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Bedminster Green River Restoration and Transport consultation – March 2021

Introduction and summary

The Society welcomes and supports the Bedminster Green proposals as far as they go: this area has long suffered from a poor quality urban environment and we wholeheartedly support the desire to see it considerably improved. Given the benefit to people's living environment and mental health, it is imperative that good design principles and high quality materials are used to ensure that the improvements are lasting and uplifting.

Public space

We welcome the soft landscaping proposed on Malago Road, but would like to see more detail of this.

Although there may be little that can be done to change this at this late stage, we are disappointed that the public space is so small compared with the massive surrounding developments.

The loss of many mature healthy trees on Plot 5, whilst not part of the public space, is very concerning. Whilst in the longer term there may be a net biodiversity gain from the river restoration and the other landscaping proposals, that will take some time to occur and meanwhile the area will have noticeably lost mature trees and their considerable ecological and climate change benefits. We feel that is hard to justify.

Bedminster Station

Bedminster Station, together with the adjoining triangle of Plot 5 to the south of Whitehouse Lane, is well-placed to become a transport hub for the Bedminster area.

To fully realise this potential there needs to be an accessible route to the station from the Bedminster Green development. Current access consists of a subway and ramps which are not EA-compliant, reached very indirectly from the area to the west of the station. Extending the existing station subway to the west to provide this access may be a costly option because the Up Relief line, under which the subway would need to pass, is lower than the other lines. Such a scheme would therefore require either that the subway was lowered and the gradients of the ramps reduced, or that the track was raised. Both options are likely to be expensive.

Nonetheless we think it is important to remember that for this station to have a meaningful future as part of MetroWest, it will have to be made more accessible at some point. We wonder whether the Government's 'Access for All' programme could help fund a scheme which would achieve this together with access to the west. We also wonder whether the alternative of completely replacing the subway with a footbridge, accessed by lifts and steps, has been fully considered. This could provide a cheaper and less disruptive solution.

Ideally any improvement should be in place before significant development takes place, so that new residents do not become habituated to other modes of transport. However we recognise that it may not be possible to implement the necessary improvements in a short timescale. We therefore suggest that the plot of land between the station and Whitehouse Lane should be reserved for use as a transport hub, perhaps

with a transport-related 'meanwhile' use, while funding is identified to make the station fully accessible from both west and east.

River Malago



The Malago today, near Clarke Street

We are enthusiastic about the proposals to restore the River Malago through the area. It will enhance the attraction of the open space. The source of the water on Dundry Hill is clean spring water and it must be ensured that the water retains its high quality down to the site. Currently the Pigeonhouse Stream appears to pick up some clouding pollution en route.

Much of the lower Malago flow is currently intercepted and diverted underground at the St John's Lane sluices, going directly to the New Cut and leaving only a low flow through the Green area. We feel that this flow must be increased, enhancing oxygenation, clarity and attractiveness. BCC have confirmed that facilities already exist to monitor and control the rates of flow at the St John's Lane sluices and therefore the benefits associated with a higher flow through the Green should be possible at modest cost. This may encourage wildlife and vegetation.

Maintenance

Having promoted and achieved the pleasant environment associated with water course, we are concerned that if there is no robust plan and funding stream for maintenance and upkeep, the river will turn into a rubbish-strewn dumping ground.

Given the post-pandemic demands on city council funding it is imperative that the developers contribute sufficiently to safeguard the long term future of the river corridor.

We also feel that it is important to encourage the local community to get involved in looking after their new local green space so there is a sense of local ownership.

Quality of materials

Given the current poor quality street scene, we would suggest that pavements and other paved public spaces should use high-quality materials such as Yorkstone or pennant paving where possible with granite kerbs and setts. As a minimum, paved surfaces should consist of high quality concrete slabs, preferably with a heritage finish so that they are indistinguishable from real stone. If that does not align with standard Council cross-Bristol policy, we would challenge that policy.

Similarly, the surfacing material used for cycleways should be carefully considered for its visual impact as well as practicality and should be edged with granite kerbs or setts. There are plenty of UK examples of well designed and crafted schemes of a similar nature and we would wish to see developers and the city council aiming for a high standard and best practice. We are happy to discuss this aspect further with the city council if they would find it helpful.