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Bristol Civic Society's response to a pre-planning-application scheme to redevelop 493/499 Bath Road Brislington

November 2024

The Civic Society welcomes the proposed provision of 100% affordable housing with a combination of social housing and shared rent. The location offers good transit routes into the city and easy access to amenities. The vacant site is largely cleared of buildings except for the derelict John Peer building and provides a ready canvas for re-development. There are topographical challenges for laying out the site proposals sympathetically to all its surroundings on this hillside site. We do not think the current proposals yet succeed.

Height and density

The proposal is for 91 homes. The site is identified in Bristol Local Plan Annex Development Allocations (site ref. 1207), and is 0.7ha in area with an estimated capacity for 85 homes. The Urban Living SPD suggests 120 units per hectare in an urban setting (e.g. Paintworks or Junction 3). Draft Local Plan policy UL1 locates the site within the inner urban area where more intensive development is to be expected. Policy UL2 stipulates a minimum net density of 120 dwellings per hectare for more intensive development in the inner urban area. This equates to 84 homes on this site.

The heights of proposed blocks A and C will be overbearing on the existing houses on Bath Road and Belmont Road.

Building design

We appreciate the consideration of a mixture of tenures, with the proposal including houses and apartments. We suggest homes of at least 3 storeys be considered by the scheme, providing homes for larger families and improving the use of the space.

The Society feels that the proposed designs are not sympathetic with the surrounding context. The longevity of these designs could be greatly improved by considering the buildings' relationship with the adjacent Victorian terraces and incorporating materials on the façade that match the surrounding streetscape. The replacement of the flat roofs with something more in keeping with the surroundings and a more interesting use of setbacks to break up the façade would be welcome updates to the designs.

This view is supported by comments made by the appeal inspector on the 2018 planning application on this site (18/05023/F), who noted that 'the proposed development would not contribute positively to the surrounding area's character or identity and would not respond appropriately to the height, scale or massing of existing buildings' and 'the appeal scheme would significantly harm the character and appearance of the area'. We consider that the same comments apply to the scheme proposed in this pre-app submission.

The sketch drawings on the project website and in the pre-app submission document show a development that appears to be too intense and too high which fails to relate to the context of Victorian and Edwardian buildings adjacent to the site. The sketches and draft elevations show proposed gridded façades that are alien to the area. We also do not see the argument for taking the existing building on the site, which is about to be demolished, as a cue for building façade design.

32 out of 81 flats are single aspect (40%) of which 8 (10%) face predominately north. Flats described as 'partial dual aspect units' are single aspect; a door onto an inset balcony on a single aspect unit does not make it dual aspect.

Sustainability and Urban Design

The Society applauds the integration of a pedestrian corridor between Bath Road and Tramway Road. This will be beneficial for the local community. However, we question whether the envisaged green social space along this corridor will achieve its purpose, to provide a space for community interactions and children to play. The proximity to Bath Road and the adjacent estate's road will limit its appeal for family use, unless such provision is central and protected from cars. The additional orchard/ urban planting spaces connected via the pedestrian walkway risk feel disconnected and unused.

The Society stresses that the success of this urban design will be largely reliant on the prioritization of community members enjoying the space. We would commend a reconsidered design where these areas of community engagement and green spaces are given greater preference to the parking spaces. Vehicle access over the Bath Road/Tramway Road 'Social Spine' should be eliminated and access to the parking area relocated. There will be parking need, however, and its landscaping and electric car charging requirement under building regulations should be thought through together.

We welcome the inclusion of bike storage with the provision of 122 stores. We do, however believe that given the location's proximity to the centre and access to cycle routes, additional capacity in the bike stores should be considered a priority.

There is a gated heritage wall at the head of the Belmont Road cul-de-sac, on the north boundary, the intentions for which should be clarified

Alternative design

It is possible to develop the site with 84 dwellings (20 houses and 64 flats), all with genuine dual aspect in buildings that do not exceed four storeys, apart from three flats in a fifth floor on the south-western corner of the site. The disposition of buildings on the site would be similar to that shown in the pre-app documents including the pedestrian link from Bath Road to Tramway Road and a parking courtyard between the terrace houses.

The access road into the site from Tramway Road would lead directly to the parking courtyard, leaving the Bath Road/Tramway Road 'Social Spine' accessible to pedestrians and cyclists only. The existing terraces of houses on Bath Road and on each side of Belmont Road would be extended into the site and terminated with blocks of flats that turn the corners to face onto communal open spaces. The terrace of buildings on Bath Road would start with two and half storey houses next to the existing houses, stepping up with flats above houses, to five storeys of flats next

to the pedestrian link to Tramway Road. Terraced houses each side of an extended Belmont Road would step up from two and half storeys high at the end of the existing houses to three and four storey blocks of flats. Houses on the north side of the Bath Road/Tramway Road link and flats on the south side would be three and a half storeys high with communal garden space between the flats and the southern boundary corresponding with the line of the sewer easement