

23/01407/F – DEMOLITION OF RUPERT STREET CAR PARK AND REDEVELOPMENT INCLUDING NEW CAR PARK, FLEXIBLE COMMERCIAL/RETAIL SPACE, PURPOSE BUILT CO-SHARING ACCOMMODATION AND PURPOSE BUILT STUDENT ACCOMMODATION.

Overview.

Bristol Civic Society members mostly wish to see the redevelopment of this site and a remodelling of the streetscape and facilities at ground floor level. Some of our members, however, value the design of the car park and its contribution to twentieth century architecture. Although the proposed redevelopment would improve the quality of the environment at street level, the Society objects strongly to the height of the new building and its impact on the wider townscape. This proposal would add to the ever-increasing accumulation of tall buildings in the city which is eroding Bristol's very special urban character and topography with its fine heritage of landmark buildings and the mid-rise historic townscape in which they have sat. It is entirely inappropriate and undesirable for this townscape. Yet another tall building will encourage further proposals for others. More and more tall buildings will deprive residents of glimpses of the surrounding countryside which help to contain perceptions of the extent of urban development. Instead, residents will be surrounded by an intensely built-up, claustrophobic and brutalist urban environment that has lost touch with human scale possibly to the detriment of their physical and mental health. We also have concerns about the quality of life for future residents in view of the noise and pollution coming from the heavy traffic in Rupert Street and Lewins Mead. Our position has not changed significantly from our earlier response.

Design, Height and Massing.

Although we are not entirely convinced that the references to Bristol Byzantine architecture are valid, we could support the improvements to the streetscape at ground level offered by the redevelopment. The colonnade would provide some relief for pedestrians from the weather and traffic disturbance.

We object strongly to the height and mass of the proposed building, however, and do not accept the applicants' justification for the height. The two highest blocks are 24 and 20 storeys with a 16 storey block between them. The massing is particularly severe from the east and west where the side elevations of the 24 and 20 storey blocks would be unrelieved. From the north and south, there is some variation in height but the bulk of the site will be filled with buildings between 16 and 24 storeys. It would diminish the prominence of the tower of St Stephen's church viewed from the west as seen from AVR viewpoint 12. It would also be a dominant feature from Lower Park Row AVR viewpoint 14. The proposal would continue the trend of ironing out the topographical form of this part of Bristol reducing the significance of the Kingsdown escarpment. Taken together, the Society considers that these effects of the height and massing of the proposal would be harmful to the character of this area and the wider city. It further demeans Bristol's fine heritage of landmark buildings and the mid-rise historic townscape in which they have sat and it would reduce still further the connection with the countryside afforded by glimpses of the hills beyond. It would encourage proposals for more tall buildings further dehumanising the urban environment possibly with detrimental effects on the health and well-being of residents. We find the building, particularly above the

first eight storeys, is a far cry from the beautiful buildings demanded by Government planning policy.

Accommodation, Living Conditions and Open Space.

The Society questions the basis for providing more and more student accommodation. The Council must assess the proposal in accordance with its own policies on the concentration of purpose built accommodation. There is an increasing need, however, for, the quantum of student accommodation to be allowed in the city to be reviewed particularly in the light of forecasts of the number of university students in Bristol increasing by 21,000 over the 14 year period from 2021/22 to 2034/35. The Society does not diminish the contribution the university and its students make to the city but we do question the rationale of accommodating ever increasing numbers who are resident for about 30 weeks a year. Furthermore, student accommodation makes a smaller contribution to the city's housing requirements than conventional housing. Planning officers have advised that 2.5 student beds are the equivalent of 1 new home for housing delivery purposes.

We think there is a place for providing co-living accommodation although we have expressed concerns about the location below.

The Society is concerned that the living conditions of future residents will be compromised by the noise and pollution arising from Rupert Street. If sound insulation and artificial ventilation is used to counteract these problems we wonder what impact this will have on the carbon footprint of the building. It is also clear that most of the accommodation is in single aspect rooms. We note the provision of a number of outdoor spaces at upper levels of the building. These would also be affected by noise and pollution and would be unwelcoming for a considerable part of the year when the weather is cool and wet.

Climate Change.

The Society supports the Council's policies to mitigate the impact of development on climate change and expects all new development to be policy compliant.