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1st March 2018

The Society's response to THAT Group's revised proposals to demolish 2-16 Clifton Down Road and redevelop a range of retail units, offices and cafe/restaurant space, landscaping and public realm improvements.

Introduction

The Society is grateful to THAT Group and their development team for the invitation to the presentation of their proposals on the 15th February 2018. This response is based on information made available at the presentation and from the development website <http://www.thatgroup.co.uk/cliftonvillage>. Public consultation is effective when it occurs early enough in the planning process to affect the final form of development. Subject to suggestions to improve the exterior design, the Society supports to proposal. The critical considerations of the application are the mix of commercial units, urban design and the provision of public realm improvements.

The site

The proposal relates to an island site in the centre of Clifton Village formerly occupied by a small parade of now empty shops. The site is a designated primary shopping area within the Clifton Conservation Area. Surrounding the site are several buildings whose style is predominately mid to late Georgian and, in King's Road, later 19th century commercial units.

Planning history

There is a long planning history that it is not profitable to recount. However, the unbuilt consent 13/00783/LC, remains a material consideration in this application. That consent permitted and remains relevant to the demolition of the current buildings, the proposed mixed commercial/retail uses and, to an extent, the height and mass of the replacement building.

Demolition, change of use, mass and height of the replacement building

The Society has no comments to offer on these aspects of the proposal.

Building design

The Society offers comments with a positive intention to improve the scheme. We believe that our suggestions would be resource neutral, they would not adversely affect the cost of construction or the rental return. Local policy states that development is expected to deliver high quality urban design and to contribute positively to an area's character and identity, creating and reinforcing local distinctiveness. The character of the Clifton and Hotwells Conservation Area is varied in this area. The local Georgian buildings present an attractive architectural approach whose proportion and scale creates a distinctive local character. In Boyes Avenue and the King's Road development is denser, the individual buildings are narrower and have a vertical emphasis and hierarchy.

The principal, Clifton Down Road elevation

The difficulty that faces the designer of this island site is that the full depth and bulk of the buildings can be seen which increases the risk that the elevation will appear as an unbroken mass of monotonous building. Furthermore, the elevation would be viewed in the context of the surrounding terraced buildings which emphasise the continuous bulk of the elevation. The continuous parapet above the second floor and the unbroken roofline accentuate the building mass. One approach to relieve the building mass could be to set the first floor further back. An alternative approach to mitigate the monolithic appearance of this elevation could be to articulate the first and second floors. The double height projecting block is 11 bays wide between King's Road and the Boyce's Avenue set back. These bays could be articulated in a 3 – 5 – 3 rhythm either by a vertical architectural feature or by a set-back/forward. The Society would slightly prefer a projection which need not exceed say 300mm which the structural frame could accommodate.

The detailing around the opening of the vertical structural elements is an attractive feature. The Society is unconvinced by the glazing of the bays on the ground and first floors with a single pane. The effect of the first-floor openings contrasts unfavourably with the fenestration pattern of the Boyce's Avenue and King's Road elevations. The single pane glazing of the first and second floors weakens the vertical emphasis that the upper floor fenestration creates. The vertical accent ceases to be prominent and the elevation becomes blander and less distinctive. The Society suggests that the introduction of a vertical element in the glazing of the first and second floor bays would enhance the vertical character of the elevation and reflect the local character. Vertical glazing elements would also help to disperse the internal clutter when the building is occupied. An alternative approach, if the developer is committed to a single glazed ground floor bays would be to use a darker material to frame the ground floor. The effect of a darker material would be to add weight to the lower floor and cause the building to be read as two floors; the darker ground floor and the lighter upper floors. The Society supports the diminishing window bays on the upper floors on all elevations and a change in the window to wall ratio.

The Society infers that the setback on King's Road end of the elevation is to reduce the impact of the development on the setting of the Grade II* listed Mortimer House. Unfortunately, the CGIs do not enable the Society to assess whether the design achieves that purpose. This aspect must remain for the Council to assess.

The view from the south, up Clifton Down Road emphasises the bulk of the building viewed against the surrounding terraced buildings. The Society suggests that it would lessen the

impact of the building mass if one bay of the middle floor overlooking Boyce's Avenue were set-back in the same manner as the set-back at the King's Road end of the elevation.

The other elevations

The Society supports the detail of the subsidiary elevations and the long King's Avenue façade. Unlike the principal façade, on these elevations a mullion divides the windows on the middle floor.

The roof

The CGIs appear to include a roof level plant enclosure which would be to the detriment of the development's appearance. This should be reconsidered. In this sensitive area all plant should be contained within the building.

Materials

The Society supports the proposed colour of the building, subject to the suggestion of a darker tone to reinforce the ground floor. Bath Stone was chosen for the earlier, withdrawn proposal. The Society assumes that the surface material would be cladding over a steel frame and that the planning permission would condition the final choice of material.

Public realm

The Society welcomes the set-back of the building from Clifton Down Road. It would be attractive to introduce a line of planters to mark the division of the public realm from the private spill-out space. We infer that this scheme, will include the funding for public realm improvements to Boyce's Avenue as did its predecessor. We also assume that there will be discussion with the Council about the improvement of the pavements and road space of King's Avenue, which construction will damage.