Bridge which is domestically scaled.

Although the 2016 Framework identified the site as suitable for low rise development the subsequent publication of Urban Living in 2018 creates a reasonable expectation that this site is appropriate for medium rise development of between 5-8 storeys and should have a business emphasis. The advised building height can be interpreted as the height above the level of the Bath Road. The Framework and Urban Living give planning advice to set an appropriate development form and scale for sites in the vicinity. The framework also sets out principles to inform development decisions on the River Avon's south bank. A tall building must be justified against the assumption of a medium rise scheme in both the Framework and in Urban Living.

The central and eastern blocks demonstrate the potential for densification. However, the Tower does not follow the recent planning advice. The land abutting the west of Totterdown Bridge is allocated for development. The increased massing and form of this site would have significant implications for the future development of the site on the west abutment of Totterdown Bridge; it would introduce close-by large scale development.

5.3 **Q3.3 Does the scheme demonstrate design excellence?**

This is an important site on the approach to the centre of the city. The proposed Tower is indistinguishable from many other residential blocks. The 'shoulder' feature attempts to create a slimmer tower but the external balconies have the opposite effect. The quality of the design and materials do not outweigh and justify the harm that the mass and height of the proposal would cause to local character. Only the Tower's height would make it a 'memorable landmark', one that is not locally welcome. A lower-rise development in place of the Tower would still add substantially

to the city's housing stock and the small number of additional flats that the upper floors would contain would be outweighed by the harm that the Tower would do to local character and distinction. The Society suggests that the developer considers increasing the height of the lower east block.

5.4 **Q3.4 Does the scheme ensure the safety of occupants and passers-by?**

We draw to the Council's attention are that post-Grenfell Tower this tall building has only one access column and there is a car park beneath the Tower.

5.5 **Q3.7 Does the scheme create a pleasant, healthy environment for future occupants?**

As amenity space of private roof tops and external balconies are superficially attractive, but on this exposed site their dependence on weather conditions, particularly wind speed, would limit their use. We assume that the design will protect the future occupants from traffic fumes and noise of the of Bath Road, Totterdown Bridge junction and the noise from the waste and recycling plant.

6 **Materials**

Subject to agreement with the Council about the choice of brick and seam detail, the Society supports construction of the riverside frontage and the linear block in brick and zinc cladding.

7 **Residential mix and amenity**

The Society supports the Council's policies to ensure a mix of property sizes and tenures on the site and affordable housing to provide a balanced and settled community.

8 **Access, open Space and the Riverside**

The Society appreciates and the attempt to make the site permeable and the commitment to high quality open space including the green edge to the Bath Road frontage. It is unfortunate that the riverside will remain private space because the Totterdown Bridge forms a barrier to the west and there appears to be no agreement with the owners of the neighbouring land to extend the riverside path into the Paintworks development. An earlier scheme included the prospect of a longer riverside path through the neighbouring land.

9 **Conclusion**

The Society submits that the Council should support the planning advice given in the Framework. The purpose of the advice is to maintain the character of the landscape of the Totterdown escarpment. The Society supports the logic and purpose of the spatial advice for the Avon Riverside to ensure that development enhances its riverside setting and enhances the residential quality of the Totterdown slopes.

Urban Living's overriding purpose is of create a liveable city and to enhance local character and distinction. The critical consideration is the impact of this building on the Bath Road, Totterdown Bridge, the riverside and from the Totterdown slopes where the harmful impact will be substantial. A tall, stand-alone tower that breaks the skyline from many angles would be to repeat past planning mistakes and should be avoided.