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Introduction

In April, the Civic Society was invited to comment on this pre-application enquiry for a site on Bath Road opposite Arnos Court Park which is largely covered by a derelict Moderne style factory building. These comments are based on a site visit, desk review of filed documents. The site covers an area of 7,200 m² on ground sloping gently down to the NW with views across Bath Road to Arnos Park and further over the city centre. Neighbouring buildings are mostly residential terraced houses with some larger Victorian semi-detached houses/villas.

Change of use

The proposals envisage that this development will create new residential housing as well as a substantial area of landscaping. All the buildings will be new-build. The Society supports the principle of residential development in this area of Bristol, which is well supplied with amenities such as shops and parks and is close to the city centre as well as being on several bus routes and is in line with development policy for higher-density urban housing in Bristol.

Height and mass

The four proposed new blocks are of varying heights and mass. The largest block, Block A on the Plan, on Bath Road, appears in the illustrations to be made up of 3 elements of differing heights and shapes situated roughly on the footprint of the existing factory building. The elevation facing Bath Road comprises 5 gable-fronted sections each of 4-storeys, with a flat-topped block behind and a taller flat-topped block of 6 storeys to the right. A saw-tooth roof/gable profile is proposed to reflect the industrial nature of the current factory building. The next largest block, Block C, is set towards the rear of the site and is also 6 storeys high at its maximum height. The two smaller blocks, both called Block B, are lower and not easily visible from Bath Road.

The Society accepts that the 3D images show appropriate heights and masses for Blocks B, C & D. These blocks are compatible with the surrounding low rise residential area, which is two and three-storey housing. The Society supports the building height proposed for the gabled Block A but its design could be substantially improved with a different approach.

Design and Materials

The Society appreciates the early attention given to consideration of building materials and appearance and design and is positive about the examples shown on p22-23. Most people seeing this development when built will be looking at it from the Bath Road side.

The architectural context of Block A is late 19th century housing that faces the Bath Road and not the building that development will demolish. The current building awkwardly cuts into the rising ground. This is an opportunity to follow the guidance of the Council's 'Planning Advice note 15 – Responding to local character: a design guide.' The Society suggests that the Block A Bath Road elevation should be organised in uniform blocks that descend the slope and follow the 19th Century example in a step-down as singles or pairs of houses. In the dominant domestic context, the 'saw' roof profile has no relevance.; it was never visible from the Bath Road. and, without copying the detail, the Bath Road elevation should respond to the proportions of the 19th century housing. The Society does not promote any particular architectural language.

Design and materials

The Society suggests that the better precedent for the roof line are the pitches of the 19th century houses that flank each side of the site. This development is an opportunity to complete the building line. The upper 7-floor flat-roofed block is intrusive and would harm the character of the streetscape. An extension of the gabled terrace should replace it. The design should be informed by but not follow the detail of the dominant late 19th century surrounding architecture. For example, the window openings in the indicative design, which have a suitable proportion, should also be adequately recessed. The Society assumes that the ground floor would not be a dead elevation that concealed a car park at ground level. Front doors in the gabled terrace would animate the design and could provide the basis for designing the area between block A and the Bath Road. The development should include a green edge.

Within the courtyard area we would positively encourage the architects to be bold and innovative with choice of materials, design of the elevations and detailing. The Society reserves judgement on final comment on the architectural detailing until details are provided. The Society strives to ensure that the quality of architecture is of the highest standards and welcomes liaison with developers in this respect prior to submission.

The landscape

The Society supports the proposal for a large area of public amenity space in the centre of the site and around the blocks, giving residents the benefit of parkland area right by where they live. The existing mature trees retained if possible. The Society strongly supports the idea (p.27) of opening up a pedestrian route through the site to Sandy Road via Belmont Road and opening up the brick wall on the N side to make the whole area more porous for people passing through on foot.