

BRISTOL URBAN DESIGN FORUM

Bristol Urban Design Forum

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For the attention of Mr Kit Stokes

6 July 2017

Dear Mr Stokes,

**Re: Bristol Urban Design Forum - Design Review on 27 June 2017
Review No. FT02/17 – Pring and St Hill Site, Malago Road, Bristol
Pre-application 17/06785/F**

Thank you for your presentation of this scheme to the Panel, which we found informative, and also for the open manner in which you engaged in the discussion.

This scheme constitutes part of the Bedminster Green Development Framework, which has previously been submitted to the BUDF. We were pleased to note that the design responds to the previous criticisms in terms of density, overlooking, ground floor activity etc. to a significant extent; it remains however a very dense development immediately adjacent to a major trunk route on a site with very limited provision of open space and as such presents significant challenges

At over 400 dwellings per hectare the density is one that might be expected only in metropolitan areas close to commuter hubs; in the panel's view this highlights the need to see the development within the context of the wider Bedminster area and Bristol City Council's own policy on housing density, mix and tenure. We expressed our concern about the ability to create a sustainable and stable community if this density were seen as a precedent for Bedminster Green as a whole. We understood that the developer was not intending to make any provision for affordable housing but no evidence was provided to justify an exception from current policy.

We understand that Bedminster Green Development Framework, previously presented to the Panel, has no planning status and consider that the absence of an agreed Spatial Framework, means there is a significant risk of piecemeal development in this area

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Apart from the issues of dwelling density and mix we were concerned that the design was not informed by a coherent strategy for:

- highways
- street trees
- routes for public utilities and district heating
- open space provision
- massing
- access to public transport and pedestrian routes
- sightlines from Windmill Hill

The issue of highway co-ordination was illustrated by the revision you have had to make to the scheme to accommodate two-way operation along the A38 for the Metro-bus. It was also not clear to the Panel at this stage how the distribution network from the proposed energy centre will be co-ordinated with other utilities in the available space. There is inevitably competition for all these functions but unless provision is also made for significant tree planting the resultant width of highway will create a bleak aspect along one of the main approaches to the City. Elsewhere in Bristol there are good examples of how highway tree planting has transformed the streetscape but, in the Panel's view, this can only be secured by a coordinated approach involving all responsible bodies. Until this exercise is carried out it is impossible to know with any certainty whether the current development boundary is viable.

Your model and elevational studies were extremely clear and helpful in allowing us to understand the massing of the buildings. It was, however difficult to assess the relationship of the scheme to its surroundings without the larger model. We would require a greater degree of certainty about the height and mass of any development to the North East of Hereford Street in order to make a more definitive comment. Within the development's own parameters of height and density we considered that the architectural treatment was successful in creating a varied roofline and in articulating the frontage of the building form. The design of the street elevation provides a successful balance between the scale of the road and the desire to give expression to individual dwellings.

Given this degree of articulation we urged you to reconsider the use of rendered panels, which apart from presenting issues of long-term weathering and maintenance in an area with potential high air pollution detract from the clarity of the overall design. We were confident that the proposed combination of brick, metal panels and metal-clad windows could achieve the sense of solidity and permanence appropriate to this prominent location.

You presented two alternatives for the location of the energy centre. We felt that unless it could be guaranteed that the stand-alone building could be a landmark of significant architectural quality the option of embedding it within the smaller residential block would be preferable. We suggest that this should be given further consideration once the associated technical issues have been fully researched.

The introduction of some retail accommodation and relatively generous foyers on the ground floor substantially addresses the concerns we had raised in previous reviews regarding ground floor uses. We suggest, however, that access to and the maintenance of the strip of land between the garage and the railway line is clarified.

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The landscaped decks and a number of dwellings overlook this space, which if not properly looked after, could create a potential nuisance. The opening up of the Malago is to be welcome, however similar concerns exist regarding its management outside the site boundary.

Given the very limited amount of open space the Panel strongly recommended that a landscape architect be engaged so that their design becomes an integral part of the planning application. We have previously discussed the importance of making proper provision for street trees; other areas where specialist input is required are the roof terraces. The use of and the responsibility for the landscaped decks above the car parks was not clear and we suggested that proper provision for access for maintenance is required. The high-level roof terraces are a potentially attractive feature but we raised a concern about the potential for conflict between communal activity and the privacy of individual residents of the penthouse flats. Given the limited amount of space available it may be more appropriate for these to be designated as private roof terraces.

The internal design appears to have overcome many of the issues of overlooking and overshadowing inherent in the scheme previously reviewed; there are however still a number of internal corners overlooking the courtyards where adjacent bedroom windows present issues of acoustic privacy. The provision of adequately dimensioned balconies is welcome and it was helpful to receive drawings that illustrated potential furniture layouts. In a number of instances we suggested that the efficiency of the space planning might be improved, especially in second bedrooms, in order to increase the area of the living space.

While we were aware of the need to rationalise the stair and lift cores the lengths of internal corridor without natural light and outside views detracts from the quality of the homes and fails to provide a sense of security. It was also not entirely clear how large items of furniture could be manoeuvred into some flats. By giving consideration to access from the communal areas to the roof decks above the car park it may be possible to mitigate some of these problems.

In conclusion the Panel considered that, taken in isolation from the wider context, the scheme represents a significant improvement on the proposals presented at previous reviews. Within its own terms of reference the architecture of the scheme has been handled confidently and, subject to the detailed comments made, we would be prepared to support this approach. However, in absence of a coherent and agreed masterplan for Bedminster Green we have serious reservations about the consequences of considering applications on a piecemeal basis. We particularly urge all parties to develop a strategy for the highway that coordinates all modes of transport, public utilities and tree planting in order to ensure that the original masterplan's objective of 'strengthening the spine' can be successfully delivered.

While we recognise the contribution that schemes of this nature make to meeting the City's Core Strategy for housing we also suggest they need to be set within a framework that ensures a sustainable community with an adequate infrastructure of open space and community facilities.

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Thank you again for a very comprehensive presentation, excellently supported by drawings and models. We would welcome the opportunity to review further design development of this scheme together with any proposals for the associated public realm.

Yours sincerely

John Waldron
Chair, Bristol Urban Design Forum Design Review Panel

cc: Bristol City Council Planning
BUDF website