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## **21/01331/F – BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY'S COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AT BALTIC WHARF.**

### **Background.**

The Society was grateful for the opportunity to consider the earlier pre-app proposals (June 2020 and revisions in January 2021). We commented on the initial pre-app and although largely supportive of the design intentions expressed concern about aspects of the proposal. These concerns focussed on the height of the Harbour facing elevation and its appropriateness for the immediate Harbourside context together with the impact of the proposed massing on the amenity of the central axis through the site.

The January revision looked to address the elevational concerns but was not supported by the full documentation that now accompanies the planning application. The Society welcomes the additional material, not least the photomontages, as an aid to understanding the likely impact of the height and massing of the proposal on both the Harbourside but also views from the south. There are, however, no verified views from the south.

The site is within the City Docks Conservation Area, has an impact on the setting of listed buildings and a scheduled monument and is likely to serve as a precedent for development proposals affecting western harbourside areas. It is important therefore to take time and care to ensure the height, massing and density do in fact respect the sensitive context, would deliver a development that would be a good neighbour and in itself provides a satisfactory living environment.

### **Policy Context.**

The policy context is drawn from the documents comprising the development plan and supported by the council's Urban Living SPD. This context emphasises securing opportunities for sustainable housing to meet the needs of Bristol residents but not at the expense of poor design. The importance of securing good design, and not just avoiding poor design is now being backed by national planning policy to an extent not foreseeable when the local development planning policy context was drawn up. A critical component of securing good design is to pay attention to the context. Here the site benefits from the analysis in the City Docks Conservation Area Character Appraisal. There are other policy considerations relating to public realm, efficient use of land and securing active frontages to the quayside walkways.

## **Land Use.**

The application site is currently used as a caravan park. The Society appreciates the strongly held views of those arguing that the site should not be redeveloped. The caravan site does contribute openness to an otherwise largely built frontage to the harbourside and this, together with the site's tree cover, is an important foil to the more bustling and intensively built-up eastern harbourside. For many, it provides an oasis of tranquillity. However, it is neither accessible nor permeable. We also recognise the pressing need for housing in Bristol not least affordable homes. We do not therefore object to the principle of developing the site, but the loss of what is seen by many as a valuable contribution to the harbourside's character underlines the importance of delivering a well-designed development that can secure broad backing in the community as well as making more efficient use of the site. The Society also supports the proposed harbourside commercial uses.

## **The Proposal.**

The application is for the erection of residential dwellings (166) including affordable homes, commercial floorspace, integrated car and bicycle parking, refuse storage, landscaping and associated infrastructure and services.

As is often the case, there is a tension in this proposal between seeking:

- to maximise housing numbers including providing sufficient coverage to support affordable units and;
- delivering good design including through respecting local character and distinctiveness, building at an appropriate scale, height and massing, protecting and enhancing views into and through the site and ensuring permeability together with an attractive public realm.

## **Height and Massing.**

The two buildings facing the floating harbour are 5 storeys. The central building is 6 storeys. There are three, four and five storey buildings extending towards Cumberland Road.

The most sensitive elevation is the north or harbourside one but in saying this the Society is concerned to avoid the southern elevations being treated as the development's 'back door'. It is important to get the frontage with Cumberland Road right, both in terms of immediate impact and on longer views into the site. On a similar note, established views across the site including of heritage features are important too.

It is acknowledged that there has been a reduction in height from the pre-app proposals seen last summer, but ground levels also appear to have been raised from extant possibly due to flood risk. The Society still feels, however, that the heights of these buildings have not been fully justified in the light of their context and will in all likelihood deliver a disappointing outcome. An improvement, in the Society's view, would be the reduction by at least one storey of the eastern gable of building B and the western gable of building A and depending on east, west and south impacts as yet unverified, possibly building F also. This would help reduce the overall and currently unwelcome impact of the northern elevation when viewed from the north side of the floating harbour. The stepping down would also relate better to the Baltic Wharf development to the immediate east and the Cottage Inn and Underfall Yard to the west.

The Society is concerned about the potential impact of the proposals on important views. We consider that the pre-ap submission has majored on several views from the north side southwards with an absence of views from the south to the north towards Clifton. In addition,

the Society would like to see a view east from the Chocolate Path which includes enough sky to enable better assessment of the impact of the height of buildings included.

We urge the City to check the proposals on Vu-City and, in particular, its impact on the following views:

**SOURCE.** City Docks Conservation area section 6.2.5 Panoramic views

A verified view over the site to Clifton from P29, a Council designed viewing platform dating from a 1991 planning permission.

A verified view from P28 Formal viewpoint on Coronation Road (Upper) over the site to Clifton

A verified view from P35 mid Vauxhall Bridge, To B-Bond over Underfall Yard (strictly this is a view westwards to Rownham Hill)

A verified view from Sylvia Crowe's Wooded Hill (high ground adjacent GII listed Ashton Avenue Rail [Metrobus] Bridge) in Cumberland Basin Character Area of CDCA, to the Cathedral (Grade 1 landmark building Map4), over Avon Crescent.

### **Design and Materials.**

The character and scale of the proposed development is very different from the residential developments in this part of harbourside – both on the north and south banks of the floating harbour. It is much more urban in tone than the existing Baltic Wharf housing immediately to the east and although it bears similarities to the Wapping Wharf development it fails to secure the same pleasing proportions. It is very different to the character of the Cottage Inn and Underfall Yard to the west. The suggested height reduction could help bring the height and footprint into better balance.

### **Public Realm.**

There would be a new pedestrian route through the site which is presently impermeable to the public. This is welcome. The caravan site currently provides an important contribution to the greening of this part of the Harbourside and the loss of trees is clearly a regret to many as there are no other similar spaces on Spike Island. It is important that the proposed landscaping is of a character to in itself make a valuable contribution to both the proposed development and its environs. The indications are that thought has gone into both hard and soft landscaping and it is important the stated intentions are carried through and not 'value engineered' out.

### **Transport and Parking.**

The site is centrally located and served by the metro bus and harbour ferries. It is a short walk from the bus services on Hotwell Road. 78 parking places and 6 fully accessible spaces are proposed. The Society is content with this level of provision. Generous cycle storage is proposed.

### **Conclusion.**

This is an important site in a sensitive part of the harbourside. It should contribute more to the City's overall requirements, particularly for housing, than the existing use. However, nothing other than a well-designed development should be acceptable, notwithstanding the important planning benefits arising from redevelopment. The Society for the reasons set out above has had to conclude that the proposal as it stands is not acceptable. We urge the Council to

resolve the design issues we have raised, with particular reference to the height of the proposals and their impact on important views. This should balance much better the City's requirement for more housing and the importance of preserving and enhancing the special qualities of this area.