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## **The Bristol Civic Society's response to the proposed development of Moxy Hotel at 55-83 Newfoundland Way**

### **The proposal**

Facing Newfoundland Circus, Vastint Hospitality B.V. propose to construct a stepped seven-storey, 214-bedroom hotel from modular units. The site is on formerly developed land in a highly urbanised area with an unattractive public realm.

### **Introduction**

The Society welcomes the redevelopment of this site and the change of use to an hotel, which could enhance the district, create employment and generate economic returns. The Society regrets that it cannot support the proposed standardised industrial design. There has been little meaningful public consultation and the scheme shows no evidence of a response to the comments received from the public or from the Bristol Urban Design Forum. The Society supports pre-fabricated construction which brings economic and environmental performance benefits but there is no reason why off-site construction should result in such monolithic form of building with dull repetitive fenestration. The revised design is no improvement on the first design.

### **Policy background**

It is not profitable to repeat National and local planning policies with which the developer and the Council are familiar. There is a requirement for good design, described as the critical aspect of sustainable development to establish the importance of character in townscape, local distinctiveness while not preventing or discouraging innovation. The Bristol Core Strategy requires that development in the city centre deliver high quality urban design that contributes positively to an area's character and identity. Development will not be permitted where it would be harmful to the local character and distinctiveness.

### **Height and mass**

The Society has no comment on these aspects of the proposal. The Society notes that expired planning permission is a material consideration in this application.

## Design

The Society's principal interest lies in the impact of the hotel on the public realm. This response will not consider the hotel's internal arrangements. The design falls short of the standards that Policy BCS21 and DM29 - Design of New Buildings - require. Although a conservation area lies in the St. Paul's hinterland, the principal setting of this hotel is the hostile traffic environment of Newfoundland Circus. This is an important site beside a city gateway that merits a building of high architectural quality.

- Despite the assertion in the Design Statement that "*Detailed studies of the existing and historic forms, scale and materiality of the surrounding built fabric were undertaken.*" This criterion is not a significant factor in this area where there are such diverse building forms and materials. A commitment to one building material, such as brick, would have local reference and could produce an attractive product.
- The design breaks down the building mass, but the result is a poorly articulated accumulation of cubes. The repeated monotony of standardised windows lacks finesse. The layout responds poorly to its prominent position, it gives the impression that it has been imported from a secondary business park. The Council has an aspiration to redevelop of the frontage to Newfoundland Street that would conceal the multi-storey car parks. The mechanical design of the hotel would cause material harm to the Council's ambition to transform this city gateway.
- The Society supports prefabrication which brings well understood advantages. We have seen examples of off-site constructed developments that created the same level of architectural imagination as can be produced by conventional on-site construction. Monolithic repetition is not an automatic consequence of modular construction. The repetitive nature of the fenestration results from choice not from a limitation of off-site prefabrication. The value architecture of this building suggests that economic constraint and the wish to create a standard product produced the design which fails to respond to the opportunities provided by this prominent site.
- Although the scale and layout of the hotel is appropriate to the site, articulation and refinement is needed. There are no architectural features to create any hierarchy of floors or to mark the top of the building. None of the blocks have vertical features to create articulation. All facades look bland. The design contrasts to its disadvantage with surrounding buildings such as the former cinema and the warehouses in the business park of the opposite side of Newfoundland Road.
- The design should avoid regularly spaced square windows without horizontal hierarchy or vertical progression or recession. The fenestration is dull. The absence of any internal glazing detail, the punched-hole effect, accentuates this impression. A vertical proportion to all the windows would be a welcome refinement. It is not possible to judge the depth of the window reveals, which the Society hopes are not shallow. Windows that lack recession flatten an elevation's appearance.
- The roof line does not enhance the townscape in contrast to the roof of the Office Supply warehouse on the opposite side of Newfoundland Road. A shaped roof

covering that creates visual interest could enclose the roof plant and support photovoltaic panels.

- Similar comments apply to the Orange Street elevation.

### **Materials**

The Society supports Policy DM29 that requires the use of high quality, durable and sustainable materials of an appropriate texture and colour. The use of colour blocks and the colourful aesthetic of the 'picture frame' fails to mitigate the lack of overall structural modulation. The innovative decorative brickwork is no substitute for architectural ambition nor does it relieve the building mass. The Society believes that the fibre cement panels may have of poor weathering qualities and be a graffiti target; local taggers carry 4m ladders. The lack of copings and strings increases the probability of rain run off causing staining.

### **Access and highways**

The Newfoundland Road elevation suffers from an unattractive public realm and has a poor pedestrian environment. The Society suggests that the principal entrance should be in Orange Street with the car and coach drop-off in Newfoundland Road. The desire line to the hotel for staff and customers is likely to be Orange Street, which offers a route to the city centre that avoids the traffic. Orange Street represents an incoherently planned space. The area on the north side of the street is part of a fast-improving area. St. Paul's is rapidly attracting a large resident population. This development gives the opportunity to define the southern boundary to the street. There is an opportunity to create shared space along Orange Street with pedestrian priority. There is a public right of way from Wilson Street to Newfoundland Road through the site. Does this go through the vehicular tunnel under the hotel and be easy to maintain? Its not clear what the developer proposes from the drawings whether the proposal is to retain it.

### **Conclusion**

The Society supports development and good modern design. We are disappointed to write such a negative response particularly when it repeats our pre-app response. The Society cannot support a design that would cause material harm to the improving character of both Newfoundland Circus and the Orange Street.