**13/04218/LBA & 13/04234/EFUL - Car Park, Sawclose Car Park, City Centre, Bath**

Alterations to Gala Bingo Club comprising: demolition of north and east extensions; removal of internal balcony/gallery, paybox, toilets and platform lift; internal structural alterations including construction of new concrete floors at first floor level supported on new columns; associated works. Alterations to the Market comprising: removal of rear walls, lobby, bar and canopy, partition walls and staircases; structural alterations including new walls, timber floors at first and second floor, stairs and lift; fire protection works; associated works. Alterations to Bluecoat House boundary walls comprising; substantial removal of west and east walls, removal of north wall.

**COMMENT** The proposal in principle sounds like a good use of an untidy and rather neglected area, and positioning the new casino near the Theatre and cinemas will provide a coherent ‘entertainment’ quarter to the city. The Trust is of the opinion that Introducing a new modern build of good design has the opportunity to improve the rather chaotic collection of existing buildings, and make an attractive addition to the public realm.

**Architectural design of new buildings**

The Trust considers that a contemporary idiom to the façade of the Casino and Hotel is broadly appropriate and the scale and massing would sit well in the space; the stepped plan reduces monolithic tendencies and the horizontal lines of the buildings all relate to each other. We have some concern about the large glazed areas and resultant light spill. In our pre-application consultation with the architect it was argued that light emerging onto the square would be beneficial to the shared space as it would reduce need for lighting clutter. Within the proposals there is little information given with regard to lighting and the degree to which light spill might be used to illuminate the public realm. A lighting strategy for the whole area at night should be part of the proposal and we are disappointed not to see more of this within the application. It is important that the lighting strategy is discussed with and accepted by the Highways Department’s lighting team, so that additional incongruous lighting fixtures are not installed at a later date.

In the drawings, the main construction of square/rectangle containing balconies and fenestration seems over emphatic, but perhaps this is due to the tonal contrast shown, which might be less evident in reality. We are concerned that the façade on Bridewell Lane could be, when built, a fairly dour façade. Whilst we accept that this elevation would never be seen as a whole face-on, we regret that more has not been done to provide greater architectural interest on this façade. That being said we welcome the intention that the restaurants and hotel will have dual public access, giving the option of entering from either Saw Close or Bridewell Lane. This not only offers flexibility but also ensures that Bridewell Lane benefits from increased activity and natural surveillance which would not be the case were it designed as a blind façade. This element of the proposals should be commended.

With regard to the historic buildings on the site, the demolitions proposed are drastic enough to raise concerns about façadism. The buildings are obviously going to be gutted, and the numerous references to historic fabric as being of “little or no architectural significance” must be a cause for concern. There is a great deal of space available on the site apart from the Market pub and the Art Deco parts of the Gala, and it seems unfortunate that a more sympathetic approach could not have been adopted, and proposals such as that of removing the entire back wall of the Market building avoided.

**Shared space**

The Trust believes the shared space proposals are attractive and could lend significantly improved ambience to the area. However, we are concerned that shared space ideals sometimes backfire in practice; the outcome of this is that hasty decisions are taken to install usually poorly designed preventative measures. An example in Bath where this happened was in Julian Road, when a carefully considered shared space proposal was never fully implemented and as a result failed on safety grounds, resulting in subsequent ‘remedial’ works.

In this area, of particular concern is the impact on the space when the theatre comes out and several hundred people spill onto the roadway simultaneously. We feel it is important to ensure that all parties (including the theatre and Highways) are fully signed up to the H&S aspects of the shared space before any permission is granted so that if any further barriers or other measures are required, they are designed in rather than installed as add-ons, which will degrade the design proposed. Linked the to the functionality of the space, there is an apparent lack of consideration given to pick-up space for Theatre Royal as there is a cycle stand and a bench proposed in the vicinity of the Theatre which will impede this. These pieces of street furniture should be relocated to allow better access to the Theatre. With regard to street furniture, we are glad to see the collaboration with the PRMS team.

In the absence of any trees within the shared space (the reasons for which are justifiable) we regret the absence of any built-in provision for soft landscaping. There is potential for solid wooden or slate planters along lines of steps to provide greenery, delineate units & avoid later addition of assorted planters by tenants.

**Materials for surfaces**

Generally the use of wooden setts and stone flags is welcomed, as long as there are sufficient safeguards to ensure that utility companies will replace as found. Consideration will need to be given to the safety implications of wooden step edges when wet or loose.

**Materials for buildings**

There needs to be absolute clarity about the treatment of the window reveals and their relationship with the ashlar façade, and about the way in which the ashlar treatment would be applied (ie block built or ‘Southgate’).

The use of Welsh Blue Pennant Stone (Ashlar) on the lower levels of the Bridewell Lane and Saw Close elevations constitutes an unusual use of pennant stone in Bath, and whilst difficult to envisage, may give a particularly dark appearance to Bridwell Lane which could result in an unsettling ambience in a fairly narrow area.

Lastly, we hold some serious reservations about the Natural Sawn Oak Exterior Wall Cladding to the elevation of Saw Close. Whilst we think this may work well as the background material to the roof terrace, the proposed roof crown of this clad in timber will stand incongruously in this setting and may be juxtaposed uncomfortably both with the rest of the contemporary façade and with the surrounding roofscapes. While we recognise that the use of timber may be a gesture towards the historic uses of the area, we do not think its use at roof level is in keeping with the palette of the historic centre of Bath and the conservation area.

In all cases materials should only be agreed by condition after the erection of samples made to scale.

**Archaeology and interpretation**

We are keen that the archaeology should be interpreted in situ and that the learning should be captured for future reference. Consideration should be given to interpretation materials as part of the development, whether on the buildings themselves or in the public space, explaining the history of the Sawclose area.

The Trust has it on good authority that the cellar of The Market contains a lot of historic equipment which is possibly the original cockpit of the theatre. If this is still the case a record of these elements should be made and an archaeological watching brief in this area is essential.