



# MAJOR SITES GROUP (MSG)

## SPRING & SUMMER 2014

### John Frenkel reports

The Major Sites Group takes part in the public consultation stage, before the planning application for major schemes. This is one of the Society's most important roles.

The improvement to the economic climate has reignited developers' interest in major residential schemes in the city centre, which the Society welcomes.

Under recent planning legislation changes, developers may now convert office buildings to residential use without planning permission. Large office blocks, empty for years will become blocks of flats. So far there are plans to convert The Pithay, Bristol Bridge House and Lewins Place (Greyfriars). The Society welcomes these buildings' return to economic use and contribution to the city's housing needs and budget. The Society supported the external refurbishment of Lewins Place, which would improve this unloved building.

The Society supports proposals to build 166 flats in Avon Street and 117 flats at 25 Redcliff Street and has suggested improvements to the design of these developments.

The Society has objected to a new block at 13-19 Dean Street in St. Pauls to accommodate students. Although the Society supports the site's redevelopment the Council's planning advice says that St. Pauls needs more homes. The building's height and mass would overbear the street and harm this part of the conservation area. The Society supports the redevelopment of the former St Mary's (Nuffield) hospital but accommodation for 200 students would overdevelop the site. On appeal the first planning application was refused and a planning application for a similar scheme is withdrawn following the Council's advice.

Out of the city centre, a new owner of the long derelict Elizabeth Shaw chocolate factory has revived the redevelopment proposals. The scheme would retain and convert two of the industrial buildings and build new family houses. There has been exemplary community consultation and the Society welcomes the scheme.

Nearby, Barratt Homes have bought the St Matthias campus. Barratts promise to provide 30% affordable housing and to secure the future for the Grade II listed college buildings as a Steiner primary school. The Society has said that the development should not be a volume housebuilder's standard estate design. This scheme falls short of the quality of the layout and design of the chocolate factory scheme.

Two major schemes for the Society to consider are for tall buildings on the cleared sites in Temple Way of the former Clerical Medical Building (Bank Place) and opposite, The Post's former print hall. The Bank Place developer wants to replace an existing planning permission for two 8 floor office blocks with a residential development of 343 flats. The development proposed for the print hall site is accommodation for 230 students in an 11 floor point block.

The year ahead, the lack of capacity in the construction industry will bring problems for developers and property investors. The welcome return of a residential population to the centre of the will increase the Council's difficulties in the providing space for soft infrastructure, schools, health care etc. No one foresaw the shift in city centre property investment to



**Top**  
Architect's impression of refurbished Lewins Place

**Middle**  
Plans for Bank Place (Clerical Medical)

**Bottom**  
Proposed bridge at Finzel's Reach

residential use in the pre-2008 economic climate. It is ironic that the market is informally reversing the formal zoning of earlier planning regimes through the conversion of office space to student accommodation and residential development.

The developer of the former Courage's Brewery site must build a new bridge from Castle Park across the Avon. The Society objects to the design, which would have a major impact on the view from Bristol Bridge and block this reach of the river. Contrast the simple lightweight quality of Meads Reach Bridge. Water users object strongly to the obstruction that the bridge and the barriers to protect its piers would cause to the use of the river. The bridge approach would harm this part of Castle Park. A new flight of steps up to the main path would bisect the retaining wall and require the replacement of the D Day memorial and its plaques and the memorial trees. There exist steps to the west and a ramped path to the east, which could be widened.