

BRISTOL URBAN DESIGN FORUM

Bristol Urban Design Forum

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For the attention of Mr David Rhodes

21 June 2016

Dear Mr Rhodes

**Re: Bristol Urban Design Forum - Design Review on Tuesday 7 June 2016
Review No. 09/16: Bedminster Green, adjacent to St Catherines Place**

Thank you for bringing this project back to the Bristol Urban Design Forum. When we last reviewed the proposals in August 2015 we welcomed the potential of this project for regenerating the wider area and were broadly supportive of the underlying strategy. From the information presented we believe that the moment patterns and the connections between the green spaces represent a sound basis for its further development; our comments are therefore mainly concentrated on the realisation of the project in three dimensions and the ability to achieve a high quality of life for residents and those who will use the spaces.

We were interested to know the future population of the development but felt that there was some uncertainty on your part regarding likely future demography of the area; on the one hand you suggested that the density of traffic makes it less suitable for family dwellings, but on the other you acknowledge that the development will create a demand for additional school places. We note that the Bristol City Council Practice Note 'Affordable Housing' refers to the need to *'plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community'* and suggest that greater consideration is given to providing for a sustainable population mix and responding to the implications of this on both building form and social infrastructure.

You have identified the improvement to pedestrian movement between Bedminster and the existing community on Windmill Hill as being a key issue and we considered that a public right of way under the railway line at the station, together with the improvements to the tunnel to be essential aspects of this. In this context we suggested that the additional route to the south west, tentatively shown on your Public Realm presentation, connecting with the new path along the Malago, would be desirable. At the previous Panel we recommended that increased pedestrian movement across Malago Road required careful coordination with the highway authority and we would have liked to see this aspect of the plan developed in more detail.

We had previously supported the strategy for the 'green infrastructure' which, apart from being essential to the quality of life in the locality, meets the wider aspirations of the City for increasing biomass and biodiversity. It also contributes to reducing air pollution, the urban heat island effect and flooding.

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The proposal to open up the Malago River is an important element of this and we encouraged you to find ways of increasing the access to the new path and ensuring better passive supervision of the space in order that it becomes both well used and safe. We noted the proposal to include a 'green wall' but, while this might be an attractive feature, its environmental contribution would be marginal.

In the light of the proposed residential density we suggested that you find ways of increasing the amount of green space, particularly by exploiting the various roof spaces, and providing smaller accessible play areas for younger children. The development will inevitably change the character of Bedminster Green and lead to the wholesale loss of the existing trees; the precedent in your presentation demonstrated the aspirations for the Green but we were concerned that this was based on a larger space that is less overshadowed by tall adjacent buildings. We strongly recommend that the height parameters for the buildings on the square are given more detailed consideration and that both wind movement and over-shading are modelled before the sites are marketed.

While the Panel members understood the commercial imperatives of a development of this scale, there was also a serious concern that the very high density could result in parts of the scheme becoming 'canyon-like', lacking in day-and sunlight and potentially windswept. We also urged you to look in greater detail at the potential overlooking and over-shadowing between residential blocks as well as the possibility of noise transmission between dwellings within confined spaces. In this respect it would be extremely helpful if the masterplan were supported by generic dwelling plans that illustrated how such problems can be overcome.

We recognise that you have invested significant time in community engagement; we would anticipate that the outcome of this will be a blue-print for a diverse social infra-structure to ensure that the development becomes a viable community. At the previous review we had expressed a concern about the use of the ground floor accommodation for apartments where it abutted public open space and we would welcome the opportunity to site retail, community and commercial uses in these locations, where they would contribute to creating active frontages.

The precedents used to illustrate the design of the public realm, including the opening up of the Malago River, show a welcome level of ambition; we anticipate that these spaces will be subject to intense use and suggest that management plans are put into place at an early stage in order to ensure their sustainability.

Much of our discussion concentrated on the two-dimensional planning of the development and the Panel was aware that we were not able to form a clear opinion of the visual impact of the buildings in their wider context. We believe that the masterplan needs to balance the legitimate aspiration to create a landmark against the amenity of surrounding residents and the protection of the historic views of the city. We recognise that the proposals are still fluid but we would urge you to consult at an early stage with the planning authority on the requirements of SPD1 Tall Buildings and agree locations for verified views.

In conclusion the Panel reiterated its support for the principles you have developed for this project and, subject to the appropriate mix of uses and of tenancy and ownership, believe that it could make a considerable contribution both to the regeneration of Bedminster and to meeting the housing needs of the wider city. We are mindful that the proposals are in embryonic form, nevertheless we are concerned that the success of this new quarter - and the quality of life for future residents - will depend on whether the subsequent detailed designs for the individual plots respond to the challenges of the high density and the intensity of traffic on the A38. Since the plan will be realised by other parties over a period of time we suggest that it is essential that an agreed spatial framework and a detailed development brief is put in place that safeguards environment standards and the residential amenity in the long term.

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In this respect Bristol City Council's Affordable Housing Practice Note represents a minimum standard for the housing element. We anticipate that this document would inform the following:

- building line
- building heights
- plot density
- sun path
- sustainable design criteria
- ground floor uses
- parking
- material palette
- design standards for open spaces and landscaping
- use of roofs
- access to open space
- etc.

The Panel wishes you success with the development of this ambitious project and would be pleased to support you further in its detailed development.

Yours sincerely

John Waldron
Co-Chair, Bristol Urban Design Forum Design Review Panel

cc: Bristol City Council Planning
BUDF website