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18th January 2018

St Mary's Hospital, Upper Byron Place - 17/07088/F – The Society's response to the proposal to convert and redevelop the buildings to provide 153 bed spaces of student accommodation with associated landscaping.

Introduction

The Society has been involved all the recent planning history relating to this site and has vigorously supported the Council's principled objections to the earlier schemes. The Society supports the current proposal that gives the opportunity to take a conservation based approach to the welcome reuse this important site. The comments included in this response are intended positively; to improve the proposed scheme.

The proposal

The scheme retains the principal building with these alterations that include

- The extension of the roof to provide accommodation.
- The demolition of the southern sun verandas to make way for a new southern extension.
- The demolition of the informal rear additions and their replacement with a new building.
- The erection of a new building on land to the south west of the site.

Change of use

The Society agrees that this site would make suitable student accommodation. We would expect any bespoke student development to be adaptable to other uses, both outside of terms dates and should there be a fall in demand for student accommodation. To ensure that purpose built student housing can be easily converted into residential accommodation it is necessary for the rooms in student flats to comply with the Council's residential space standards.

The principal building

The Society welcomes the design that does not require extensive internal structural alterations, and which integrates the new accommodation in a manner consistent with the fenestration of the principal elevation. The proposal to add a mansard roof has the potential

to create the planning gain of a more satisfactory roof outline. The new roof needs careful detailing. Dormer windows would be a better choice than roof lights, they reflect the quality of this Italianate building. The integration of PV panels in the new roof should follow Council design advice. The reuse of the lodge and the creation of the ground-floor student common rooms would make an attractive approach and reception area to the hall of residence. The Society would regret the loss of the 'sunlight' conservatories to the south of the principal building, which are important survivors from an era in the development of hospital treatment. If the applicant establishes that the benefit of development outweighs the loss of the conservatories, the Society supports the form of the new extension.

The new Upper Byron Place buildings

Upper Byron Place has no pavement; it is the width of a lane. Its purpose was to give access the back of the houses in Berkeley Square. The lane probably followed a former public footpath to Brandon Hill. To the east side of the Upper Byron Place lane stand small scale modest buildings in keeping with the character of the lane. The Society supports the redevelopment of the architecturally undistinguished hospital extensions on Upper Byron Place. In a previous planning application, the Council supported 'mews type development'. The Society is unconvinced that the proposed terrace of contemporary brick-built two-storey units is the best architectural solution. Given the context of the area the Society suggests that a design informed by local house types could enhance the 'green lane'.

The new south west "pavilion" building

The construction of this building has caused great local opposition. The residents of Byron Place have an understandable concern about the effect of construction work on the stability of the retaining wall at the rear of their properties that supports the hospital garden above and they have objections that relate to overlooking and shadowing of their houses. The Society proposes the omission of the building and suggests that the applicant investigates whether the development between the principal building and Upper Byron Place could include additional accommodation. This building would substantially compromise the quality of the gardens, the scheme's attractive, west facing outdoor amenity space.

The green walls

In the Society's view, unless a building must inescapably include a large blank wall, architecture should justify itself without needing a mask of a green screen. Although the applicant's filed documents contain impressive information about the sustainability of the green wall system the Society remains sceptical of the value of this proposal that must inevitably increase maintenance cost. The Society would support the proposal without the green wall.