



an independent force for a better Bristol

20th March 2020

The Society's response to a Public Consultation 16 March 2020 on proposals to develop land on Dalby Lane, Bedminster; also known as Plot 3 - NCP Car Park (Deeley Freed)

The development

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in the recent consultation event for the latest plans for this site. The presentation and documents give a good picture of the proposals.

The scheme is for the construction of two buildings comprising 700 student beds and 600 m² of flexible workspace on a triangular site bounded by Whitehouse Lane, Dalby Avenue, and on the E side by Windmill Hill City Farm and part of the Bedminster Green Conservation Area.

Summary

While we give below some comments and suggestions for improvement, the Society strongly supports this development proposal.

Context

Several major development schemes are under consideration for this part of Bedminster. The whole Bedminster Green area was the subject of a place-making Framework Report by the Nash Partnership, in which this site is referred to as Site 3. Whilst we have some concerns about building heights, the Society supports the aims of the Framework Report and in particular Section 4, p.66, the Framework Principles of "humanising the (Dalby) Avenue", "Green Network and River Malago" and "Fronting and Enclosing Streets". Currently Dalby Avenue is an unattractive through-route for motor traffic with little or nothing to appeal to the walker or cyclist. There are few and badly-sited crossings, no active street frontages and few trees. We understand that Whitehouse Lane, a narrow road used by cars and cyclists, is under consideration to be made one-way.

Most of the site is cleared and ready for development. There are some small but interesting heritage elements such as the former sluice gate and stone wall. An important feature is the River Malago which flows NE through the site and turns to form part of the NW boundary. A

conspicuous unattractive building which houses a Wessex Water pumping station sits at the northernmost point outside the site boundary.

Uses

Provided it does not become over-dominant, the Society supports the development of high-quality student accommodation, and in particular the creation at the same time of flexible employment space in a part of Bristol where there are many small businesses. There is demand for business space and for local jobs.

The Society expects student development to be adaptable to other uses should there be a change in the market. The spacing of the structural walls and windows should be made to enable purpose-built student housing such as this to be converted into residential apartments in a manner that minimises modification to the external envelope.

We understand that the proposal is to provide an active frontage along Dalby Avenue at ground and first floor levels. The Society supports this but urges the developers to create opportunities for some of that space to be accessible to the wider community. It is important that the development reaches out to the community in addition to improving the townscape and public realm. We also understand that business units will be at ground level fronting on to Whitehouse Lane, which the Society supports.

Mass, height and design

Fronting Dalby Avenue, a terrace of 7-9 storeys is proposed (Building A) broadly following the concave curve of the road. This would be tiered down towards the road, reducing its impact upon it. This would create an enclosed street frontage without being overpowering. The height of some of the blocks of building B would be considerably lower, but we are concerned that the southernmost block of Building B is shown as 9-storeys in height. This is too high in our view. The Society supports a natural progression down in building heights from the higher-density development around Bedminster Green. Building B is also sensitive to views from S of the railway line.

We like the suggested rooftop terrace on the lower part of Building B facing Whitehouse Lane.

Materials and elevations

The Society encourages the use of modern materials and would like to see bold attractive elevations on both proposed buildings, especially the conspicuous elevations facing both sides of Clarke St and onto Dalby Avenue. We urge the architects to seek inspiration from the examples of attractive elevations shown to us in the presentation consultation slides.

Student accommodation and hotel buildings frequently show repetitive and unimaginative window treatments giving the appearance of a dull or threatening institution. We look to the architects to overcome this challenge in the detailed designs. Much of old Bedminster is built in red brick which could be employed here to good effect. Subject to meeting the Council's sustainability requirements, we like the large-scale glass elevations in the curved building on

Dalby Avenue and the idea of making a feature of the proposed cycle storage facility on Whitehouse Lane.

Access, streetscape and public realm

The Society's principal concerns are the public realm and public access. We welcome the emphasis on trees and new public spaces and the linear park along Clarke St. This together with the planned opening-up and improvements to the Malago River will do much to change the landscape for the better.

On board 7, lots of routes are labelled pedestrian/cycle, with no differentiation between which is primarily cycle and which is primarily pedestrian. The detailed design for how to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists on any route is vitally important, and we assume that the current presentation is only as it is because it is high-level.

Again on board 7, the secondary entrance to Windmill Hill from Clarke Street will add to activity along Clarke Street, and is to be welcomed.

We welcome the fact that the developers have discussed with Bristol City Council's Highways ~~en~~ plans to link this development with desired improvements to Dalby Avenue and Whitehouse Lane. However View 5 of the Emerging Proposals clearly shows cars and cyclists sharing a busy road, Dalby Avenue, which contradicts the aspirations made on p.7 Access and Movement. We would like to see a clear separation in both directions made for cyclists along Dalby Ave. We understood from the presentation that a new fully-segregated cycle lane is proposed along the E side of Dalby Avenue.

We acknowledge the generosity of the developers in granting land along Dalby Avenue to the Council for highways improvements. Judging by the helicopter plan view on Board 04, the building looks set back from Dalby Avenue, leaving a wide pavement, which we welcome. The buildings are also set back either side of Clarke Street, a key pedestrian route, which again we welcome. In contrast, the buildings on Whitehouse Lane do not seem to be set back much, and could over-dominate.

View 1 Emerging Proposals, showing Clarke St looking N towards Windmill Hill City Farm entrance, shows an unfortunate mix of cyclists and pedestrians going in different directions sharing what might be a very busy through route at certain times of the day. Students living in Building B will have to cross Clarke St (over the Malago) at the N end to reach Dalby Ave. If Clarke Street is to be shared space, then clear signposting will be needed to allow the space to be shared peaceably. Will this cycle route be designed for utility cyclists (people in a hurry), leisure cyclists, or a mixture? The same remarks apply to the (presumably shared) pedestrian + cycle route along the N side of Building A.

View 2 on the same Emerging Proposals sheet is wrongly labelled. It should say "View north..." not south. Viewpoint 2 on the plan looks as though it should lie more to the south.

The Wessex Water pumping station is an eyesore at the N point of the site. We urge that consideration is given to screening or improving this building as part of the overall Dalby Avenue improvements.

We refer to the proposed new pedestrian routes shown on board 07, one between Clarke Street and Whitehouse Lane, and one between Dalby Avenue and Clarke Street, both running roughly on a NW/SE axis. (These routes do not seem to be shown in the helicopter plan view on Board 04.) There are divided views within the Society on these proposed routes:

- One view is that:
 - it is not on a strong desire line
 - natural surveillance would be weak, particularly at night, and a path along this route could present security issues for the occupants of Building B.
- Others take a different view:
 - permeability of routes in different directions through a neighbourhood is good in principle, and one should not design out permeability for security issues without challenging whether the security issues can be mitigated through design.
 - the site will be so densely populated that the site should create significant pedestrian traffic, thus mitigating the security concern
 - it is on a pedestrian desire line between Victoria Park, under the railway bridge at Windmill Close, along Whitehouse Lane, and via the new route to East Street

Whether or not these routes are made public, the landscape design along the routes will be important, both for residents and (if allowed) the public passing through. For instance, there should not be too much lifeless hard surfacing. The current plans give very little detail on this.