



Bath Heritage Watchdog

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APPLICATION NUMBER: 17/02034/LBA

ADDRESS: Herman Miller Building, Locksbrook Road

PROPOSAL: Internal and external alterations to facilitate general refurbishment of the former Herman Miller building including external cladding of the building, removal of internal mezzanine and installation of new, open mezzanine to the internal perimeter of the building and addition of a roof top pavilion to the southern elevation of the building

CASE OFFICER: Chris Gomm

DATE: 16 June 2017

COMMENT: OBJECTION

Bath Heritage Watchdog objects to these proposals in their current form.

The Watchdog did not offer comment on the change of use application as there was no “in principle” objection to the proposed use, based on the fact that at the first public consultation drop-in event held in the building, all designs shown and verbal responses given were that the existing plan form of the building would remain intact. There were to be alterations to the arrangement of the cladding panels and the closing up of the large shuttered openings but nothing to indicate any major alterations or additions that would alter the existing form or cause harm to the character of the listed building and its setting. This in hindsight was quite clearly a ruse to ensure the granting of permission.

The second public drop in event clearly showed the addition of the roof-top pavilion and roof-lights and raised platform to accommodate plant. Though this has gradually been revised in shape and mass through consultation and negotiation, it remains an alien and conspicuous addition to the listed building.

It is these rooftop additions the form the bulk of our objection; we have no major objection to the interior works or the majority of the exterior works.

We have to ask why this extra space is suddenly required when at the first public event there was no mention of it. A modern glazed roof pavilion that jars with the host building smacks of a 'vanity project' serving no real purpose other than to provide a talking point at corporate events. If the only way the art and design school can be accommodated on the site is by altering the character of a heritage asset then the building clearly does not fulfil the University's needs and another site should have been considered.

From other correspondence and comments on this application there are other alternatives to the rooftop pavilion. It is noted that the applicants had explored the option of glazed pavilion buildings and these are indicated in the design and access statement. Given there is a large space at the eastern end of the building where the loading bays and sawdust are and were situated, we wonder why the option of an external building linked to the main structure cannot be situated here. We would also ask the question. "is it not possible to use the existing steelwork of the hoppers to form the basis of an extension?" (if indeed the extension is a necessity rather than just a fanciful idea). Either of these options would cause less harm than the chosen solution.

We believe the proposed additions of pavilion, platform and roof-lights cause unnecessary harm to the character of the building by changing the plan form as indicated in its listing. The design and materials do not compliment or reflect the ethos of the original building. We would like to see these aspects dropped from the proposals.

It will also impact on the setting of the other former Herman Miller building across the river. It should be noted that the then senior conservation officer for BANES correctly applied the legislation protecting listed buildings by refusing numerous attempts by Lidl to puncture the roofline with pyramid roof-lights. The same principle should be applied to this Herman Miller building

The rooftop pavilion will also be visible from the higher southern slopes as the existing roof can already be seen from Lansdown Lane and The Hollow. Facing full south and fully glazed there are the issues of reflectivity to consider. If the existing willow trees are further pollarded, which is likely given nobody in the pavilion or the balcony would want to look out on a sea of green (not to mention fallen leaves, dropped branches and sap). If there is any pruning of the willows, then the visual impact of the pavilion will be increased. We also raise the issue of light-spill on the river corridor at night especially the impact on the bats which currently use it, bearing in mind that in winter it gets dark during normal working hours.

The fact it faces south means that in order to keep it cool excessive rooftop plant equipment is required. This alters the profile of the listed building in an unacceptable manner.

We do not subscribe to the current culture of developer appeasement where supposed public benefit outweighs harm. Yes the building will be brought back into use but it could and should be done so without substantially altering its character. There is limited or negligible public benefit from these proposals an art shop, a cafe and possible limited access to the rooftop balcony do not in our opinion offset the harm caused (it should be noted that across the river there will soon be Hobbycraft and Costa Coffee to cover the same offer) There is far greater public (as opposed to University) benefit from Lidl, etc and as stated above they were refused permission to alter the roof-line. The same rules should also apply here.

We tend to agree with the findings of the current senior conservation officer that if extra room and plant is required it should be 'outside the box' leaving the form of the main building intact. The applicants should be encouraged to adopt the solutions put forward in the pre-application advice. The current proposals are contrary to policies BH2, BH6, D4 and NE10, and for that reason they should be refused. There are other less harmful ways of achieving the desired outcome.