



13th March 2023

Rupert Street NCP Car Park

This response is produced following the presentation of the development proposals to the Civic Society.

There was general support for the redevelopment of the existing car park which many consider is outdated and which does not contribute positively to the appearance of this part of the City Centre. However, some questioned the need for demolition (and the implications for embodied carbon) and suggested that the opportunities for renovation and adapted use should be assessed in more depth. Some supported the current submission to obtain Listing for the car park on the grounds of it being non-rectilinear and therefore so welcome amongst city centre blocks and worthy of being kept. One commented “what better building to locate in a fume filled motor way than a car park!”

Some challenged the need to provide a replacement car park. Surely cars will not be part of the future Bristol City Centre? Without the car park there would be no need for such a bulky building. However, views differed with some stating that in any case won't the emission fumes have gone in 10 to 15 years because vehicles are electric (or hydrogen)? It's likely that there will still be a need for car parks in central Bristol, otherwise there might be demand for a further out of town retail centre and city centre residents will need to drive out of it not into it! Further justification of the car park element is therefore required.

Although the majority questioned this particular location for such high-density residential use, the idea of creating co-living for young professionals who can't yet buy their own property was attractive and deserves credit.

In contrast there were strong objections to the proposed replacement development. It was generally considered to be too high with adverse impacts on views, particularly from the north. There is clearly a need for verified visual impact assessment to accompany any future planning application. Coupled with concerns about height were concerns about the sheer monolithic bulk of the proposed scheme, with unrelenting wall encasing both car park and residential floors. The setting of the proposed development requires further analysis as there are numerous other tall buildings and street canyons creating a generally unpleasant environment. Perhaps the proposal should include an explanation of why another tall building matters in such a context. There was support for the ground level proposals which had the potential to assist in creating a better street scene along both main streets.

Opinions varied about the elevational treatment with many expressing their appreciation of our 'Bristol Byzantine' buildings with their intricate variety at street level, in-between and at roof level. But that appreciation of 'Bristol Byzantine' buildings is in the context of their human scale and the structural honesty of details such as arches. Applying Bristol Byzantium to a building so much bigger than the buildings the Victorians built, with a completely different scale and rhythm, seems inappropriate. Similarly using arches in the Bristol Byzantium style seems inappropriate if they are not needed structurally. Some Civic Society members felt strongly that what is now being proposed is a pastiche: something that mimics a historic style without staying true to it.

We look forward to seeing more details as the project proceeds.

Simon Birch, Bristol Civic Society