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## **The Society's response to a planning application – 19/02664/F to redevelop the site of Chanson Foods Avon Street**

### **Introduction**

- 1 The Society supports in principle the development of the Chanson Foods site with a denser development next to Bristol University's University Campus (Campus). However, we have reservations about the development of such a large single-use development that is unmixed with ordinary residential use. The Society does not support the height and mass of the design which overdevelops the site and presents a bleak view on all sides.

### **The proposal**

- 2 The proposal of Victoria Hall Management Limited (VHML) is for managed student residential accommodation comprising 502 bedspaces and communal facilities arranged within three buildings. The buildings are stepped, varying from 6 – 13 storeys, arranged around a central communal courtyard. To the harbour side of the site there is a standalone two storey 'hub' building containing offices and other uses ancillary to the student accommodation.

### **Demolition**

- 3 There is nothing of architectural merit on the site.

### **Change of use**

- 3.1 The Society supports student accommodation. The inclusion of and extensive provision of amenity space and collaborative work-space is unusual and welcome. These aspects may make this accommodation more attractive than much of the competing student accommodation should there be an oversupply in the market. Policy BCAP4 and the emerging policy proposal ULH 6: 'Specialist Student Housing' supports the principle of student accommodation in the city centre. There is no local harmful concentration of student accommodation.

3.2 These are relevant points for consideration.

- This is a sustainable location for access to the Campus.
- In addition to the 950-student bed-spaces that the University plans on the Campus there are planning applications for 640 student bed-spaces at 10 Feeder Road and 750 bed-spaces in the Silverthorne Lane. There have been planning enquiries relating to student accommodation on other local sites in addition to the substantial quantity of student accommodation planned at Bedminster Green. Emerging Draft Policy H7: 'Managing the development of purpose-built student accommodation' proposes 2,300 student bed-spaces in the Temple Quarter and 700 in St. Philip's Marsh.
- The Campus will employ 800 new academic staff plus non-academic staff. The new staff will require accommodation.
- Temple Quarter needs a permanent residential population. The area has no social infrastructure. Vacations often make it impossible for businesses to survive in student dominated area.
- 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 not least to accommodate future University employees.

### **Height and mass**

4.1 The current use is low density employment. The Society supports the Council policy to increase land use density in the centre of the city. The scheme includes two tall buildings. The Society does not oppose the construction of tall buildings in appropriate places subject to the Urban Living Special Planning Document (Urban Living). The starting point for any proposal should be the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone Framework (Framework) which remains current and which sets an appropriate form and scale of development for sites which is low rise, 1 to 4 floors. The proposal is a significant departure from the adopted framework in terms of the scale and massing. The proposed Avon Street blocks are many floors taller than the buildings indicated as appropriate heights in the Framework.

4.2 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. Although the stepped disposition of the three proposed buildings is interesting the Society cannot support the proposed building height of 14-floors, including the ground floor. This building mass overdevelops the site. It would overbear the Council's aspiration to enhance the riverbank with a 'greened' promenade. The mass would potentially inhibit the development of the land acquired east of Avon Street now occupied by a Vauxhall car compound. The development should not exceed 6 floors.

4.3 Buildings south of the railway within the Silverthorne Lane Character Area should be of a scale that is informed by the area's historic character. These proposed

buildings would establish themselves as the area's dominant landmarks and given the serious concerns about the quality of design this is problematic.

### **Design and materials**

- 5.1 The overriding objective of the Framework is to ensure that developments within the Silverthorne Lane Character Area will respond positively to the character of the historic environment. We welcome the proposals:
- To create an attractive soft landscape and to provide space for the social infrastructure that the area lacks. However, an exclusively student population would challenge the viability of any retail or food and drink uses during vacations.
  - To work closely with the University to develop a brief to put student welfare and pastoral care at the heart of the project.
- 5.2 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. The stepped back floors of one elevation do not mitigate the minimal articulation of these orthogonal blocks. The blocks have no 'top' or 'podium' as Part 3 of the Special Planning Document suggests; they rise directly from the ground. The Society dislikes vertical cliff faces that descend directly to pavement level. These commercial structures fail to create a sense of place or local character and lack recognisable character or distinction.
- 5.3 This is a prominent site, visible to railway passengers, to walkers on the riverside path and from Avon Street. There is no immediate architectural context. The VHML has an unconstrained opportunity to design a cluster of buildings to create a landmark of contemporary architecture. The Society supports the use of brick but there is an opportunity to use other modern materials. The illustrations suggest the use of sombre grey brick that would increase the barrack like quality of the masonry cliffs. 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.
- 5.4 Bespoke student development must be adaptable to other uses should there be a fall in demand for that use. 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. Unlike the Freestone Road proposal, the flat sizes appear to be uniform and lack flexibility. We foresee that the mass of the two principal buildings could make their future modification to other uses problematic.

### **Public realm**

- 6 Will this development contribute to the construction of the new bridge across the river to the Campus from which the future occupants will benefit?