

15/02162/EFUL - Former Bath Press Premises, Lower Bristol Road, Westmoreland, Bath

Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment of the site to provide a residential-led mixed-use development comprising 244 dwellings (Use Class C3) and 1,485.2 square metres (GIA) flexible employment space (Use Class B1), basement car park, substation, associated landscaping and access

COMMENT

General

BPT appreciates the early and continued opportunity to engage with the development team. We recognise that some of the issues we raised in the previous consultation have been address.

The principle of developing this brownfield site for residential use is welcomed, especially as family homes are to be included. We applaud the use of more generous than average space standards, shown in the adoption of 'Parker Morris' for the residential units. However, a greater proportion of affordable homes would be desirable.

Although we have a number of concerns about the proposed development we consider that on balance it would meet local housing need, preserve the appearance of at least part of this locally important heritage asset and maintain sense of place and local distinctiveness.

In our earlier comments we encouraged the greater use of the terrace form. We are, therefore, pleased that the scheme now includes more terraced housing.

Detailed comments are given below. To summarise BPT is in support of the following elements of your current proposal;

- Lower density
- Articulated terraces
- Segregation of pedestrians and vehicles
- Retention of Bath Press façade and chimney

BPT is particularly concerned about;

- Loss of historic fabric and detail
- Massing and height of the building around the chimney

BPT has reservations about

- Views through the portico
- Window and balustrade design to the Lower Bristol Road elevations
- Materials

Detailed comments

The Bath Press Façade

The retention and proposed use of the facade of the existing Bath Press building on the northern edge of the site is welcomed, especially its integration as a functional element of the design. However, we are very concerned that the height, close proximity and design (as presented) of the new residential blocks behind the retained façade will have an over-dominant impact on this façade.

We appreciate the retention of the historic chimney and welcome its proposed use as a flue. However, we are concerned that the prominence of the chimney is compromised by the close proximity and height of the development surrounding it (either side and the taller building behind). The heights and position of these building would dominate the chimney and detract from its value as a local landmark and harm the visual significance of the chimney in the street scene.

We agree that the existing portico on the northern edge of the site is an ideal feature to be retained and used as a natural pedestrian entrance to the wider site, forming an important feature on an articulated route between the river and the railway station. However, we regret that the view through is to be partially obscured by the projecting block behind, making the entrance appear uneven, with the central open space offset. We note that there will be some loss of historic fabric, especially the carved detailing above the door, and wonder whether this could this be reused elsewhere.

With regard to the use of clear glazing within the existing window openings we feel that this may present issues and will require regular cleaning. Perhaps, another solution might be to provide a metal balustrade to mirror the historic form of Crittal windows.

Building design and height

We welcome the omission of the higher buildings previously proposed for this site. The use of 4-storey development on the outer edges along main roads, with 3-storey terraces abutting existing residential roads and small 5-storey apartment blocks within the site should provide an acceptable variety of building form and roof articulation, which we would generally encourage.

As indicated above, we are concerned about the design and appearance of the elevation/block positioned behind the retained wall, particularly its relationship with the chimney and the window design which alternates between Crittal and plain glazing - why not Crittal on all windows? And why do the upper storey windows appear wider than the original openings below?

The 'sawtooth' frontage of the south-easterly terrace, reflecting the historic industrial roof of the Press, is commended, as are the references to local industrial precedents in the fenestration and window sizes/materials for some elements.

Building Materials

We would hope that materials for construction are natural Bath stone (not reconstituted) and that any brick used is of an acceptable type, colour and bond. We would encourage the early construction of sample panels on-site, prior to the determination of the planning application. In addition we would like to see a detailed materials plan submitted with this application which identifies the proposed use of materials on all elevations.

Landscaping

The positive use of the vision splay on the north-eastern corner as a pocket park visible to the passing public and containing artwork appropriate to the Press site's history is welcomed. Provision of details about planting and wall treatments might helpfully be included within the planning application.

Landscaping generally seems appropriate, although, for example, the necessary exclusion of vehicles from planted areas might require bollards, and the height of the garden fences along Brook Street seems to require reconsideration.

The idea of roof-top allotments is commendable, but we wonder about their practicality and impact on perceived roof heights.

We would hope that the quality of the hard landscaping will match the rest of the scheme, and, in particular, that means will be adopted to ensure that the execution of the works is equally high. The current level of Council-led street resurfacing, in for example Victoria Bridge approach and Lower Borough Walls, is disappointingly poor.

Other comments

We commend the provision of predominantly underground car parking, accessed from the main site access from Brook Road. This will free up ground level space for landscaping appropriate to its context.

We encourage on-site interpretation of the historic use and appearance of the Bath Press building, perhaps by way of an interpretation panel within the space behind the portico on the central pedestrian spine, as well as underlying the design of the pocket park and other elements of the scheme.

The Trust therefore encourages the LPA to review elements of the design and obtain further information and detail as described above in support of this planning application prior to determination.

Bath Preservation Trust

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