



Bath Heritage Watchdog

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APPLICATION NUMBER: 16/04819/REG13

ADDRESS: Bath Quays South Development Site, Lower Bristol Road

PROPOSAL: Internal and external alterations to Newark Works (including West Machine Shop and Smithy) and demolition of Foundry and Boiler House

CASE OFFICER: Gwilym Jones

DATE: 24 March 2017

COMMENT: STRONG SECOND RE-OBJECTION

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Bath Heritage Watchdog still **Strongly Objects** to this application.

We note the new documents dated 17th March and the revised drawings and documents dated 14th February.

The documents dated 17th March consist of design codes for the residential units. We have seen these kind of design parameters before in the Western Riverside and other developments. They do not address the issue of the outline element of this proposal. They therefore do not remove any of the comments relayed in our previous objections to this scheme.

The documents and drawings dated 14th February offer reductions in height of the office building and its effective splitting into two elements with a change of materials to one part. There is also a reduction of height to one of the residential units. The other remains the same. These are stated to be addressing the concerns stated in the objection comment. Though they may have satisfied some and placated others we remain unconvinced by the scheme for the reasons given below.

Office Building

In a different city and a different context the office building could be said to have been improved. Unfortunately it is not in a different city and context and in Bath the building remains unacceptable in terms of design. Despite the revisions it remains a massive bulky design with a really poor roof design, and despite our personally talking to the architects about the importance of this element of the design, no notice has been taken or any serious attempt at revisions made.

It may not by itself have an individual impact on the setting of the WHS but cumulatively when taken with other proposals including the residential element of this scheme it does. No matter what materials it is clad in it will have an adverse and detrimental impact on the setting of the listed Newark Works, other designated and undesignated heritage assets, the character and setting of the nearby Conservation Area and views in/out and across the WHS.

It is not in design terms a building fit for Bath and one to replace the curtilage listed undesignated heritage asset (the Foundry Building). If this curtilage structure has to be lost (and we see no necessity because we believe no serious attempt has or will be made to look at its adaptation) then what replaces it must be exemplar architecture and design not the kind of monolithic lump that can be seen in any office retail park across the land.

The scale of the reductions proposed also shows the applicants (the Council) were going for broke with what they could cram onto the site, underlining our original claims of over-development of the site. One wonders just what further reductions could be made, and whether the assumption that reflects BMT as the client needs to be tested by competition because the council is the developer?

It should also be noted at the present time there is a vacant office building offering over 7,500 square feet of office space on the opposite site of the Lower Bristol Road. We wonder therefore why a cash strapped council is pursuing a grandiose scheme to provide a 'Landmark Building' for a local company that appears to have declined guaranteeing to occupy it?

There is still no adequate sequential test or viability study provided to explain why there is no alternative site for the office element or why the Foundry Building and other historic structures cannot be adapted for other uses.

Housing Element

Though there is a reduction in height to one of the towers the other one, close to the Bayer/Maritime House complex, remains the same. Therefore our strong objection still remains. These revisions do nothing to reduce the impact of the proposals on the modest scale and setting of the Newark Works and the site in general. The whole remains completely inappropriate in height, scale and mass to the site and views of it. The tower still competes with the height of the tall historic wharf buildings and is of an alien design and character in form and materials to them. Just from this element of the proposals alone, there will still be serious harm caused to the setting and views in/out and across the WHS, the character and setting of the Conservation Area, the setting of the historic site and both designated and undesignated heritage assets. Further cumulative harm will also result when combined with the office and soft landscaping proposals.

We remain convinced the housing element should be a full part of the application and not in outline form, so that the impact of the proposals can be adequately assessed. We recommend that the application should be withdrawn until this is done, because there are “in principle” objections to the height and mass that must not be carried forward as an outline approval.

A New Factor

The recent of granting of permission for the new bridge, demolition of some of the arches and the boiler house and introduction of sheet piling to the river all affecting this site clearly shows the local authority is determined to push ahead with these proposals regardless of impact on heritage. All the extant planning legislation pointed against approval. To all the other issues raised can be added that this application is predetermined.

If this application is refused, which on planning grounds alone it should be, there would be no landing point for the bridge amongst other things. The granting of permission for the bridge mandates development of this site. Precedents are set: historic assets can be demolished and the riverbank altered. As the two applications are linked one cannot exist without the other and the applicant is the same. No decision should have been made beforehand. Both should have been decided at the same time. The fact that they were separated is a “divide and conquer” approach which equates to maladministration.

Conclusion

These comments should be read in conjunction with our previous comments relating to this scheme. Though changes have been made they have little overall impact on our opinion that this remains one of the most harmful and inappropriate proposals put forward since the Dyson Scheme which thankfully fell foul of a shortfall in funding after the Planning Committee overruled the Case Officer's recommendation to refuse, and the Western Riverside which continues on despite the recommendation of the World Heritage Committee that the second and third phases were unacceptable, and is proving widely unpopular in design terms.

The fact is the local authority is the applicant and seems determined to press ahead as the recent granting of permission for another part of this scheme shows. Regardless of the cost to heritage and oblivious to the concerns of many it is pursuing its own agenda. It all leaves a big question mark over our World Heritage Status and the Council's interpretation of what it means.