

BRISTOL CIVIC SOCIETY

63 St Thomas Street, Bristol BS1 6JZ

Response to development proposals

Bristol Civic Society is pleased to have been given the opportunity to comment on the upcoming proposals for 63 St Thomas Street.

Potential for reuse?

We would need to be convinced by more evidence that this construction industry iconic building cannot be saved due to its history with the Bristol building fraternity. Also, there must surely be a strong argument for its retention and reuse given current concerns regarding climate change.

Provision of affordable housing?

The proposals seek to yet again add further to the student accommodation numbers and we do not see how this can be helping the growing need for general housing within the city. Would it be possible to include a proportion of affordable housing within this scale of development?

Proposals represent over development

We realise the city is changing and wish to help in its creation however to do this we need to see better designs coming forward. We are disappointed that the proposals show an over development of the site. Both St Thomas Street and Canynge Street are not particularly wide, maybe some 10-11m and thus overlooking from and to the proposals will be an issue.

The internal courtyard also seems tight and thus the overlooking between accommodation may well cause an issue. The ground floor plan shows an active frontage to St Thomas Street which is commended, especially the community use envisaged. However, the side street and rear of the proposals show no active uses and thus these streets will be of poor quality and create dangerous and forbidding places that could encourage antisocial behaviour.

The sun path shown on the drawings indicated that the existing Portwall Lane building will overshadow any new proposals. Therefore, to have a U-shaped plan facing north would mean that most (if not all the single aspect student flats) will be overshadowed for most if not all day for the majority of the academic year. The first-floor garden within the courtyard will also be overshadowed and thus create a difficult environment for the growth of any plants.

We also note the degree of over-shading on St Thomas Street from this proposed development will increase considerably, and wind patterns may also change. There will be a loss of morning sun for passing pedestrians in the Conservation Area, (West Side pavement and road centre) Possible cooling in winter mornings in particular, and amenity losses to the Locally listed buildings opposite with recessed balconies as they lose morning sunshine.

Elevationally, the proposals onto St Thomas Street fit well into its context with material treatments consistent with today's architectural styles and thus neutral to the bystander. The height of the buildings causes concern being above the prevailing height lines of the street. The shoulder line and set back on St Thomas Street tries to reduce the overall height but without a significant set back fails in its attempt and this sits poorly, adjacent to the Portwall Lane building. Simply because the adjacent building on Victoria Street is high does not mean the rear wing of this proposal should match its height. Realistically both wings should be 1-3 storeys lower.

The proposals seek to have a roof top garden and amenity space for the students. This a great idea and one that should be encouraged but we are not aware of one of these on another student accommodation building in Bristol that has been installed for use and with ongoing concern for student safety we are sceptical that it will actually be allowed without massively tall protection barriers being erected.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would suggest the client and architects look again at the site and reappraise the design.

Bristol Civic Society

19th January 2025