

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY'S RESPONSE TO THE S73 APPLICATION FOR MEAD STREET.

23/04650/X | Application for variation of Condition Nos. 39 (Landscaping (Tree Planting) works), 45 (Use Class Restriction) and 50 (List of approved plans) following grant of planning permission 21/06878/F Mixed-use redevelopment including 221 residential (C3) units and 651 sq.m. of commercial floorspace (Class E) on ground floor, together with a new vehicular access off Mead Street, cycle and car parking provision, private amenity space, servicing arrangements, landscaping, public realm, and associated works. | Land At Corner Of York Road And St Lukes Road Bedminster Bristol BS3 4AD

Summary.

Bristol Civic Society objects strongly to this application. The Society objected to the application 21/06878/F which was approved despite the officers' recommendation for refusal. Our objections (appended below) related to the height and massing of the proposal, the impact of these on important views particularly those towards the Totterdown escarpment and quality of life issues. We consider that the changes proposed would have a more adverse effect on the quality of life without reducing the adverse impact on views. Affordable housing provision was part of the balance of considerations in the approval of the last application. The Society supported this aspect of the proposal, notwithstanding our overall objection, in the event that the Council approved it. We, therefore, object to the reduction of the proportion of affordable housing from 30% to 20% of the total units. We note also the increase in the number of one and two bedroom flats and the deletion of most of the three bedroom flats which diminishes the residential offer and the potential for community building. In view of these changes to the original application together with floorspace changes and changes in the footprint of the development, the Society requests that officers carefully consider whether the application is a valid s.73 application. In any case, if the application proceeds, it should be considered by Members at a Development Management Committee so that all the issues raised by the proposal can be considered transparently. This would help reassure the local community that their concerns have been taken seriously.

Main changes to the proposal arising from 23/04650/X.

There have been a number of changes to the footprint of the development as follows:

The footprint of blocks A and B was 1,685sqm now proposed 1,853sqm, an increase of 168sqm or 9.97%.

The footprint of blocks C was 769sqm now proposed 806sqm, an increase of 37sqm or 4.81%.

Combined footprints of blocks A, B and C was 2,454sqm now proposed 2,659sqm, an increase of 205sqm or 8.35%.

Width across courtyard was 18m now proposed 16.9m.

Width between blocks B and C was 18.0m now proposed 16.2m.

York Road pavement width reduced by 0.4m in front of blocks A and B.

York Road pavement width reduced by 0.6m in front of block C.

The effect of this is to reduce the amount of ground level open space between the buildings and in the three-sided courtyard area. Overlooking from one flat to another would also be exacerbated. The Society feels that these factors would reduce the quality of life for residents.

Although the footprint of the building has changed, the impact of the height and massing on views has not. The views from the north towards the Totterdown escarpment, a key city view, are compromised by the intrusion of the tall blocks. A reduction of two or three storeys would greatly reduce this adverse impact. The Society considers it imperative that officers require verified views demonstrating the impact of the development on important views affecting the Totterdown escarpment, conservation areas and open space. Such verified views must include the full height of the buildings.

The offer of accommodation has changed:

The proportion of one and two bed apartments has increased at the expense of most three bed apartments.

The proportion of affordable units has been reduced from 30% of the total to 20% ie. from 66 units to 44.

The remainder of the accommodation is for private rental.

In the Society's view this will lead to a more transient group of occupants and diminish the prospects for community development. The affordable housing offer in the approved scheme featured in the balance of considerations leading to the grant of permission.

Design changes arising from a change to a modern method of construction, using a SIBS modular system could adversely affect the appearance of the proposed development. It is a yet to be proven that this type of construction can avoid creating very simple aesthetics, with no depth or grain to the elevations thus making them look flat. Bristol has a history of elegant, finely detailed buildings with elevations of depth and character. These new buildings designs will create elevations that are bland, flat and cheap in appearance. A good example is the reduced size of the windows in the new application and thus the poor proportion of solid to void shown on the elevations plus the horizontal jointing at each floor level makes it look like a stacked set of portacabins. We realise that there is a cost of living crisis but this should in no way reduce the need for good quality and characterful architecture. The National Planning Policy Framework is very clear (paragraph 131) that the "creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve."

There is still a preponderance of single aspect flats. This would adversely affect the quality of life as would the juxtaposition and overlooking between flats, especially between living rooms and bedrooms.

The introduction of more active uses at ground level could, depending on their nature, be beneficial.

Although the Society does not wish to encourage car use in central Bristol the reduction of parking provision to just 5 disabled persons' spaces raises a number of issues. The absence of parking spaces would discourage if not preclude people whose work is dependent on having a car such as taxi drivers and peripatetic care workers from moving to the development. This

could increase the transient nature of residents living there and exacerbate the difficulties of community development we have already identified arising from the offer of accommodation. The disabled persons spaces provided are also very inconveniently located for M4(3) flats for which they are intended. These issues should be resolved and could be by the reinstatement of the basement car park.

Conclusions.

The Society objects to the proposal because of the harm, set out above, that would result, particularly on the quality of life of residents and on important views. In view of the fundamental changes proposed in the application, we ask the officers to consider carefully whether this application is consistent with the requirements of a s73 application. Whether this application proceeds or whether it becomes an application for planning permission for a revised scheme, the Society feels strongly that it should be considered by members at a Development Management Committee to enable full public discussion of the issues it raises.

APPENDIX – The Society’s submission on 21/06878/F.

Summary

Bristol Civic Society objects strongly to this application. The Society considers that proposals for the loss of commercial premises should not be considered in the absence of a masterplan for the area providing for a balanced redevelopment of the area from Bath Road to Bedminster Green. Such a plan should be adopted by the Council after full consultation with residents and other stakeholders. The proposal itself raises a number of concerns relating to its height, the resultant quality of life for residents and its impact on views, particularly those towards the Totterdown escarpment.

Change of Use.

The Society is increasingly concerned that employment generating floorspace in the St Philips and Bedminster areas is being redeveloped for residential purposes in the absence of overall strategies for these areas aiming to achieve a balance of new uses. We agree that the areas are ripe for redevelopment but feel strongly that strategies to steer it should be formulated in full consultation with residents and other stakeholders before they are adopted by the Council. In the meantime, the Society cannot support the loss of employment generating uses on land defined in the Local Plan as a Principal Industrial and Warehouse Area.

Height, Massing and Impact on Views.

The proposed development comprises an eight storey block adjoining St Lukes Road with two parallel eleven storey blocks. The block next to St Lukes Road is attached to the parallel Eleven storey block with a five storey development. The easternmost block is free standing separated from its neighbour by an area of public space. The Society is concerned that blocks of this height and mass will be harmful to views toward Richmond Street, with its colourful terraced houses, atop the Totterdown escarpment. This is one of Bristol’s important, landmark views. Equally important are views toward the Grade I Listed buildings at Temple Meads Station and the spire of St Mary Redcliffe. A full analysis of the proposals impact on views

agreed with the Council is essential before the application is considered. We are not convinced that the Visual Impact Assessment adequately addresses these concerns.

Quality of Living Environment.

The Society has a number of concerns regarding the potential living environment which would result from this application. Air quality could be compromised by its location at the junction of St Lukes Road and the heavily used York Road. The preponderance of single aspect flats is also a concern. The provision of outdoor amenity space is very sparse for a development of 244 dwellings. It is not clear what facilities will result from the development on-site and the site itself is not convenient for day-to-day shopping requirements and other services. The impact of this development on school places in the area also needs to be considered.

Affordable Housing.

Notwithstanding our overall objections to this proposal, the Society is supportive of the Council's push for affordable housing and so we would welcome 100% provision should the Council approve this application.

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