BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY #

an independent force for a better Bristol

12th February 2016

The Society's response to a pre-planning application enquiry to redevelop Brunel House St Georges Road 16/00415/PREAPP

The scheme
The enquiry relates to a proposal to redevelop the site to provide 436 purpose built student bed spaces. This will result in the creation of additional massing to the rear following demolition of existing 1980s office building behind Pope and Brunel's 19th century neo-classical façade, which is to be retained. In principle the Society strongly supports a scheme that regenerates and gives new use to a large obsolescent city centre office building.

Principle of loss of office accommodation
To determine whether to permit the loss of the current employment use the Council must decide if it accepts UNITE's evidence that:
  i. The office space is underperforming and would generate little market interest when the building becomes vacant later this year. And,
  ii. The proposed alternative uses would make a positive contribution to the vitality and economy of the area.
The society does not challenge UNITE's submission.

Principle of purpose built student accommodation
The Council will explore with UNITE the material consideration of the issue of:
  i. The current concentration of student accommodation within this area of the city centre. And,
  ii. Whether the additional student population introduced by this large scheme would have a significant impact on the quality of life of the neighbouring residential accommodation.
The society agrees with UNITE that the site is highly sustainable for student accommodation. If the Council accepts that it can tolerate the loss of existing office floorspace and that there would be no significant impact on the existing residential population, the Society supports the change of use.

Height and mass
In September 2015, the Council responded to an earlier enquiry whether it would accept a student accommodation scheme. The mass of the proposed scheme would almost double the number of units contained in the earlier scheme. No further comment is possible without seeing the impact of the scheme from key views to demonstrate the impact (if any) of the increased building mass on the wider conservation area and nearby listed buildings. As well as views, there are no sections through the site or contextual elevations for the new built parts. It concerns the Society if the height of the new build exceeded the height of the former quarry edge and the Horse Bazaar. The Council will assess with UNITE the daylight and sunlight impacts within the scheme. There is no information on these matters available to the Society.

Design, appearance and public realm improvements
The Society is disappointed that the submitted drawings appear to show redevelopment within the current car park. This development would cause significant harm the Grade II listed Horse Bazaar, which would lose its spatial coherence. The right hand carriage entrance of the former Royal Western Hotel leads to the amphitheatre, which is a long narrow space framed by ruined walls with an apsidal end relieved by the frames of tall arched windows. The recent listing indicates that Historic England recognises the importance of this area to the fabric of the conservation area. The Society cannot support development within the Horse Bazaar, which would harm the significance of the listed structure. The ground plan appears to contradict the statement in the pre-app covering letter that '*The associated Horse Bazaar structure and walls will remain untouched to ensure the historical setting of the site is preserved'*. The Society suggests, with as much force as possible, that this space be transformed into a distinct enclosed space for the future occupants' amenity.   The development of the Horse Bazaar as an outdoor recreational area would materially improve the attraction of the development and distinguish it from other student accommodation. The development of courtyard as a recreational would mitigate the high density of this development and enhance the conservation area.