

## **22/02737/F Bristol Zoo Gardens Guthrie Road Bristol BS8 3HA**

*Redevelopment of site to include 201 residential units (Class C3), the provision of community floorspace (Class E, F1 and F2), and open space with associated landscaping, play space, parking, accesses (pedestrian, cycle and vehicular), infrastructure, works to listed buildings, and selective demolition of buildings.*

### Principle of redevelopment

The Zoo Gardens are designated as public open space in the development plan and on reflection the Society is not convinced by the current plans to partially develop the site for housing whilst retaining open space as publicly accessible gardens. We think that the proposal is neither fish nor fowl. It would be better either being kept as open space or redeveloped for housing.

The Society questions who will wish to visit the site when it is surrounded and dominated by private housing. The special character of the existing Gardens will be further eroded with vehicles accessing an area where no vehicles have previously been permitted, both passing through the open space and parking there on a permanent basis. The verdant nature of the area will inevitably be completely transformed.

In addition, there will be the challenge of maintaining such a significant area of open space, presumably paid for by service charges on future residents. There will be inevitable pressure to create a gated community at some point in the future.

The Zoo Gardens currently provide an oasis of calm that has been enjoyed by Bristolians for generations. We consider that they are of such special environmental and historical importance that they should be retained as a fully accessible public asset.

### Detailed response

Nevertheless, if the development in something like its current housing plus open space form is accepted, we have the following comments.

In our response to the earlier consultation we welcomed the principles published to guide the future of the Bristol Zoo site. 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.”*

The retention of open space for future public access (even if used less than if it was completely open space), and the reuse of historic buildings, are positive proposals. The proposed Conservation Hub is welcome. However, 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.”

The Society has reservations over the heights of several of the proposed residential blocks and considers that further detailed assessment will be required. The Society also has reservations about the quality of the architecture, and notes that others have also expressed the view that this site deserves building design proposals which make a much more positive contribution to the appearance of the Conservation Area and to the setting of Listed Buildings. This particular issue remains a critical aspect when making an overall assessment of 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.

The Society is not convinced that the planning application demonstrates the potential impact of the proposed buildings by means of verified views. It has proved difficult to identify which views are being demonstrated and to assess in detail the potential future impact, particularly on neighbouring residents.

### 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

As noted above, 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 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 overbearing 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.