

**19/01854/OUT Hartwells of Bath Newbridge Road, Newbridge Bath BA1 2PP**

Outline application with all matters reserved except for access and layout.

**OBJECTION**

The Trust welcomed the opportunity to comment on this scheme at the public consultation stage, but felt it had to object on the basis of the inclusion of student housing, insufficient affordable housing and the scale of the proposed blocks. The Trust notes the lengthy design details included with the submission, but will only comment on the two matters for which approval is sought at this stage: layout and access. However, it must acknowledged that the questions of scale (and therefore height) and massing are difficult to separate from the layout.

Student housing

The scheme still includes a large amount of student housing and the Trust urges the Council to rigorously test the assumptions made in the viability assessment. It is difficult to accept that this level of student housing is necessary , only a relatively short time after viability assessments must have been made when the site was allocated for “*80-100 dwellings (not student housing)”* in the Placemaking Plan 2015, as set out in Policy SB15 (*Hartwells Garage*). All the constraints and site specific restrictions were set out in that policy and are not new.

Policy SB15 requires that there be no student housing on this site “*where this would prejudice the achievement of Policy DW.1 and B1 of the Placemaking Plan*.” The Trust notes that officers gave an opinion in 2018 (as stated in the DAS 1.4.4) that the student housing element would not prejudice the delivery of current housing requirement. However, this was caveated by the comment that “*Whether the site can satisfactorily accommodate the quantum of development proposed is a separate matter…*” The DAS does not include any further comments by the officers, if any were made.

The emerging West of England Joint Spatial and Bath Local Plans[[1]](#footnote-1) both require that an additional 300 homes are found in Bath, through windfall sites and intensification of existing allocated sites, such as Hartwells. Any additional capacity achieved through intensification of development on this site should therefore be devoted to helping Bath reach this new target and should not be used for student housing. It is important to note that this site is not the full SB15 site, as the concrete batching plant is excluded. No doubt additional development will come forth on that site in due course, so it could be argued that the amount of housing on the application should be lower than maximum of 100 specified by SB15.

**The Trust therefore continues to object to the inclusion of student housing on this site as this would be contrary to the requirements of PMP Policy 202 and SB15.1, and the application does not include any evidence that this would not prejudice the achievement of the aims of policies DW.1 (*District-wide spatial strategy)* and B1 (*Bath Spatial Strategy*).**

**The Trust’s position is that the layout would leads to a quantum and scale of development which is too great and therefore this layout should not be approved, for the following reasons:**

Impact on setting and Universal Value of World Heritage Site

The Newbridge Road is a key route into the World Heritage Site from the west. There is a pleasant progression along this route, lined with good quality late Victorian residential buildings of modest scale on the north side and early C20th semi-detached dwellings on the south, (as acknowledged in the Design and Access Statement 2.3.5). These terraced and semi-detached houses are universally 2 storeys with pitched roofs, and some have prominent dormered/gabled roofs. The building frontages are set back, with individual front doors and small front gardens and there is a low scale and spacious quality to the street scene. There are many notable views of ridges and hillsides in all directions, over and in between the houses. Opposite the application site a terrace of 2 storeys is set back about one storey above the road with verdant frontage planting.

The application site is on a bend which also marks the edge of the Bath Conservation Area and a stand of trees, on the application site, forms an important marker in the views towards and out of the Conservation Area. The loss of these trees to form a wider access is a matter to be approved at this stage.

The Trust agrees with the general conclusions of LVIA, as shown on the Visually Verified Montages (VVMs), that the impact of the proposal on long distance and medium distance views from the surrounding viewpoints looking into the city would not significantly harm the universal Value or setting of the WHS. However, as shown by VVMs 7 and 8/9, there would be a significantly adverse effect on the WHS, for the reasons explained below.

The *City of Bath World Heritage Site Setting SPD (2013)* Chapter 5, states that one of the important characteristics of the WHS setting are “The views afforded from the city to the green hillsides, woodland and open spaces and conversely the opportunities provided by the surroundings to view the city and its surrounding landscape.”

Views to hills and wooded ridges are a key feature along the Newbridge Road. There are many views, looking both west (leaving the city) and looking east (arriving) as well as to the south and the north. These multiple views play an important role in appreciating the valley floor setting of the historic core of the city. The existing buildings on the application site are low and widely spaced. The views obtained across the site from Newbridge Road towards the Twerton slopes and ridges beyond are an important feature of the site and they make a contribution to the spacious character of the area. They also play an important part in the natural progression to the urban city centre and historic core of Bath. These views have been underplayed by the applicants, but the DAS Part 4 para 5.30 acknowledges the loss of these views.

The Trust is concerned that these views would be substantially lost, due to the solid layout of the frontage blocks. The view through the narrow gap between the frontage blocks would be blocked by the student blocks beyond. A very narrow view over the carpark might remain, but it will continue to be dominated by the redundant (?) unsightly concrete batching tower and subject to future proposals when that part of the site is brought forward for development. Whilst the existing use was a “detractor” the buildings and the forecourts are low scale and open. The Trust does not therefore agree that the proposed layout is justified because it will replace a detractor.

The Trust notes that a freestanding frame along the frontage is proposed – if this is part of the “layout” then the Trust objects to this alien object in the street scene. Perhaps its only function is to put down a marker for the future development of the car park?

**The Trust therefore objects to the layout as it would harm the setting and significance of the World Heritage Site Setting, contrary to the requirements of Policy B1.1.a and Policy B4 of the PMP. It would also be contrary to the policies set out in Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) particularly paras: 184, 196.**

Impact on the character of the area, including the adjacent conservation area

The Trust also objects to the proposed layout, as its deep plan blocks and poor quality frontage treatment along the Newbridge Road would be completely at odds with the residential character of the area. The layout would therefore be contrary to the aims PMP Policy SB15.2 and the text in para 203 of SB15, which require that the site has “*an active frontage*” and be “*be sympathetic to the Victorian context of the terraced housing along the road*”. The layout fails to achieve either of these.

A finger of the site extends under the road bridge along the former railway line to the east and this is within the Conservation Area. It is distinctly different to the industrialised character of the main site, being wide, tranquil and overgrown. It should be seen as part of the future linear cycle route/public park and the Trust seriously questions the use of this area as an overflow carpark, which will be remote, without natural surveillance. (This point has also been raised by the Council’s Highways officer). The former railway embankments are very wide at this point and their use for open overflow parking would prejudice the creation of a high quality linear urban park and would be harmful to the peaceful, overgrown character of the former railway land, which is in the Conservation Area.

There is a row of trees along the site frontage which although slightly formal in their planting, creates a soft element to the frontage. The loss of one, possibly two trees on the frontage would harm the character of the area – the Trust cannot see why a new bus shelter could not be located away from the trees. The NE corner of the site contains a significant cluster of mature trees (G28) which contributes to the street scene and would help soften any new development on the Hartwells site. Unfortunately these trees (category B) are to be felled to make way for the new vehicle access. This corner of the site is on a prominent bend in the road at the very beginning of the Conservation Area. The deep plan blocks would be seen at an angle and would be an alien feature within the setting of the Conservation Area and would detract from the pleasant and consistent linear terraced character of the street scene within the Conservation Area.

Policy SB15 requires that the development should be sympathetic to the context of the Victorian terraced housing. The massing and deep plan of the blocks serves will increase the impact of the height of the blocks on the street scene. The screening device over the entrance to the car-park is also an anomaly in the street scene and achieves nothing in design terms to reduce the impact of the proposed open car-park.

In choosing an apartment block layout (for which approval is sought at this stage) the design is forced to incorporate flats at ground floor, with a single north aspect facing Newbridge Road. There is an indicative line on the ground floor plan showing some form of separation between the building and the pavement, but it is unclear whether this will be private or public space. The integration of the building base into the street scene is an important layout matter and should not be left as detail to be sorted out later. The Trust urges that reconsideration be given to a layout with an active frontage (i.e. front gardens and front doors) along the Newbridge Road, to integrate the frontage with the residential character of the street.

**The proposal is therefore contrary to the specific requirements of PMP Policy SB15, and also to the more general requirements of PMP policies BD1 (*Bath design policy*), DW1 (6) (*cultural and heritage assets*), D1 (*general urban design principles*)(c) and (d) and Policies D2 (*local character and distinctiveness*) and D3 (*urban fabric*) as well as HE1 (*historic environment*).**

Means of access for pedestrians, cyclists and cars

The application is not clear about whether the pedestrian route into the site from the Newbridge Road would be publicly accessible at all times. A long flight of stairs and one lift would be a real barrier to the public and the spaces surrounding the lift and stairs would not be naturally supervised. Cyclists will not use this lift – it would be quicker to cycle along the road!

The Trust is also concerned that there is a very poor relationship with the proposed new cycle route/public park, whose edge along the southern boundary of the site, would be dominated by car parking and overspill car parking, all requiring lighting and 24 hour security. This means of access should not be approved it is demonstrated that security for these areas can be provided whilst providing an attractive public cycle and walking route. It is unrealistic to expect that the application site would be open and permeable as shown on the cross sections.

The southerly route to the site through the trading estate into the site will be heavily used by the site’s occupiers. Although the applicants state they have a permanent right of way, at the moment the estate is gated and is locked at night. Will occupiers of the site be able to walk or cycle through the trading estate at any time? The route through the estate is unlit and there is no pedestrian provision. This means of access should not be approved until the Council is completely satisfied that this will be a permanent, safe and practical route to the site for 24/7.

Policy D3 (*urban fabric*) (a) requires that “developments provide safe and high quality routes, ideally providing new green infrastructure”– **this scheme does not do that**.

Lack of a vision for the ST route

It should be noted that the ST route as shown on the Policies map bisects the site at a higher point than the route shown on the submitted plan No -002. Has the Council given up on the possibility that the route might be used for other types of ST? There is no indication of this in the draft Local Plan. The applicants have bent the route southwards in order to build the student blocks. Is a 3.5m wide route with a sharp bend, enough for other forms of ST transport? If the possibility of other forms of ST (which might need a straight line) has been abandoned, where is the vision now for this wide linear public space? As commented by the Council’s Parks and Green Spaces officer, this space “*has the potential to be a recreational facility that can contribute to meeting the requirements of Policy LCR6 and the Green Spaces Strategy*.” This highly dense layout has produced a series of small service courtyards, dominated by recycling bins, bike lockers and bike stands and likely to be overshadowed significantly especially in winter. The layout gives very little potential for attractive spaces, either hard or soft. The residents will depend on the adjacent linear route for any contact with natural green spaces and this application should not be approved until a plan for the whole of the route is produced and agreed through genuine public consultation with the all the communities who will use it.

**In this respect the Trust considers that the proposal would be contrary to PMP Policies ST2 and ST2A.**

1. BTH2 *Proposed Policy approach for housing*, para 4.13.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)