

Application Number: 10/04977/FUL

Address:

The Harvester
Gloucester Road
Lower Swainswick
Bath BA1 7BW

Proposal:

Erection of 46no. dwellings comprising of 5no. 1 bedroom, 30no. 2 bedroom, 9no. 3 bedroom apartments and 2no. 4 bedroom town houses with associated development, including car parking and landscaping works following demolition of the existing building on the site.

Comments: submitted at 14/02/2011

Bath Heritage Watchdog wishes to **OBJECT** to the above applications

This is the third such application in as many years. Architecturally and visually this is probably the most successful but it still does not just quite gel. There also remains the issue of the current building on the site which does fit in, and the question must be have all options been considered for the re-use of this building.

Conservation Area Consent

This extract from the 2006 appeal for a previous application is relevant. It states:

“... It is this sense of spaciousness on site with the attendant landscaping that enables the Harvester development to act as an attractive, effective and important element in establishing and maintaining the character of this entrance into the city ...”

These words remain true today.

The 2006 appeal also stated:

“... I am obliged however to consider the proposed demolition having regard to the criteria listed in paragraph 3.19 of PPG15. The merits of the proposals have been considered (criterion iii). The condition of the building is sound because of its age and quality of construction and no argument as to it being unfit has been promoted and no case has been put forward regarding efforts to retain the building on use (criteria ii) ...”

Although in the intervening period further damage must have taken place from vandalism, etc the structure must still be sound. We still feel there is a potential for re-use of the structure for some other purpose. There are obviously problems associated with making it living accommodation but other uses could include. Cycle and bin storage recycling along with laundry facilities etc. A residents or community facility inc gym/cinema etc or a district heating system. As a minimum the materials should be salvaged. The red roof tiles are its most distinctive feature and should either be re-used in the new proposal (if acceptable) or elsewhere.

The New Proposals

Though not without some merit as stated above there is something not quite right. Bulk and massing seem to be at fault but above all it is the roofscape that appears to be at fault.

In terms of detailed design and materials most are acceptable although some of the contemporary elements are at odds. We remain unconvinced with timber weatherboarding and screens used in this way and to the use of aluminium windows and render in a Conservation Area. Somehow it lacks that transitional element marking the boundary between town and countryside. Some of the rear elevations such as the South Block look rather utilitarian with small windows and large areas of render.

Scale and bulk remain a problem despite the best attempt of the architects. It all seems rather too tall with a lot of the height in the roof. The mansard element is stretched to accommodate living accommodation in the space. If the ridge line was just above the tops of the dormers height would appear less exaggerated. The whole needs breaking up into smaller more varied blocks particularly in the area bounding Pitman Court. An impression is gained of an accommodation block rather than a residential area.

The roofscape is poor with no gables or stacks to break up the form. The appearance is too uniform too unvaried. It is a contemporary approach but it fails to work in Bath with its varied roofline. Elevations of the North Block again show the utilitarian approach with the timber boarding and the ventilation slats. Some of the montages show there could be problems with shadow and light loss in some areas. Overall it does not have a design sense of being Bath. Giving it a Bath stone overcoat and a slate hat does not mean it won't stand out on the street.

Other Issues

The consultation period seems to have been poorly advertised and attendance would seem to back this up. There seems to have been no attempt made to contact amenity and heritage groups. We were not made aware of the proposals. It also seems strange the advice of English Heritage was not sought prior to the proposals being submitted.

None of the proposals show or mention any form of lighting or the effects of light spill and pollution.

There is no mention of the impact from the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Little Solsbury Camp in particular the roofscape.

Conclusion.

A better attempt than the previous outings but still not without faults. We would ask that Conservation Area consent is not granted until all possible uses for the existing structure are exhausted and fully acceptable designs are in place. There are too many issues relating to scale and bulk and in particular roofline for consent to be granted.

We would ask the applicants to look at the issues raised and to try to find a solution for its lack of local distinctiveness despite the positive aspects. In its current form the application contravenes Policies BH1, BH6, BH7, BH11, BH15, D2 and D4 and with guidance contained within PPS5 and should therefore be refused.