



## Bath Heritage Watchdog

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APPLICATION NUMBER: 17/06214/FUL  
ADDRESS: City of Bath College, Chris Gomm  
PROPOSAL: Demolition of existing building and erection of new hotel  
CASE OFFICER: Chris Gomm  
DATE: 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018  
COMMENT: OBJECTION

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Bath Heritage Watchdog objects to this application

These comments relate to design aspects only; we leave it to others to argue the case as to whether another hotel is justified in this location.

One of our main concerns is that this is more of a fronting application designed to gain planning permission for a hotel which may or may not be taken up. If no take up offer is found the design with its lower ground floor cycle store, open ground floor public space and gym areas and restaurant space together with numerous guestrooms stacked over six floors has all the hallmarks of a student accommodation block. It certainly would not be difficult to retro-fit the design to suit this alternative use. We therefore consider that any decision to permit should be conditioned to preclude this change of use.

### **The Existing Building**

Although the existing Allen Building is not the greatest piece of architecture to be seen in Bath. It does have some quirky elements in its design such as its varied roofline and articulation to the corners. The documentation claims it does not positively contribute to the value of the World Heritage Site and has a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area and while up to a point this may be true, the same can certainly be said for the proposed design which is yet another in the series of bland utilitarian designs of oversized and over-tall boxes with poor roofscapes, largely based on the design codes of the Western Riverside.

Given the relative newness (in architectural terms) of the current building, we would dispute the scheme having a low carbon footprint when the embodied energy involved in the creation of the current building has to be carried forward due to its premature demolition. The only fault the current building seems to suffer from is being rather neglected and in need of a good clean. If it is to be lost its replacement needs to be of a far higher quality and appropriateness of design than that currently proposed.

In May 2017, Application 17/01588/FUL was given consent to convert the current building into B1 office use on a phased basis as the College withdrew from the building it no longer requires. In reaching that decision it was noted that Policy SB4.3. identifies the college site as a being protected for educational uses, but also accepts its role in the delivery of Bath Quays as a site for modern office accommodation, if the college can show that any of their premises are no longer required for educational uses. The college stated in that application that it is no longer required for educational use, and the current proposal to demolish reinforces it. Consequently that application conformed to the Placemaking Plan and permission was granted with a Condition “*Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order 2015 (as amended) (or any order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), the premises shall be used only for purposes defined as Use Class B1a (offices) in the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended) and for no other purpose whatsoever*” in order to protect the future office space provision (which required no structural alterations to the building). That condition argues against the current proposal to demolish the building and therefore lose its office use.

### **The New Build**

James Street West has become an architectural disaster due to the lack of a cohesive master plan for the area, resulting in a series of individual buildings that defy the human scale and proportions that define ‘Bathness’. The worst building of its time (Kingsmead House) was replaced by a bland soulless hotel. A grossly over-scaled cinema/entertainment complex was built with an ill judged roof that dominates the location. Then there was the total mutilation of a listed building (the former Labour Exchange) with a student block shoe-horned into its bomb scarred walls, and to top it all a black clad triangular wedge (The Roper Building) seemingly dropped from the future directly opposite one on the city’s most iconic buildings, the Abbey Church House. The addition of yet another totally inappropriate design seems to be adding insult to injury.

Firstly what is proposed is far too tall for the location. If the opportunity exists to replace the current buildings which is also of a height that is too great for its surroundings, it should be with one of the correct proportions which should be no more than three/four above-pavement storeys with mansard or set back pitched roof. That currently proposed is some seven plus storeys. Plant should not be incorporated in the roof but in the basement. The roofscape is over dominant and will have a detrimental impact on the setting when seen from the surrounding hills. Rooms should be incorporated into the roof structure to further reduce height. This could also be partially recessed behind a parapet to add a bit of “Bathness” back to the area. The footprint is too large for the site in an attempt to maximize floorspace, which adds to the dominance of the design and masks the surrounding buildings.

Elevational treatment is bland and follows the recent standard pattern of incorrect ratio of solid to void. There is no horizontal emphasis, all is vertical. There is no detail whatsoever, all is bland and sterile. There are no string courses, no cornices or pediments, and this is made worse by oddly sized windows. The design is not architecturally grounded: the top storeys appear too heavy for the ground floor. The treatment of the corners is weak. The inclusion of some token rustication on the ground floor cannot save the inappropriate design.

### **Materials**

The materials list also follows the standard pattern. Grey zinc cladding, powder coated aluminium for the windows. Dark grey metal shop fronts and render for the bits less easily seen. The use of Bath stone, though supported, does not work successfully when used in these proportions.

As this is a Conservation Area the correct material should be slate for the roofs and timber for the windows and shop fronts. Render should be replaced with course stone rubble, etc.

### **Conclusion**

Regrettably we can find nothing positive to say about what is proposed. It is rather a shame we were not involved in any of the stakeholder consultations. Here is yet another missed opportunity to fix another bit of broken Bath by replacing a poor building with one of a fitting design and a scale, mass and height appropriate for its location. In its current form this design falls well short of the mark and is yet another which will negatively detract from the Setting of the World Heritage Site and the Character of the Conservation Area and Streetscape. It is contrary to Policies B1, B2 and B4 of the B&NES Core Strategy and Policies D1 and D2 of the Placemaking Plan. It should also be noted that Application 17/01588/FUL raises an expectation of office accommodation being made available to meet Policy SB4.3 of the Placemaking Plan and this application, if approved, removes 4,108 square metres of flexible office accommodation from the deliverables of that Plan

The proposal in its current form should be refused or withdrawn.