

23/02946/P

North Plot, Wapping Wharf Wapping Road Bristol BS1 4RH

Hybrid planning application (In full for phase 1 and in outline with approval sought for access and masterplan for phase 2) for phased mixed use development to provide up to 245 apartments and up to 10,500m² of retail and commercial space (use class E) with associated basement parking and service areas, vehicular and pedestrian access routes and landscaping works. Phase 1 to include 10 storey Cargo building with market hall below and stepped restaurant terracing attached, and 113 apartments. (Major)

Bristol Civic Society objects to this proposed development.

The Society has fundamental objections to the design of the development proposed for North Plot which cannot be resolved without a fundamental redesign.

In our view this is a “special place”, a particularly key part of Harbourside where views and context are especially relevant. We question the justification for a landmark building – at 10 storeys this is far too high and has no meaningful relationship to the existing Wapping Wharf development.

The proposed development would have a particularly negative impact on the silhouette of the harbour cranes, which are a significant feature of this part of Bristol’s Harbourside.

Detail

Whatever the preferred solution there is unanimity that the current scheme is unacceptable, being too high, lacking in design sympathy with its context, and setting an unwelcome precedent for even higher buildings around the harbour.

In detail, members of the Society’s Major Sites Group have differing views on what would be acceptable in this location:

Should the height of development be limited to the height of the current Wapping Wharf blocks? This would continue the height and scale of development which many consider is appropriate on Harbourside.

Others consider that a reduction to 7 storeys might be sufficient for the tall block (from a currently proposed 10 storeys). With the other blocks reduced to 6 storeys, down from 8 or 9 storeys. Clearly this would involve a major reworking of the design proposals.

More radically, would a long low development be preferable to the individual towers? This would potentially reduce the impact on the cranes and on M Shed itself.

Precedent

The Society considers “precedent” discussion, referencing the pre-war grain building, whether to justify mass or height, as spurious. Particularly so for the proposed landmark building. It was not part of the 2003 Wapping Wharf Masterplan to recreate this massive building in this location. The grain building was a redundant war loss, (fully site-cleared before 1946), given the trade-move to deeper berths and mechanical silos for larger grain ships from Canada at Avonmouth, and was consciously replaced by the more useful transit sheds (now M-Shed and other listed waterside assets) in the post-war period of Bristol Harbours operation.

In addition, the concrete Tobacco Bonds north of the harbour were demolished in 1988 in order to promote lower rise buildings of new purpose and quality such as the now Listed Lloyds Bank buildings. Views from here to for example St Pauls Church Southville have been very much part of the 21st Century Planning framework in which the M-shed was redeveloped, and the Wapping Wharf masterplan was conceived, and development seen to date emerged from its masterplan.

The new residential proposals bear no resemblance to that of the buildings fronting Cumberland Road and Wapping Road. Regardless of exact shape or form, when combined with the current buildouts, the new hybrid proposal greatly exceeds the residential targets of the whole masterplan. In summary it is significantly larger than expected.

In detail, the following issues are also raised:

How will the operations of the steam engine be impacted by the proximity of both restaurants and homes? The railway is a popular attraction along the Harbourside and the engine is currently housed in its shed next to M Shed. The development of new residential accommodation and restaurants in close proximity to the shed may give rise to conflicts regarding noise, fumes and smells.

There may well be an opportunity for the developer and the City Council to work together to develop the potential of Museum Square as a public space.

The current plans show a significant scale of greenery and the Society questions how this will be managed and tended once the development is complete. Is such a scale of greenery viable and economic? The vegetation proposed for the buildings would be striking but it would have to be carefully planned for the conditions and well maintained.

Positive aspects

At ground level the public realm and pedestrian route proposals are welcome. Rope Walk certainly has the potential to become an attractive route and place. Similarly, the 'helicopter view' of the proposed buildings, with courtyard spaces and stepped-back shapes, works well. Some members considered that the proposed buildings, particularly the ziggurat form, would contribute to the variety of building styles around the harbour and have a visual appeal of their own.

The mix of residential, business, services and retail uses would be good for the overall vibrancy of the area. Umberslade's approach to getting in local independent businesses, and provision in the development for the existing businesses to stay, being temporarily relocated during the development was welcomed.