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GAS LANE STUDENT ACCOMMODATION.

The Proposal.

The Watkins Jones proposal for the development of the triangular site between Gas Lane and Freestone Road, is for 387 student bedspaces, including communal facilities, bin and bike stores. No parking spaces are included. Recreational space is provided on a sixth floor terrace and an inner courtyard. Two flexible commercial units are proposed accessed from Freestone Road.

Summary.

The Society cannot support this scheme. We regard it as premature until there is a clearer strategic view of the overall development of the St Philips Marsh area. The Society acknowledges that there is a master plan for the Silverthorne Island area included with the proposal. However, the Society considers that a master plan for the wider St Philips area should be brought forward which would cast light on the mix of development, supporting services and open space. Notwithstanding the masterplan developed with the University, we are opposed to the height and form of the buildings and the impact that would have, in particular, on the courtyard area and the proposed development on the northside of Freestone Road.

Demolition.

There are no buildings of merit on the site.

Land Use, Layout and Height.

The Society is concerned that proposals for development in the St Philips area are coming forward before a strategic overview or masterplan for the wider St Philips area has been agreed. Many of these are for student accommodation which might be appropriate as part of an overall plan for St Philips which would, hopefully, include a variety of land uses to support residential development and avoid losing the opportunity to replace the employment generating activities that have occupied and still do occupy sites there. If the Council is prepared to consider a student accommodation based scheme, however, the Society welcomes the inclusion of commercial units.

We find the layout and proposed height of the development unsupportable. The perimeter form would result in a very shaded and unattractive courtyard space. It would also present cliff faces to Freestone Road, Gas Lane and the north/south route adjacent to the east ends of the development. To the north, the Society considers that this would adversely affect the proposed development on the north side of Freestone Road particularly the lower floors. In Gas Lane the combined effect of the high façade and the historic wall on the opposite side would result in an unpleasant ambience for pedestrians and cyclists using the road. This is

particularly important as we understand that Gas Lane is intended solely for cyclists and pedestrians.

While there might be an opportunity for some higher elements in a development on this site, we strongly suggest a generally lower approach which is sufficiently divided into blocks to allow light into and through the site.

The Society would welcome a car free development proposal.

Landscape.

The Society considers that there is little purpose in commenting on the landscape proposals as we have such fundamental objections to the proposal. Suffice it to say that a row of well-spaced trees on Gas Lane will have only the most minimal mitigating effect on the visual impact of the proposed building in a narrow street.

Access.

Service access would be provided from the north/south route to the east of the site. We are neutral about this but, as with landscape, we want to see a fundamental rethink of the design approach.

Public Realm.

The Society considers that the proposal would have an adverse impact on the street scene and that this cannot be resolved with this design approach. However, there is a great need for public realm improvements in this area to encourage pedestrian and cycle movements. We are also aware of the attractive fan patterned cobbles on Freestone Road. These should be protected in any proposal. The narrow pedestrian tunnel leading north from Freestone Road to Dings Park is also in much need of improvement.