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an independent force for a better Bristol

18th January 2017

Land At Temple Circus - 16/06828/P - the Society's response to *proposals to build Engine Shed 2 - the part demolition, extension and change of use of the former Grade II Listed George and Railway Hotel to provide 5,630 sqm of office space with ancillary cafe/restaurant uses at ground floor level.*

Summary

The area around Temple Meads Station has long been a widespread concern. The architectural setting of the Station Approach gives the first-time visitor leaving the station a poor impression of the city. The area cries out for imaginative redevelopment and architecture that is informed by the surviving architectural context. The Society strongly supports the site's redevelopment but regrets that it cannot support the proposed, seven-floor equivalent, height of Engine Shed 2. The Society's primary concern is the impact of the development on the setting of the Grade 1 listed Temple Meads Old Station (the Old Station), a nationally important group of buildings, and the Grade II listed George and Railway Hotel (the Hotel). Whilst the Society welcomes the inclusion of the Hotel we are distressed at the way the Hotel will be overshadowed by Engine Shed 2. The mass of new building would render the context for the listed building meaningless. The retained Hotel would be reduced to a nominal gesture to the historic context. The Hotel would appear as an afterthought next to the mass of the new building. Similarly, the relationship between the proposed building and the Grade I listed Old Station would be out of scale. The massing of Engine Shed 2 would dominate the south side of the junction of the Temple Gate highway scheme and the setting of the Old Station. The Society supports an innovative architectural approach to the new development. The design of the glass cube attracted compliments.

Conservation issues

The Society strongly supports the Council's ambitious plan to improve this blighted area. Bristol Temple Quarter is an important approach to the city and a prominent element in the Enterprise Zone and Arena developments. As part of its long-term strategy the Council has

acquired for demolition the dreary block that includes Temple Gate House to upgrade the cityscape and improve the degraded contemporary view from the Station Approach. Engine Shed 2 will abut the Grade II listed George and Railway Hotel (the Hotel) and face the Grade I listed Bristol Old Station (Old Station) a group of buildings of national importance. These listed buildings set a clear hierarchy for the height and mass of any new building within their visual vicinity. The Society considers that Engine Shed 2 would cause a high degree of harm to the listed buildings, both are within its immediate visual context.

Policy tests:

National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph

132 *When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation."*

Does the proposal give great weight to the special interest of the listed buildings and their settings?

The Society considers that the height of Engine Shed 2 fails to consider, or give sufficient weight to the preservation or enhancement of the setting of both listed buildings.

"131 *"In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness."*

Do the proposals contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness?

The Society considers the Engine Shed 2 fails to recognise of the scale of the neighbouring listed buildings. Engine Shed 2 would dominate the heritage assets. The Temple Gate elevation of the Old Station and the Hotel would become subordinate to it. Because of its dominant height of Engine Shed 2 would not make a positive contribution to the area, or to the city.

If the Council considers that the development of Engine Shed 2 will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset:

134 *Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use."*

If the degree of harm less than substantial, would the harm posed offset by public benefits?

The Society considers that the harm that Engine Shed 2 would cause to the listed buildings would outweigh any public benefit from the provision of additional employment space above the space that Engine Shed 2 would provide if its height were reduced to four floors.

Local Policies:

Policy BCS22 “Development proposals will safeguard or enhance heritage assets and the character and setting of areas of acknowledged importance including historic buildings both nationally and locally listed.

Does the proposal safeguard or enhance the Conservation Area or setting of the listed buildings?

Engine Shed 2 would neither safeguard or enhance the setting of neighbouring listed buildings due to its over-dominant scale.

Policy DM31 *“Development that has an impact upon a heritage asset will be expected to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the asset or its setting.”*

Would Engine Shed 2 conserve or enhance the setting of the listed buildings?

Engine Shed 2 is in the immediate visual context of two listed buildings whose scale defines development that would harm their setting. The scale of the listed buildings sets a strong precedent for appropriate, contextual development for the site. The proposed height of Engine Shed 2 would greatly exceed the historic scale of the Hotel, which is would overbear. For the same reason, Engine Shed 2 would harm the setting of the Old Station.

Enterprise Zone Planning Policy background

9.1.3 The Central Area Plan (CAP) contributes to an integrated planning approach to the Enterprise Zone to promote and expedite development:

Policy BCAP35 embeds the vision for Bristol Temple Quarter within the development plan. It sets out a wide range of appropriate uses providing clarity and flexibility for prospective developers.

The Spatial Framework for Bristol Temple Quarter provides a planning and design framework to deliver the vision for the area. The Framework seeks to guide and shape an urban structure to promote and inspire enterprise and innovation, with a focus on the co-ordination of investment in infrastructure, the layout of development, connections through the area and the design of the public realm.

Section 4 of the Temple Quarter Spatial Framework (the Framework) – Working assumptions:

“A range of building heights are adopted that reflect the varied context across the four place plan areas.....Typically buildings in Temple Quay are 5 – 8 storeys and elsewhere 4 – 6.”

Key planning question – Is the site appropriate for a building of six stories plus a 5-metre-tall plant screen?

The Applicant’s Planning Statement at paragraph 5.5 says,

“It is however considered that the plot occupies a prominent location along Temple Gate and therefore provides scope for height and for striking architecture which adds to the city's skyline (having regard to existing key views). Therefore, the scheme has sought to challenge the suggestion in the Framework that the site could only support low to medium scale development. Since the framework was finalised, we understand that the City's appetite for taller buildings has grown and that the principle for well-designed taller buildings is therefore supported.”

This bold statement surprises the Society for various reasons. The Council adopted the Central Area Plan in March 2015 and the Temple Quarter Spatial Framework as recently as October 2016. The CAP is a statutory document, which incorporates and gives authority to the Framework, which it anticipates. The Council adopted the Framework following an extensive public consultation to which the Applicant had the opportunity to contribute. This is the first planning application to follow the Framework's adoption. The Framework would be redundant if within months of its adoption the Council ignored its clear, unambiguous recommendations. The effect would be to undermine confidence in the planning system and create a planning vacuum in the Enterprise Zone.

The proposed Engine Shed 2 would have six floors of 3.75m plus a 5.00m plant screen; equivalent to a 7-storey building. The Framework guidance is that the site should support a four-floor building. The lower figure of the Framework building height range of 4 – 6 floors applies. If it is to comply with the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone Public Realm Guide, Engine Shed 2 must present a human scale beside the upgraded section of the Brunel Way that forms its boundary. The area around the building must be pedestrian-friendly. There is a huge footfall to and from Temple Meads Station along the Brunel Way and Victoria Street.

Design

The Society supports a choice of architecture that is distinct from the Grade II listed George and Railway Hotel. Although the Society is attracted to the outward aesthetic of the building, if the intention is to replicate the Engine Shed 1 workplaces, Engine Shed 2 does not display the characteristics of the original working conditions that have appealed to start-up enterprises. The Society has concern when it considers a proposal for a glass wall building. Frequently, the occupier's interior clutter nullifies the original architectural image. This is a problem that the design must resolve.

Public realm

The Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone Public Realm Guide refers to seven public realm qualities that a development should aim to achieve. The public aspect of the southern elevation disappoints. Although it will have a sunny aspect, the building a blank facade of bicycle storage built to the back of the pavement will face the public realm. There is no integration of the building with the street. The building turns its back to the public and excludes the passer-by. The north entrance that faces the Brunel Mile could be developed to create a greater focal point.