

24/01632/M reserved matters subsequent to 17/06459/P (new University Campus), Former Post Office Depot, Cattle Market Road BS1

Introduction

This application seeks approval of the student accommodation element of outline application 17/06459/P which was granted on 7th June 2019.

The outline application comprised a new mixed-use University Campus comprising up to 82,395sq m of floor space including up to 1,500 student beds with all matters reserved except access.

Subsequently a reserved matters application 19/02952/M sought approval of details of layout, scale, appearance and landscape pursuant to conditions 1 and 3 of outline permission 17/06459/P. The scheme comprised 953 student beds in cluster flats with ground floor active uses and associated works. Approval was granted on 6th December 2019 but lapsed at the end of 2022.

This new application maintains the massing and principles of the previous scheme with amendments to comply with the requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022, enacted following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Four additional staircase cores have been incorporated to provide alternative means of escape. Consequently, the number of bedrooms has been reduced from 953 to 864 and ground floor commercial spaces have become communal amenity area. The building layout and heights of blocks remain as application 19/02952/M and the architectural rendering also remains the same: PPC aluminium cladding and glass.

Previous Bristol Civic Society comments

The Civic Society reviewed the outline planning application and compiled a set of comments dated 29th December 2017 including the following points relating to the residential element that still apply:

- In recent years the University has expanded continuously and left the market to provide accommodation for its expanding population....the Society is pleased to note that the new Campus will provide residential accommodation.
- The Society was heartened by the University's commitment to deliver high quality architecture....the prominence in the Enterprise Zone and the importance of this development requires exemplary architecture....the tallest building gives an opportunity to create an internationally recognised symbol of the University and the City's aspirations.
- A design to match the Wills Tower would be impressive. The group of new buildings could create an impressive entry to the city from the railway.

The Civic Society reviewed the subsequent application (19/02952/M) and made the following comments that still apply:

- The new campus should be distinguished by buildings as recognisably 'Bristol' as the Wills Memorial Building. It is disappointing to make a negative response to the proposed design.
- The proposed buildings are anonymous and indistinguishable from many of Bristol's speculative office blocks. The tall orthogonal blocks have repetitious fenestration in elevations that have no horizontal hierarchy and minimal vertical articulation. They have no 'tops' or 'podiums' as Part 3 of the Urban Living SPD suggests. The dark colour of the proposed materials emphasises the buildings' mass.
- Only the buildings' height makes them 'memorable landmarks'. These 'anywhere' commercial structures do not indicate that they are part of an exciting future campus. The Temple Island buildings lack recognisable character or distinction.

The scheme proposal

The outline planning permission includes a series of parameter plans which defines the maximum extent of development (height, mass, quantum) along with an Illustrative Masterplan which indicated how the site may ultimately be developed. Both this and the previous reserved matters applications comply with these parameters.

The proposal contains 864 student rooms in cluster flats and studios with communal spaces, including a 24-hour Student Hub, and active frontages at ground level, arranged in a U-shaped building enclosing a generous external amenity space.

Elevations

This is a very prominent site, and its location adjacent to the London-bound platforms at Temple Meads will be the first impression of Bristol to visitors arriving in the city, which the illustration on page 107 of the Design and Access Statement shows. As we have said previously a site of this prominence demands a development of the highest design quality. We are disappointed that the elevations are effectively the same as the previous application and the changes to the floor plans have not been used to reassess the elevational treatment.

Although the northern ends of blocks AR1 and AR3 offer a slender massing, the horizontal emphasis of the cladding that disguises the three different elements on each floor (blank wall to study bedroom, window to corridor and windows to cluster kitchen/living room) detracts from the slenderness. We consider that these facades should be split by vertical division into three separate parts corresponding to the three different elements of the floorplans. These are vitally important elevations and need to be top class.

The officer's report on the previous application states that *'the scheme's skilled architectural approach has achieved a holistic balance where the uncomplicated facades are well suited to the slender massing achieved for the taller elements'*.

However Historic England's consultation response includes the statement that *'the remaining elevations of the proposed buildings appear as sheer unrelieved monoliths with little sense of refinement in their detail'*. We agree with Historic England and consider that the staircase/lift cores should be expressed differently in the elevations to dramatically split up the *'unrelieved monoliths.'* This is particularly so as the external walls to the staircases and lifts are solid and perversely the external cladding to them is currently shown as windows identical to those of the student rooms.

We consider that there should be more modelling in the façade treatment including greater horizontal articulation. We are concerned that the cladding material will not weather gracefully and that the use of more enduring materials that relate to Bristol should be considered. Reliance on different colours of aluminium cladding to break up the monotony of the elevational treatment is absurd even though the choice of colours may be considered in the words of the BUDF to be *'very much in keeping with the colouration of the adjacent listed station complex'*.

External Circulation

The access and movement diagram on page 111 and the refuse vehicle tracking study on page 114 of the Design and Access Statement show vehicle circulation over hard-paved surfaces within the courtyard area. This appears to be related to keeping the access as permitted in the outline application 17/06459/P when the adjoining land to the south was reserved for the arena and no vehicular access was proposed along the southern side of the University site. The circumstances are now different; proposals for the arena site show a series of blocks with a street adjacent to the southern side of the University site. This street is shown on the access and movement diagram with a refuse collection vehicle serving refuse stores AR2a and AR2b. The street should be extended along the western edge of the site and used for access to the accessible parking spaces and refuse store AR1. Vehicles could turn in the gap between buildings AR1 and AR2. All refuse collection stores, and service entrances are on the outer side of the building apart from refuse store AR3, which could be flipped to the outer side of the building and collections made from the main access road prior to crossing Brocks Bridge. Taxis and deliveries could be made to the entrance doors shown on the outer side of the buildings. All vehicular movement would therefore be removed from the courtyard.

External Amenity Space

With all vehicular movement removed from the courtyard, the amount of hard surfacing therein can be dramatically reduced and laid to grass. The courtyard could then truly be called a 'quad', as sometimes referred to in the planning documents, and be an accurate interpretation of the Oxbridge tradition.

The courtyard faces north and the shadow studies and insolation diagrams in the landscape design and access statement show that the majority of the ground will be in

shade during the time that students will be in residence. This situation could be improved by reducing the height of the central link in block AR2 and removing the 3m high wall to the roof terrace to let more sunlight in. Indeed, the roof terrace and its 3m high security walls could be removed altogether as there would be additional usable external space created in the courtyard as noted above. We are not convinced that roof terraces are as useful and convivial as external space at ground level which is readily accessible to all residents in the development.

External Environment

We are concerned that the Wind Microclimate Report is not backed up by any technical evaluation. The report makes no reference to guidance in the Urban Living SPD for understanding wind effects at pedestrian level where tall buildings are proposed. Clearly the gap between buildings AR1 and AR2 and anticipated ground level conditions on the western side of these blocks contradicts advice given in the SPD. It is perverse that entrances associated with the disabled parking are located on the exposed western faces of these blocks and the reason that these entrances are there is to eliminate the need for users to walk through the gap between AR1 and AR2 where winds will be accelerated to 'Uncomfortable' levels.

Some trees have been introduced within the gap between AR1 and AR2 to help improve local conditions so that 'Strolling' conditions may be possible immediately next to and behind the trees, not throughout the entire gap. The whole width of this gap is the subject of an easement with Wessex Water allowing access to their 1.8m dia. sewer below. Does the easement permit trees to be planted in this gap? (the same also applies to trees shown in the landscape layout in the courtyard space).

The Urban Living SPD advises that tall buildings near frequently used areas (e.g. train stations) require careful attention. Temple Meads station platforms 12 is c.25 metres from the western sides of buildings AR1 and AR2. What will the impact be of the proposed development on rail passengers waiting on this platform in windy conditions?

The Urban Living SPD suggests that bulk, height and massing options for developments need to be thoroughly assessed at an early stage to avoid the need for retrospective mitigation measures. The SPD advises that any proposal for a 14 to 20 Storey high building needs a Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) study and, if the study indicates the possibility of unsafe conditions, a wind tunnel test to quantify and confirm the effectiveness of any mitigation measures proposed. The final point of the report's conclusion states that '*Further refinement of the landscaping for wind mitigation can be carried out with quantitative methods such as physical wind tunnel testing, if needed.*' We consider it essential to carry out a CFD study and possibly wind tunnel test **now**,

and any modification to the design of the building or landscaping assessed before a decision is issued on this planning application.

Sustainable Construction

There is no explanation of why it is proposed to target BREEAM Excellent and not BREEAM Outstanding.

There is also no embodied carbon assessment included in the documents on the Planning Online website.

These ambitions and omissions would appear to go against the University's pledge to become a net zero carbon campus by 2030.