



Bristol Civic Society comments 11/05/2025

Planning Application 24/03137/F Waverley House Crow Lane BS1 1WH

Demolition of multi-storey car park and student accommodation and redevelopment of the site comprising student accommodation with associated amenity space, flexible commercial and/or community floorspace.

Introduction

Bristol Civic Society reviewed proposals for the replacement building at pre-app and full application stages and identified significant issues in the comments we made. It is regrettable that the applicants have failed to address our comments and there is no explanation why our comments have largely been ignored.

The existing development on the site is identified as a negative building in the City and Queen Square Conservation Area character appraisal which also refers to it as an 'insensitive building intruding its ugliness near Welsh Back'.

This is a wonderful opportunity to replace an over-tall, ugly and incongruous building with something that is worthy of its location in the heart of the historic core of the city. Unfortunately, the building proposed in this application fails to meet up to our expectation; in some respects, it is worse than the existing.

Following receipt of letter from BCC Development Management advising that revised details had been submitted we have reviewed the revised proposals and make the following comments:

What we said in our comments dated 17.09.2024

- Opportunity to replace an over-tall, ugly, incongruous building with something worthy of its setting in the historic core of the city.
- Elimination of the car park and increase and continued use of student accommodation on the site is appropriate.
- The building proposed fails to meet our expectation; in some respects, it is worse than the existing.
- The proposal will be over-prominent in important views across the city and in local street scenes.

- The proposal fails to maximise commercial frontage to Queen Charlotte Street and Crow Lane.
- We suggested removing floors, so centre of building is one storey lower than the existing stair tower and the elevation to Crow Lane is one storey lower than the existing building.
- We suggested reconfiguring ground and first floor layouts with main entrance moved to Queen Charlotte Street.
- Our suggested adjustments would reduce the number of student rooms from 507 to 489.
- Architectural treatment of the courtyard elevations and service yard behind Bridge House and the Brigstow Hotel needs to be reconsidered.
- Include city-owned area adjacent to the Welsh Back side of the site in the proposals.

The revisions made by the applicant

- 1.7m reduction in height of block adjacent to Welsh Back by amending roof terrace parapet.
- Reduced massing – width of tallest element reduced by 4.2m.
- Reduced massing – top of tallest element raised ‘slightly’ (1.2m) to hide rooftop plant, with framed structure incorporating perforated cladding.
- Amount of stone in tallest element reduced to give a lighter effect.
- Alteration of architectural treatment to base of building to relate more closely to nearby historic buildings.
- Treatment to top of brick shoulder blocks altered to a more contextual approach.
- Number of student rooms reduced from 507 to 503.
- Failure to include the city-owned area adjacent to the Welsh Back side of the site in the proposals.
- Subsequent to the submission of the full planning application, the applicants have owned up to an error in the TVIA views – the proposed buildings were shown one storey lower than intended!

Our comments on the revised proposals

- Opportunity not taken to replace an over-tall, ugly and incongruous building that disfigures an important conservation area in the city.
- Revisions to the scheme design fail to address the fundamental objection that the building is too high, over-prominent in important views across the city and in local street scenes. It is over development.
- Changes in the architectural renderings of the elevations are an improvement.
- It would be a better civic fit if the whole scheme were reduced by 4 storeys so that the road elevations were similar to the buildings on the opposite side of the Queen Charlotte Street.

- Reduction of the centre block around the twin core by 4 storeys and the corner block by 1 storey would reduce the number of rooms from 503 to 468.
- Reconfigure ground and first floors to give more commercial frontage to Queen Charlotte Street and Crow Lane and move the main entrance to Queen Charlotte Street.
- Include city-owned area adjacent to the Welsh Back side of the site in the proposals.

Comparative views

We have prepared the attached power point presentation which shows comparative views of the existing building, the original proposal, the corrected original proposal (one storey higher) and the revised proposal. The views are reproduced from the applicant's HTVIA documents.

These views are taken from four significant locations: Redcliffe Parade, Bridge Quay, Castle Bridge and along Queen Charlotte Street

The comparative views clearly show the height and mass of the revised proposal is greater than the original proposal and significantly higher than the existing building.

Conclusion

The proposed building is too high. We consider that the centre block around the twin core should be reduced by 4 storeys and the corner block reduced by 1 storey, which would reduce the number of rooms from 503 to 468.

The layout of the ground and first floors needs to be reconfigured to give more commercial frontage to Queen Charlotte Street and Crow Lane and move the main entrance to Queen Charlotte Street.

Bristol Civic Society cannot support the application as it is currently proposed. We strongly urge the planning officers to embrace the opportunity to replace an over-tall, ugly and incongruous building with something that is worthy of its location in the heart of the historic core of the city.