



21/04914/PREAPP | Mixed use development including residential and community/leisure focused uses with associated landscaping. | Bristol Zoological Gardens College Road Clifton Bristol

Bristol Civic Society – summary of comments

The Society welcomes the principles published to guide the future of the Bristol Zoo site. In reviewing the material forming the pre-app submission, the Society has considered whether the proposals match the aspiration of these principles.

In particular, the aim to *“create an inspiring and sustainable development that celebrates the site’s natural and built heritage. We will create space for communities to thrive and the wider public to enjoy – a legacy to make us and Bristol proud.”*

In the Society’s view the current proposals fall short of the stated aspirations in a number of ways. Aspects of the proposals also cut across adopted development plan policies, in particular DM17 in the *Bristol Local Plan – Site Allocations and Development Management Policies* which states, “Development on part, or all, of an Important Open Space as designated on the Policies Map will not be permitted unless the development is ancillary to the open space use.”

However, there are aspects of this pre-app proposal which may form the basis of an acceptable scheme. The retention of open space for future public access and the reuse of historic buildings are positive proposals. The proposed Conservation Hub is welcome.

However, the Society has reservations over the heights of several of the proposed residential blocks and considers that further detailed assessment will be required. It is not yet possible to assess the quality of the architecture, and this will be a key aspect of the final proposals when making the case to change the main use of the site.

The Society is disappointed by the lack of ambition with respect to the eco credentials of the project, particularly with such a high level of car provision in such an accessible location.

Height of buildings

The Society has significant reservations about the heights of several of the proposed residential blocks and considers that further detailed assessment will be required. These reservations concern the impact of the heights of the perimeter blocks on the wider conservation area and on the internal character of the gardens themselves. The latter concern also applies to the town houses arcing around the lake, albeit to a lesser extent.

Further assessment is required with respect to the proposed residential blocks to the north and northeast. At 7 storeys the corner block may well have adverse impacts both on the general appearance of the Conservation Area and on the specific amenities of neighbouring properties. Whilst the heights on the northern edge reduce gradually from 6, 5 and 4 storeys there is a need to carefully assess their visual impact.

Similar assessments will be essential along both Guthrie Road and Northcote Road.

Clifton Conservation Hub

The Society welcomes the proposal to repurpose the iconic entrance building to provide for a range of conservation related activities. This seems an appropriate future for this historic part of the site.

Vehicle access, circulation, and parking

The Society is disappointed by the lack of ambition with respect to future car ownership and parking. Surely this well-located site has the potential to become an exemplar for a car free development. The developers own plan showing “resident routes to key local facilities” provides very real evidence that key local facilities are all within easy walking distance.

The need to provide circulation routes and undercroft parking areas makes the development much more invasive in terms of its impacts on the gardens than would be necessary with a car free scheme.

Details are required to demonstrate how the proposed vehicle access off Northcote Road will actually operate in practice. The Guthrie Road access exists and is more straightforward in terms of future operation.

Retention of public access

There is clearly a challenge in retaining public access to the open spaces when they will be bounded by private residential areas. The juxtaposition of private and public outside areas will need very careful design and planning to ensure satisfying experiences for all parties. There is lack of clarity about the future of the water body – is it really to be utilised for wind surfing and boating or for more conservation related purposes?

As the illustrations in the pre-app demonstrate, and notwithstanding the efforts made to avoid significant incursions into the gardens, the Society fears that much of the essential character of the gardens will be lost. This is because of the likely visual dominance of the apartment blocks and the resulting sense of over-bearing the gardens. Currently the gardens offer oases of tranquillity and privacy from urban bustle, with a minimal sense of intrusion from the outside world. There is a very real risk these will be lost, in part because of the dominance of the proposed buildings but also because of the manner in which the service roads dissect the site and will bring vehicular movement deep into the gardens.

It is absolutely fundamental that if the BZS truly want to deliver a legacy consistent with the principles it published, then it should commit to binding any future developer to the proposals. Otherwise, the whole process is nugatory. The Society is not yet convinced that this will be possible and awaits further clarification.

The Society reserves its position

The Society reserves its detailed comments and final position for the planning application which is understood to be submitted early in 2022.

20th December 2021