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14 April 2021.

PLOT 5 – RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PROPOSALS OF MARCH 2021.

Bristol Civic Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on Dandara's proposed development for Plot 5 identified in the Bedminster Green Framework. We support, in principle, the predominantly residential development of this vacant site. However, we have a number of serious concerns about this proposal which are set out below. The Society hopes that they will assist Dandara in making revisions to the proposal which we could not support in its present form.

The proposal.

Dandara's development comprises 158 apartments and 301sq. m. of mixed retail, eating and community uses. There are three buildings from seven to 10 storeys immediately to the east, west and south of the Green. The non-residential uses are at ground floor level facing Bedminster Green. Public realm improvements including redesigning Bedminster Green are included.

Height, massing and design.

The Society acknowledges that the proposed heights are consistent with the Bedminster Green Framework (BGF) but we expressed our concern about development up to 10 storeys adjacent to the Green in our response to the BGF. The Society considers that the Green is too small to accommodate buildings of this height on its perimeter along with the proposed cluster of taller buildings on the site immediately to the north of Dalby Avenue. These buildings will have an overbearing presence upon the small Green and will cast shadow over a significant part of it in the afternoons for much of the year.

Building 1 would be 10 storeys facing Dalby Avenue. At the eastern end of the building this would face even taller buildings opposite producing a canyon effect on Dalby Avenue. A similar, possibly more pronounced, effect will occur on Hereford Street if high buildings are permitted at this point on plot 1. At the western end, the proposed building would relate most uncomfortably to the two storey existing houses opposite. There has been no attempt to ameliorate this jarring juxtaposition which would have an overbearing, if not overshadowing, impact on the existing houses.

Building 3 offers the opportunity to make transition from the tall buildings proposed to the north to the traditional residential development south of the railway line. The BGF encourages a transition from the new to the existing among other things by stepping down in scale. However, a seven storey building would not achieve this. A three or four storey block of town houses would provide a better transition both in terms of scale and residential type.

We also consider that the upper storeys of a seven storey building would be more exposed to disturbance from the railway line.

The proposed massing of the three buildings is oppressive. There is little variation in height and no breaks in the facades to allow permeability or light into the developments. The Society would prefer to see less dependence on perimeter development in building 1 away from the elevation to the Green. Building 2 substantially fills its site with very little offered to relieve the solid facades. The space between the southern and northern wings of the development appears very enclosed and shady. We have already suggested a different approach to building 3.

In this section, the Society addresses the proposed design in terms of its impact on the character of the neighbourhood. Other design aspects will be picked up in later sections. Although the elevations are relieved to some extent by projecting or inset balconies, the overall appearance of the buildings, in addition to the comments above on height and massing, lacks interest and variety. All the proposed roofs are flat and there is little discernible relationship or reference to existing buildings in the area. The Society would like to see this site contribute more visually to stitching new development surrounding the Green into the wider neighbourhood.

In considering these issues, the Society is not convinced that the proposal meets the requirements of national and local planning policies to achieve a high quality of design suited to the development context. Bristol City Council and the Planning Inspectorate are giving considerable weight to these policy requirements in assessing proposals in the Bedminster Green area.

Living Conditions

The Society considers single aspect apartments to offer a less than satisfactory living environment for their occupants. 52 or 15% of the proposed dwellings on plot 3 would be single aspect. A further 108 or 32% are described as dual ventilation. These have one elevation in very close proximity to neighbouring apartments and offer very limited outlook. In some cases daylight on these elevations will be compromised. We would support larger windows on southern elevations provided that they were compatible with sustainability objectives.

At least some of the proposed apartments are likely to be occupied by households with children. Each dwelling has a balcony but we are not convinced that there is sufficient external playspace at close quarters for many of the dwellings apart from those facing the Green. We believe this could only be rectified with a different approach to the development rather than the perimeter design proposed for buildings 1 and 2. As it stands, the Society considers that the lack of outdoor playspace in close proximity to many of the dwellings would result in poor living conditions for households with children. We are not convinced that the enclosed open space in building 1 at first floor level and its roof garden will be particularly suitable for children's play.

Size and tenure of proposed dwellings.

30% of the units provided are proposed to be affordable. The Society welcomes this. We are concerned, however, about the preponderance of one and two bedroom apartments which comprise 87% of the total to be provided. The BGF's vision included seeking to provide a range of new homes and sustainable urban living offers through a mix of residential units and

tenures to help meet Bristol's acute needs and contribute to a diverse, thriving and sustainable Bedminster community. We consider that the range of units proposed does not contribute sufficiently to this but rather would lead to a mono-culture of small flats as we warned in our response to the BGF.

Non-residential land uses.

Retail, eating and community uses are proposed for the ground floors each building facing the Green. If viable and consistent with a revived East Street shopping centre, the Society supports these uses although, as noted above, we consider that building 3 could be reformatted as town houses to facilitate a smoother transition to the character of development south of the railway.

Sustainability.

The Society supports the Council's Local Plan policy commitments to sustainability and reducing the impacts of climate change. We trust that future iterations of the proposal will include building fabric performance statement and an energy statement. An over-heating assessment should be provided particularly for the single aspect and dual ventilation apartments. The Bedminster Green developments should be exemplars of achieving sustainability.

Traffic and transport.

The BGF envisaged an entrance to Bedminster Station opening directly on to the Green. Bristol Civic Society supported this. However, our own investigations support the view of the developers that this would require prohibitively expensive work and would possibly be disruptive to the train service during implementation. Reluctantly, therefore, we accept that the station entrance must remain to the south of the tracks for the present. We would urge the developers to discuss with Network rail whether a northern station entrance is possible in the longer term and, if so, to protect the location where it could be provided. It is also important that Dandara work with the Council and Network Rail to improve the access to and appearance of the present entrance. In particular, the unfriendly and narrow approach through the bridge needs to become more pedestrian friendly. Sheltering facilities on the platforms would also benefit from upgrading.

Although there are few train services stopping at Bedminster currently, implementation of the Metrowest project including the Portishead line will significantly improve services including cross city routes. It is important that the increase in population from the Bedminster Green project, as well as the existing community, are encouraged to use the train. There is also potential to develop a fairly convenient interchange between rail and bus services including the metrobus.

The Society is not clear how the buildings will be serviced by delivery and other vehicles. There is one layby shown on Hereford Street for Building 1 and Building 2 has a lorry space indicated. It is important that parking on Dalby Avenue does not contribute to traffic congestion on this busy road.

Public Realm.

The Society supports the deculverting of the Malago River. It is important that the future management of it is agreed at the outset, however, in order maintain its aesthetic quality. We also want to see Bedminster Green improved as an open space. We are concerned, however,

that Bedminster Green is designed to cope with the pressure of the impending population growth. It is a relatively small space and we have already commented on the overbearing and overshadowing issues that the proposed buildings would cause. Hard wearing surfaces and careful consideration of the location of facilities and seating will be vital.

The recent Bristol City Council transport and river restoration consultation covered most of the public realm around the site with one exception. We understand that Dandara will be responsible for implementing changes to the west side of the green. However, the current plans do not show any detail on this and we look forward to seeing such detail.

The width provided on the north of Buildings 1 and 2 is welcome and we would support the planting of suitable trees to contribute to the creation of an Avenue on Malago Road and Dalby Avenue. Careful consideration of planting on Hereford Road, ideally in conjunction with proposals for the south side, will also be important.