

#



an independent force for a better Bristol

The Society's response to THAT Group's revised proposals to demolish 2-16 Clifton Down Road and redevelop a range of retail units, offices and cafe/restaurant space, landscaping and public realm improvements.

14th November 2016

Introduction

Subject to suggestions to improve the exterior design, the Society supports to proposal.

This pre-application refers to an island site in Clifton Village formerly occupied by a small group of retail units. There is a lengthy planning history for this site. These latest proposals have been drawn up following feedback from public consultation in September 2016. The Society notes that there is now no residential use included. The surrounding streets, King's Road (to the N and E) and Boyce's Avenue (to the S), are popular with shoppers and pedestrians. The Society's agrees that this added space will be appreciated by the public as well as having the effect of increasing footfall to and around the area which will benefit the retail businesses on this site.

Recent Planning History

A planning application for this site (14/04500/F) was refused in April 2015 due to failure to deliver high quality urban design and to contribute positively to the Clifton Conservation Area's character and identity. Specifically, the scheme failed to comply with local planning policies BCS21 Quality Urban Design and BCS22 Conservation and the Historic Environment.

The Society responded to a planning enquiry in September this year (16/04657/PREAPP) to create mixed commercial accommodation over 3 floors plus 2 underground floors. The response said that the proposed building's scale and unremitting rectangular form would introduce an oppressive presence into the street scene. This would harm the charm and intimacy of the lanes to the side and rear. The front elevation appeared as a cliff on Clifton Downs Road, losing all the variety of shape and surfaces that the previous frontage offered and in our view causing substantial harm to the many listed buildings nearby.

Demolition

The Society welcomes the removal of the existing building and the redevelopment of this prominent site in a Conservation Area.

Height and mass

This latest pre-application proposal follows the September 2016 planning enquiry. The Society supports the changes from the September 2016 version which includes:

- a reduction in overall building height and footprint
- setting back the front of the building (facing Clifton Down Road)
- more space for trees, landscaping and seating at front
- facades; 3 options using different treatments and materials.

The design

Any new building should contribute positively to the area's style and identity, particularly in this setting where it is surrounded by Victorian and Georgian buildings of character.

The Society sees the main planning issue as being building design. Any new building in this location must be a good neighbour to the buildings on either side and immediately behind it which frame it when viewed from the street. The Society is pleased that, judging by comments at the consultation event at Clifton Library on 31 October by both the developer and architect that they share the Society's view of priorities.

The reduction in the building's height and mass in this proposal are welcome improvements, as is the change to set the building further back from the street edge and to increase the amount of public space on Clifton Down Road to allow for trees and seating. A floor has been removed from the previous version, giving this design 3 floors above ground level and 2 basement floors, with the same development area as the (granted) 2013 scheme. The height of this proposed version is the same as the height of Clifton Arcade which sits immediately behind on King's Road.

The inflexible grid of the current design does not appear to be informed by the proportions and delicacy of detail of the surrounding terraces. The Society understands that the design is work in progress. To improve the design of the unrelieved rectangular form the Society suggests the introduction of architectural elements to emphasise the top of the elevation and to reinforce the end bays to provide an architectural frame for the facades. The corners of the building are important areas for the overall appeal of the building design. Architectural elements within the bays would create vertical articulation and introduce variety. The recession of some of the windows could be another element to add visual interest to the rectangular facades.

Materials

In the consultation presentation on 31 October three variants of possible facades were put forward as alternatives:

- Stone/ceramic:
 - With pronounced horizontals
 - With vertical fluted mullions
- Stone/metal
- Brick

Given the background of the previously refused planning application, and the importance of harmony with neighbouring buildings, the Society welcomes the work developing a range of choices for the building exterior.

In considering any options for the design of the facades, the guiding principle must be that of being a good neighbour. To be successful, a building on this conspicuous site must fit in and blend well with the variety of buildings around it. These neighbours are not all “Georgian” or “Victorian” buildings; they are in a wide variety of styles, colours, and degree of decoration. What is important is to recognise and maintain the rhythms of the surrounding buildings in terms of aspects such as the heights and spacing of the windows, colours and textures of external finishes, detailing and appearance. The new building must be understated and sympathetic so that it enhances the character of the area. The aim should be to create a good background building.

Of the three variants of facade proposed, based on the limited and initial views presented the Society supports the stone/ceramic facade with vertical fluted elements or mullions was the most immediately attractive. This approach is one that can be developed.

Public realm

The Society assumes that the improvements to the public realm that the developer offers and the reinstatement of the pavements in the secondary streets will be subject to a planning condition.