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Cargo Work - former JS Fry Warehouse, Wapping Wharf - the Society's response to a pre-planning presentation to construct office space in re-purposed shipping containers within the Grade II listed gaol walls.

Change of use and planning history

In 2006 the Council approved an overall masterplan for Wapping Wharf which included the redevelopment of sets out the redevelopment for the warehouse as offices. In 2015 Umberslade was granted permission for a two-storey office closely representing the existing heritage building as 15/01162/A. This was about 10m high at its roof ridges and had a similar eaves level to the prison wall at around 7.5m high, very like the old building. Umberslade have brought forward a revised scheme because they say that it is not possible to adapt or build a replica of the warehouse with adequate daylight to the ground floor in a deep-plan building.

The proposal

The new proposal would provide office space in re-purposed shipping containers on the same footprint as the old warehouse framed by the Grade II listed gaol walls. A central atrium would provide natural light with open-plan office space on either side across 5 levels. There would be one new opening in the outer wall to create a main entrance. The proposal would be similar to the successful Cargo 1 and 2 schemes. The storey height is 3m in the container modules which would not now perhaps be adequate in more expensive office developments. This permits five stories to be considered within 15m of building height with a bit more required for the atrium ridge.

Demolition

The former warehouse and the later exterior wall between the prison wall and the back of the pavement are demolished.

Mass and height

The proposal is about twice the height of the eaves of the extant permission which had three low ridges. In due course the Council must consider the impact of the proposal on daylight in Umberslade's affordable housing block G which abuts directly to the North. The shadow could particularly affect the courtyard amenity area but also some windows throughout the autumn, winter and spring. The proposal's height could adversely affect the outlook of the residents of block E, to the East. There is a footpath between the buildings but in a 15m deep

canyon. The Society notes that the scheme is similar in footprint to the current permitted development.

Design and Materials

Although the Society regrets the loss of the unlisted former warehouse it supports the current proposal in principle. This would be the third scheme of this type in the City. The other schemes have proved popular with their occupiers. It is however significantly taller than Engine shed at Temple Meads or the Cargo 1 and 2. In due course the Council must consider the proposal's impact on the Grade II listed Prison wall, it would be at least double the height of the heritage asset. Umberslade says that properly maintained the containers and conventional building have a similar life expectancy. The Society assumes that the permission would approve or condition the exterior paint colour. The Society has not considered, the internal arrangements, the heating and ventilation nor the scheme's sustainability.

The public realm

The exposure, restoration and maintenance of the former prison wall will be a planning gain particularly if supported by a panel to explain the significance of the wall and the recently consolidated prison gate. The Society supports the creation of one new entrance in place of the 6 window openings permitted in the prison wall facing Cumberland Road. The new entrance must be designed to signify the entrance to a large building in a manner suitable for its situation.

Outside the walls a new public realm with a wider pavement, cycle path and landscape scheme are welcome. The Society has reservations about the management of the loading bay close to the main entrance. None of the plans showed the new road alignment created by the second Bathurst Basin Metrobus Bridge, the new pedestrian crossings or the configuration of the new cycle routes. There is potential for conflict between traffic, cyclists and pedestrians which the loading bay could aggravate. We understand that discussion with the Highways Department is pending. The Society suggests a condition against the use of long-term parking in the lay-by to prevent opportunistic use out of business hours. The Society further suggests that Umberslade consider establishing a parcel collection point for Wapping Wharf phase 2 to consolidate parcel delivery and reduce the number of internet shopping delivery vans that would use the loading bay.



Section to show height relative to the Grade II listed Prison wall for the permitted scheme.