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Blackberry Hill Hospital Manor Road Fishponds - 16/05376/F

Regeneration, refurbishment and demolition of existing buildings and new build development to provide a total of 305 residential 510 sqm of commercial/retail floorspace and 280 sqm community space

7th Oct 2016

Introduction

In August Bilfinger GVA invited the Society to comment on proposals for the long-awaited regeneration and redevelopment of this large site in Fishponds. The Society thanks Bilfinger GVA for the opportunity to contribute. Blackberry Hill Hospital is a brownfield site of 6.9ha about 4 miles from Bristol City Centre. It was bought by the HCA in 2009 and comprises old and newer buildings as well as an area of parkland designated as a Town and Village Green.

Planned use

The proposals envisage that most of the redevelopment will be to create new residential housing. There will also be some retail/commercial space as well as community space and landscaping. The Society supports this mix of uses, and in particular supports proposals for the landscaping of and public access to the large area of parkland on the E of the site.

In total 305 residential units will be provided (192 new build plus 113 refurbished units). There will be 510 m² of commercial/retail floorspace and 280 m² of community space. The proposals state that 3 existing buildings are to be retained and converted.

The Society is disappointed that the existing chapel (which we think is numbered as building 28 on the masterplan) is not to be retained and converted. The chapel is presumably a substantial Victorian building whose loss seems regrettable. We note that a new building of broadly similar footprint to the chapel is shown on the masterplan. We suggest that the Council takes conservation advice about the possibility of retaining this potentially valuable older building which - with imaginative conversion - might add significant interest and beauty to the overall development. Local listing might also be considered at the same time.

Height and mass

The Society strongly supports the proposal to set the maximum building height across the site at three stories. This matches the heights of the three current buildings which are intended for retention/refurbishment. This suburban site does not call for higher buildings. We note that some of the proposed new-build houses are shown as two stories (mainly

along the edge of development bordering the Town Green area) while the townhouses around the central green spaces are three stories in height. This is sensible placing in our view, as it reduces the impact of the housing adjacent to the parkland while allowing greater housing density towards the centre of the site.

From the 3D images presented in the masterplan documents we feel the proposed height and mass of the larger buildings on the site will deliver an overall pleasing balance of close-grained suburban living. The elevations of the planned new larger apartment buildings to be linked to the retained existing buildings by glazed atrium links are attractive in our view.

We note that three of the proposed new apartment buildings will be positioned close to the main road, Manor Road, which runs along the S boundary. In our view the height, profiles, choice of materials, and detailing of these three large buildings will be particularly important to the public realm. These aspects should therefore be designed and chosen with particular attention to how they appear from Manor Road and how the three buildings will signal the entrance to the site.

Apart from comments above about the desirability of retaining the chapel, the Society - with some regret - endorses the proposal to demolish the remaining buildings on the site which are judged to be of medium or low significance as heritage assets.

Design and Materials

The Society suggests that the choice of building shapes and materials should be either a close match with the retained existing buildings (largely constructed of local grey limestone with pitched red tiled roofs), or else deliberately chosen to be in marked contrast with the existing buildings to highlight the difference.

The landscape

The Society supports the proposal for a number of green spaces across the development, giving all residents the benefit of parkland area right by where they live. Where possible we would like to see existing mature trees retained as we think this will immediately enhance the sense of this as an established development.

The open space to the E of the site to be retained as a Village Green is a key feature of this development. Residents will of course be aware of this space close to where they live, but it is important in the Society's view that availability and easy access to this valuable public space is also well signalled to the public at large. The masterplan document in S04 recognises the importance of maintaining views from Manor Road and highlights a "viewing corridor" to the Village Green from the E end of the Manor Road boundary. However, this sightline is very narrow, as it is severely constrained by proposed new buildings. We suggest that the design improves the signposting to attract visitors to the Village Green public space behind the new houses.