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The Society's statement in response to the proposed design for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge linking Castle Park to Finzels Reach.

9th May 2014

Planning history

The Public Realm and Movement Framework, Bristol City Centre (the Framework) is unclear in its aims. The Framework shows a bridge to link Castle Park to the former Courage Brewery Site (the Mobius Bridge) as part of a 'secondary' pedestrian route ¹ although the Framework later upgrades the route to Primary Route 4. The Finzels Reach section duplicates the Bristol Bridge /Victoria Street section. ² The Framework states that aim of Primary Route 4 is to '

"Improve the direct pedestrian connection between Temple Meads Station, Broadmead and the Marlborough Road Bus Station."

Objective 4G – The Mobius Bridge / Temple Street would:

- *Create a new pedestrian footbridge linking Castle Park and the former Courage's Brewery.*
- *Create a pedestrian route through the site that connects with Temple Street.*
- *Where possible, reinstate the historic alignment of Temple Street.....*

On the 20th April 2005, permission was granted for the current development of the former Courage's Brewery site, which included a pedestrian and cycle bridge. There are several subsequent planning consents; the one that is relevant to this response is the 2013 permission to reduce the commercial use of the former Courage's Brewery site and to increase the proportion of the residential accommodation.

Key question 1 - Is the Finzel's Reach Bridge necessary?

The purpose of Pero's Bridge was always obvious; it enables the large numbers of people who assemble to use the leisure facilities on Canon's Marsh and on Narrow Quay to cross the Harbour. It is a Primary Route to link Temple Meads Station via the Millennium Mile to the Harbour. The purpose of the Mobius Bridge was less clear. The pedestrian use of the

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areas that the bridge would abut is far below the pedestrian levels around Pero's Bridge. The last ten years have seen social and economic changes that would probably reduce the potential number of pedestrians that would use the Mobius Bridge.

- In 2004, the Council planned a high density, mixed use development on the whole of Castle Park between Union Street and High Street. Public opposition has made that development unlikely. It is probable that the only areas for redevelopment are the sites of the buildings on the south west corner of Castle Park and that any development would now be residentially led.
- In 2013, the developer of the former Courage's Brewery site recognised the lack of market interest in the commercial space of their redevelopment. The Council permitted the developer to reduce the office space and increase the number of residential units.

It is probable that the reduction of business use would also reduce the number of potential users of the Finzel's Reach during business hours.

How many users would the Finzel's Reach Bridge attract?

The Society is unconvinced that the bridge would attract sufficient users to justify its cost. The original Mobius Bridge proposal assumed a pedestrian / cyclist desire line from Temple Street to Union Street. However, a pedestrian walking from Temple Meads to the Old City end of Castle Park would choose to cross Bristol Bridge whilst a pedestrian walking to Cabot Circus would choose St. Philip's Bridge. The Society suggests that the destination of most potential users would lie at either end of Castle Park and not in the middle at Union Street. An important development was the opening of Cabot Circus, which did not exist as a retail destination at the conception of the Mobius Bridge proposal. The current off-set design moves the bridge away from the original pedestrian / cycling desire line and further lessens the number of potential users.

The current design would create a long exposed bridge. Without a flow of users, many potential pedestrians would feel uncomfortable using the bridge after dark. A Redcliffe bound pedestrian could not see the space beyond the far abutment. A Broadmead bound pedestrian must walk through the Park. The Society believes that most pedestrians would prefer to use the trafficked Bristol Bridge or the St. Philip's Bridge. The developer proposes café / restaurant units on the Redcliffe bank of the Avon. The Society doubts the commercial viability of those units even with a bridge. In daylight, the alternative routes of Bristol Bridge and St. Philip's Bridge would probably attract the majority of cross-river pedestrians and cyclists. After dark, the bridge would discourage potential customers.

The design of the proposed bridge

The Society accepts the Cubex's argument that the difference in the levels of the bridge abutments makes it impossible to build a bridge perpendicularly from Castle Park to the Courage's Brewery site that would be disability compliant. However, the visual impact of the proposed concrete like structure sitting in the harbour would be enormous; it would significantly harm views of the waterway from all directions. The bridge would significantly harm the character of Castle Park and the reach of the river Avon.

Key question 2 - Is the bridge over Finzel's Reach sustainable development?

The bridge with the barriers in the water that protect its piers would be a major obstruction in the river navigation. The obstruction is so great that it must inhibit the future use of the water course. It is a truism that none of us can predict the future use of the river. No one in 1914 would have foreseen the creation of Castle Park, the closure of the docks, the brewery, or the sugar refinery. The Finzel's Reach Bridge would obstruct more of the navigable water than do Bristol Bridge or St. Philip's Bridge. The proposed bridge with its protective barriers would limit the use of the navigation of the river for future generations. The bridge would confer no benefit to Castle Park and its users.

Conclusion

The Society opposes the proposed bridge design. If it is not possible to build a bridge that does not obstruct the river navigation and which does not obstruct the view of the attractive brick walls of the former Courage's Brewery that fall directly into the water, Cubex should ask the Council to abandon the contractual obligation to span Finzel's Reach with a bridge. If the Council abandons the bridge requirement, the parties could renegotiate the use of the developer's contribution that the cost of the bridge represents.

The Society does not intend the comment that it is concerned about the presence of 'group think' as a criticism of the Council or anyone else. After nearly ten years, the construction of a bridge over Finzel's Reach has become the accepted thinking for people inside and outside the Council who take the eventual construction of a bridge for granted. The Society believes the following reasons compel reconsideration of the Finzel's Reach bridge proposal; the Society challenges the assumption of the need for another bridge at this location.

- The developer's engineering advice shows that the original plan for a direct single span bridge that is disability compliant is not feasible.
- The proposed bridge would be a huge structure that would significantly harm the character of the area and would prejudice the future navigation of the river.
- The potential business users of the bridge on both banks of the river are fewer than they were in 2004. The bridge did not serve the desire lines of many pedestrians / cyclists crossing the Avon even before the alteration of the alignment. The design of the bridge would discourage its use by pedestrians / cyclists after dark.
- Anyone choosing to walk or cycle from Temple Meads to cross the Avon would find the diversion over Bristol Bridge or St. Philip's Bridge negligible, even if those bridges were not their first choice. The bridge would serve the convenience of few users.