



an independent force for a better Bristol

5th July 2017

McArthur's Warehouse Gas Ferry Road – 17/03139/F - The Society's response to the planning application to demolish the existing warehouse and. Redevelopment to provide a mixed-use development of 147 residential units, workspace and a cafe with ancillary gallery space associated car parking, landscaping, and supporting infrastructures.

The Society's statement in response to a scheme for a high quality, residential-led development of about 150 flats with flexible ground floor level commercial space at the former McArthur's Warehouse Gas Ferry Road.

Introduction

In principle, the Society strongly supports redevelopment to bring this site back into productive use. The Society agrees with the development constraints and opportunities that the Nash Partnership sets out in the SWOT analysis. The Society opposes the scheme solely because the proposed buildings are a floor too tall. The Society would support a reduced height scheme, unconditionally.

Demolition

The Society reluctantly accepts demolition of the existing warehouse.

Change of use

The Society accepts that a predominantly residential, mixed use scheme is appropriate in this location. The Society is pleased to note that Guinness appreciates the problems that would arise if new residential accommodation is built to the back of the dock. The Society shares the concern of others about the protection of employment uses around the periphery of the dry dock. The scheme should offer simple, and therefore affordable, ground floor industrial units. The Underfall Yard Trust will voice several concerns about maintaining the historic character of the dockyard and the potential impact on shipbuilding and ship repair activities at The Graving Dock and Albion Dockyard, which the Society supports but need not repeat here.

Mass

The Society supports the Council's concern about the height of the scheme. Bristol Urban Design Forum shares the Council's concern, they say "*the apparently arbitrary increase in*

height to seven storeys, which we believe would draw undue emphasis to the development and, crucially, detract from the SS Great Britain, a major heritage asset. In this respect, we suggested that verified views of the development should include viewpoints from the north of the river, where it will form a backdrop to the masts of the SS Great Britain.”

The advice given by Historic England about the impact of the scheme is unambiguous. They say,

“Historic England objects to the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the application does not meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.”

The assembly of local heritage assets that are important to the local economy.

The Society is unhappy about the current tower that would face south that would dominate the view from Coronation Road. Not only will it present a large dark mass but it will also overwhelm the Rolt boat builders plot at its feet. In the Society’s view, no block should exceed six floors. The principal block would contain five floors with a sixth floor of loft apartments within the roof pitches. The broader triangulation of the south block roof pitch would create an acceptable taller ridge above the east block.

Design and materials

The Society supports informal blocks set at angles to each other and the landscaped podium over the parking area to divide the residential floors from the ground floor commercial uses, cafe and residents’ parking. The Society welcomes a roof line that is varied and adds visual interest. However, the Society supports the Bristol Urban Design Forum’s concerns where they say, *“The SS Great Britain is rightly the centre of attraction in this area, with the surrounding buildings forming a backdrop; the Panel believes that this requires a more restrained approach to maintain the drama of the approach to this asset heritage.”* It is vital that the proposals for McArthurs are subservient to the importance of SS Great Britain as the local landmark. The current proposals are too dominant visually, especially seen from the south.

The block that faces Gas Ferry Road show subservient upper floors over a more traditional ‘warehouse style’ development in the Society view this block should not exceed 6 storeys. This should comprise 5 storeys of ‘warehouse’ and top storey under the interesting pitched roofs. The zinc clad roof storey is acceptably subservient because of darker colour. This ‘trick’ could be employed elsewhere in the development as the eye is drawn to the parapet line and the top floor accommodation above appears recessive behind it.

The proposed southern block is clad entirely in ‘standing seam’ zinc and is overly dominant. If this block was also reduced to 6 storeys the height would be acceptable viewed from the south of the site. However, it would still dominate the site due to the fact it is entirely zinc faced. The Society remains concerned that even 6 storeys of zinc sheeting will be seen, especially from the south as a large dark mass, and suggests reconsideration of the design to break up the verticality of the southern elevation.

The Society welcomes and supports the use of contemporary materials, but comments that as in all developments the success of the project is often in the quality of the materials used and the architectural detailing of the elevations. It is so often the case that the visuals at planning stage are not reflected in the product. For a development, as important as McArthurs the quality and detailing of the buildings should be conditioned. The development should not be overly fussy, the historic warehouses were simple buildings. Their virtue to the (aesthetic) eye, lay in their proportions, materials and built quality. The Society regrets that the scheme does not reuse any of the original, deep terracotta bricks, which could make an attractive feature.

The Society supports the proposed amalgamation of zinc cladding with integrated 'PV array', which is extremely interesting. Often pv panels are an ugly addition to a building.

Accommodation mix

The Society shares the Council's concern about the accommodation mix. The scheme should offer a greater mix than one and two-bedroom units. A greater mix of accommodation size will attract a greater range of purchasers, improve the likelihood of a sustainable community and be more adaptable in the future.

This scheme will comprise of several blocks that could lend themselves to the provision of market and affordable housing with different levels of service charge. The Society does not understand why this development should not provide policy compliant affordable housing on site.

Car parking

The proposed podium would provide a convenient car park. The Society assumes that the development would avoid surface car parking on other parts of the site.

Public realm

The Society welcomes the ground floor commercial and café uses that will bring welcome activity to the surrounding area, potentially animating the route past Rolt's Boathouse and provide greater amenity to the residents of the flats. This part of the Harbour Promenade is currently neglected and derelict.