



an independent force for a better Bristol

Land at Temple Circus Bristol - 16/06828/P. The Society's response to outline planning application for the demolition of the Grosvenor Hotel and the development of the remainder of the site to provide up to 30,000 sqm of new office accommodation, including up to 2,000 sqm of retail uses, public realm and landscaping works, site servicing and car parking.

20th January 2017

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Society has made a separate response to the full planning application to develop the Engine Shed 2 site. This response considers outline planning application for the two sites that the Design and Access Statement (DAS) identifies as Blocks B & C to the north of Brunel Way. The Society welcomed the Council's plan to realign the road junction to release land for development. It is encouraged to see proposals to bring forward this outstanding development opportunity made possible by the Temple Gate highway scheme. This is a major site in the Enterprise Zone. If this development succeeds it should encourage further investment to develop other sites that would transform the appearance and business activity in the Zone.
- 1.2 The Society regrets that it cannot support this ambitious scheme whose height and mass substantially conflicts with current planning policy. The proposed building mass maximises the development potential of the site without considering the local context. This approach contrasts unfavourably with the careful analysis of the local character and context set out in the Council's planning advice. The planning guidance seeks to achieve an integrated planning approach to deliver a vision for the area. A scheme that responds to the Council's extensive planning advice is required to achieve a successful development. The Society is not encouraged by the proposal to demolish the Grosvenor Hotel; a building locally listed for its architectural and artistic merit.

- 1.3 The Society suggests an alternative development philosophy. A closer grain scheme of buildings with a larger footprint, with lower heights and a redistributed public space could achieve the same or greater lettable space, an improved sense of place and be policy compliant.

2 Enterprise Zone Planning Policy background

- 2.1 9.1.3 - The Central Area Plan (CAP) contributes to an integrated planning approach to the Enterprise Zone to promote and expedite development: Policy CAP35 embeds the vision for the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone within the development plan. It sets out a wide range of appropriate uses providing clarity and flexibility for prospective developers.
- 2.2 The Spatial Framework for Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone (the Framework) provides a planning and design framework to deliver the vision for the whole Enterprise Zone. 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.
- 2.3 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.”
- 2.4 Section 3 of the Framework is keen to retain and reuse buildings that are locally listed as valued buildings that are considered worthy of preservation. The Framework provides a balance between protection of heritage assets and opportunities for reuse and adaptation consistent with National Planning Policy to create a distinctive and vibrant economic quarter with a blend of old and new. Bristol’s local list currently includes the Grosvenor Hotel; the local list states that the Hotel has architectural and artistic merit and creates local identity.

3 Key planning question – Is the site appropriate for buildings of the proposed height and mass?

- 3.1 The proposed Block B would be 8 storeys and Block C 12 storeys with a linking six floor block on the north-east elevation. The Framework’s working assumption is that *“Typically buildings in Temple Quay are 5 – 8 storeys and elsewhere 4 – 6.”* The height recommended for the Temple Meads City Gateway, is 4 – 6 floors. The proposed scheme conflicts with the Spatial Framework.

- 3.2 The Applicant's Planning Statement refers to planning ref. 09/03587/F that gave permission to demolish the Grosvenor Hotel, and construct a six-storey office building. The consent was not implemented, has expired and is not a material consideration. After 2009, local planning policy changed radically with the adoption of the Core Strategy, the Central Area Plan (CAP), the emerging Redcliffe Neighbourhood Plan and the creation of the Enterprise Zone with its supporting planning Framework. The physical appearance of the Temple Meads City Gateway will change profoundly. When the Council granted permission 09/03587/F that development would have stood on an island within the Temple Circus Gyration. The constant heavy traffic on all sides would have made it a hostile location. The removal of the gyration will expand the development land by a multiple of almost four. Unlike the 2008 scheme, only the Victoria Street/Temple Gate side of the site will be exposed to heavy traffic. Further changes include the extension of the Brunel Mile to Temple Meads Station, better bus connections, improved cycle routes and various enhancements of the public realm.
- 3.3 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."
- 3.4 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. 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 meaningless and the preceding public consultation futile 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.
- 3.5 This site is critical to the Temple Meads City Gateway Character Area. The analysis of the site characteristics and its relationship with the built surroundings shows that the buildings close to the site are 4 – 6 storeys high and newer buildings on Temple Way are around 6 - 8 tall. The scheme departs significantly from the vision that the Framework describes. Blocks B & C would be considerably higher than the Framework proposes.
- 3.6 The Applicant's outline follows the conventional approach to commercial development, which is to build 'headquarters' capacity buildings. The site is

visually sensitive. There are long views towards the site from at least four directions. The Applicant's Visually Verified Montages document shows how the proposed large corporate buildings would dominate and harm the Council's vision for the character of the Temple Meads City Gateway. Building heights should respond to the predominant existing context of the surrounding urban form. Large corporate buildings would harm the local place making objective. Although not in a conservation area, the site lies between the Grade I listed Temple Meads Station building group and St. Mary Redcliff. The mass of a large tall, urbanisation scheme should not dominate the intervening space between two of the city's most eminent landmarks.

- 3.7 The Council recommends that the Grosvenor Hotel is incorporated within new development. The Hotel is a local landmark. The Hotel's 'Northern Renaissance' style enhances the blighted local landscape and gives local distinction. The Council's decision to include the Hotel in the local list of valued buildings is official recognition that the building is a positive feature. The Framework proposes the retention Hotel because it is worthy of preservation. The blend of old and new is essential to the creation of a distinctive and vibrant economic quarter. To preserve a sense of local identity, 'you have arrived in Bristol', it is vital to retain large prominent buildings of conspicuous design. National Planning Policy provides that in the case of a non-designated heritage asset that the scale of harm or loss of significance requires a balanced judgement to be made. If neither Hotel, nor its façade is to survive demolition the quality of the replacement building must be sufficient to justify demolition. The monolithic Block B fails to surmount that hurdle.

4 An alternative, policy compliant, spatial approach

- 4.1 The Society's following proposal bears in mind that the development must produce sufficient floorspace to make the scheme commercially viable. The alternative approach is to plan a close grain lower rise work quarter, with possibly a greater number of buildings. This site could support a development with a larger footprint of buildings.
- 4.2 If the scheme reallocated the proposed open space to create a larger footprint of buildings the restructuring of the site need not reduce the marketable space. A close grain cluster of buildings would create an attractive development for work and recreation. A close grain lower rise work quarter would produce the character of the 'Scenario Testing' section of the Framework which envisages a lower series of buildings that retains both former hotels, and could incorporate more green areas than the proposed scheme. A close grain lower rise work quarter scale would reflect the characteristics of the original Engine Shed whose working conditions are integral to the nature of start-up enterprises.
- 4.3 The differences of scale in a development of a combination of low rise and medium rise buildings would produce the required mix of heights to give the

Temple Meads City Gateway a sense of place. The redevelopment of the city block that includes Temple Gate House, Engine Shed 2 and Blocks A & B is a crucial contribution the rebirth of the whole Temple Meads City Gateway. The Applicant's Visually Verified Montages confirms how and mass of Blocks B & C would the dominate the redevelopment. The dominant, monolithic blocks would undermine the Council's imagination and forward thinking when it purchased the urban block that includes Temple Gate House. Other solutions to provide the same level of floorspace should be exhausted before permitting tall buildings.

5 **The public realm**

- 5.1 A human scale is the precondition to a successful public place. A close grain lower rise work quarter would make the Brunel Mile and Victoria Street more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. These streets are primary pedestrian and cycling routes into the city. Concurrently, the Council has promoted the Redcliffe Neighbourhood Plan to improve Redcliffe Way and create a 'close' to the north of St. Mary's Redcliff. The site is visually sensitive. The Applicant's Visually Verified Montages show the negative impact of Blocks B & C to the views along the adjoining streets.
- 5.2 The Society doubts whether a large open space on the west of the site overlooked by the large corporate buildings, Blocks B & C, would create a place that would attract the public to linger. Most of the areas proposed for outside hospitality (coloured blue on pages 8/9 of the DAS) are on the outside of the development area and unprotected from the continuous traffic. There would be a dead area in front of the Temple Gate / Victoria Street elevation.
- 5.3 The site is small enough to service from the perimeter, which would enable a close grain access between the new buildings. The new large public space, should be reallocated to several 'pocket parks' in spaces between the new buildings beside pedestrian routes. A factor behind the success of the Engine Shed has been the creation of cooperative working spaces. Small, informal spaces, large enough for outside catering, would be immediately attractive and a potent factor to support the development's commercial success. The Society refers to the attached images to support its argument. The Society is impressed by the success of the Cargo initiative, the home to a host of independent retailers, developed in the Wapping Wharf scheme. The pedestrian and cycle flow around the Temple Meads City Gateway is heavier than on Goal Ferry Steps.

6 **Applying the Public Place Tool**

- 6.1 The Bristol Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone Public Realm Guide requires all projects that affect the public realm to demonstrate how they achieve seven

possible public realm qualities. The table applies the tool to the proposed scheme and the Society's alternative proposal.

Conventional corporate building

Characterful	Greater probability that the outward facing qualities would have a corporate character that gives no sense of local identity.
Comfortable	It is difficult to create a human welcoming atmosphere in a formal open space surrounded by tall buildings.
Connected	The would be a highly connected development
Convivial	Large corporate facades create a sterile streetscape.
Animated	Large corporate facades create a sterile streetscape
Versatile	Large corporate, concrete-frame buildings are inflexible

New urban 'village' of close grain, lower height buildings

Characterful	Greater possibility of a development to create local identity. The development would include the locally listed Grosvenor Hotel, a local landmark
Comfortable	Small pocket parks create intimate inviting spaces.
Connected	The would be a highly-connected development
Convivial	Narrower streets with pocket parks and corners create a character for social contact
Animated	Narrower streets with pocket parks and corners create a character for social contact
Versatile	Smaller buildings are more flexible than large concrete frame buildings.

Conclusion

The outline proposal offers insufficient benefits to the public realm to balance its lack of policy compliance. It would harm the setting and character of Temple Meads City Gateway and the nearby nationally important Listed Buildings and destroy a locally recognised building of merit.

Examples of pocket parks

