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The Society's response to a planning application to redevelopment land bounded by Redcliff Street, St. Thomas Street and Three Queens Lane Redcliff - No: 16/02349/F - to provide 274 residential dwellings, a 186-bed hotel, café/restaurants, a food hall and office space.

9<sup>th</sup> June 2016

### **Introduction**

The Society is grateful to Change Real Estate and its team for the series of meetings to discuss this major redevelopment of an important city centre site. The Society did not respond formally, earlier in the planning process. The Society informed Change that it agreed with and had nothing to add either to the Council's September 2015 response or to the Bristol Urban Design Forum February 2016 advice to earlier iterations of the scheme. The scheme has only achieved its final form in the planning application.

SPD3 – the Future of Redcliff guided the Society's approach to the scheme. However, the Society recognises that policy set out in the Core Strategy and the Central Area Plan will determine the planning application. The Society strongly supports the principle of urban intensification. The Society supports the mix of uses, the creation of the new cross street and the other contributions to improve the surrounding streets. Although the body of this response criticises one aspect of the scheme the Society wishes to make clear that it considers the scheme as a whole will make a substantial and valuable contribution to the re-urbanisation of a neglected part of the city. Subject to the height objections, the Society strongly supports the application.

The Society recognises that regional spatial strategy is a driver for concentrating housing and activity in a city centre rather than let the city sprawl, and hence justifies a high density, and a higher building height than has previously been considered acceptable. However, it is generally accepted that it is not necessary to 'build high' to support a policy of densification.

### **The key planning question 1 – Is the site suitable for a tall building?**

The Society supports the plan and the land uses but cannot support the tower. The Society considers that the applicant's four part supplementary verified visual montages, filed in mid-May, support the Society's objection. Viewed from the south and the west the mass of the tower buttressed by the south blocks forms a daunting built mass that overbears the

foreground buildings. The foreground buildings themselves have a substantial mass, suitable for a city centre. SPD1 – Tall Buildings – provides guidance. The scheme lies outside the areas, indicated in Figure G where a tall building may be appropriate in the city centre. The Society does not accept that the need for densification and the social and economic renewal of this character area of Redcliff automatically creates a case for a tall building in this location.

Towers have a reputable place in the history of cities. By their nature they dominate. The approach taken by SPD1 follows the practice of most civilised cities, which either ban new towers from historic areas or zone them into clusters. There is a positive and negative purpose of creating clusters of tall buildings. The positive reason is the aesthetic appeal of a cluster of towers. The negative reason is that if there is no limit set on the location of towers or their height, the views of the city will be marked by a jagged broken line of tall buildings. The consideration for the aesthetics of place instigated the public consultation that resulted in SPD1. The consideration of the aesthetics of a tall building in this location are the views from the west, particularly across the water of Welsh Back through to the setting of St. Mary Redcliff, a key point of reference for development in this area. The proximity of St. Mary appears the strongest argument against the erection of a new 'landmark' tower. This is an area that draws visitors as a destination. If built, the tower and the buttressing blocks would dominate and harm the area's character. The Council must also consider the longer term consequences of permitting another tall building in Redcliff Street. If permitted it would be difficult to resist the argument later developers who seek to build a tall building that the Redcliff Quarter tower is a material consideration in the planning decision. The Council should not repeat the mistakes of an earlier planning regime that allowed commercial blocks to dominate the spires and towers of the city centre churches. The earlier stages in the development of this scheme did not contain the tower. The Society assumes that the scheme, presented as a planning enquiry and which resulted in the Council's response in September 2015 was viable. The Society remains unpersuaded that the original scheme needs to evolve to include more accommodation that creates the need for a tower.

### **Other issues**

It would benefit the city if the development of Redcliff Quarter encourages the redevelopment of other unused or underused sites nearby. When considering the future of the area regard must be paid at this stage to the quality of the surrounding streets, when redeveloped. How would St. Thomas Street and Three Queens Lane appear if bordered on both sides by tall elevations built to the back of the pavement? The Council should take the long-term view to conserve a human scale in subsidiary streets particularly where they become residential. Avon Street is an example of a new street bordered by tall modern buildings creates an inhospitable canyon. For the reasons given by the Council in its September 2015 response to Change's planning enquiry, the Society questions the height of the general street profile of some of the perimeter buildings.

There is a separate issue. The Society objects to the proposed illuminated blue glass crown to the tower. The Bristol skyline includes many of Bristol's heritage destinations. Illuminated high-level signage, which draws the eye, harms the non-illuminated features. High-level signs are unnecessary and promote competition. Bristol should adopt the

standards of Bath, Chester and Edinburgh that discourage high level attention seeking illumination.