

## **Trust Commentary - Planning Application 23/1215/VOC relating to the PBSA next to John Lewis in Longbrook Street**

### **1. Replacement of ground floor commercial space with Student Amenity areas.**

As explained in the DAS, the suggestion of the independent Design Review Panel to move the student common room from the ground floor to the top floor and designating the entire ground floor frontage for commercial use - apart from a suitably proportioned entrance to the student accommodation – was an idea warmly embraced by other parties involved, including the planning officer and architects.

This high proportion of retail / restaurant use would complement the existing commercial activity at the top of Longbrook Street and the City Centre itself, so that passers-by would scarcely be aware that this was a student accommodation block. The professional designers and planners agreed this was a big improvement and its incorporation in the design by the architects was welcomed. Do you agree, or instead of retail units, restaurant and / or cafe, are you happy to see much of this frontage in such an important location, replaced by a student common room and a cycle store as is now proposed?

### **2. Change of accommodation type to be 100% Studio bedrooms.**

A widely applauded, feature by Exeter St James Forum and others was the innovative future-proofing of the accommodation, whereby the architect ensured that the design of the student 'cluster flats' facilitated conversion to residential flats that would meet statutory national standard space required for much-needed permanent residential homes, should PBSA be not needed in future.

By replacing the cluster flats with individual studio bedrooms as now proposed this very significant benefit would be removed.

### **3. Introduce a new first floor within the existing double height commercial space.**

Sensitive to the fact that the new building would stand at the gateway to the City Centre from one perspective, and at the gateway to the smaller scale, largely residential Longbrook Conservation Area in the other, all involved in the original design agreed that the ground floor commercial unit abutting John Lewis should have double-height ceiling (and windows of similarly appropriate proportions), whereas the ceiling at the other end of the frontage should be single-storey height.

The new applicant is now seeking to reduce the former to single-height so that another floor of studio accommodation can be introduced. No attempt is made to acknowledge the visual detriment this would have, ignoring the sensitive design rationale of the approved DAS.

### **4. Enlargement of the sixth, seventh and eight floor levels**

Here the applicant has ignored the detailed attention to massing explained in the DAS. It appears the sole objective is maximising lucrative studio accommodation regardless of the context.

## 5. Relocation of Cycle Store and Plant Room.

The approved cycle store location was at the rear of the ground floor with access to and from the service yard and parking area in King William Street behind John Lewis, and the Plant Room was to be discreetly on the top of the building. Now we are being asked whether we are content for the cycle store to be brought to the front of the building. This would mean cyclists would enter and exit across the pavement on Longbrook Street. The Plant Room would be located at the rear.

The reason offered by the applicant for the move of the cycle store is a perceived safety risk to student cyclists using this yard. As this same area has provided disabled parking and access to John Lewis as well as parking for customers collecting online orders, the risk seems overblown. Is there concern that the cyclists might be at risk from wheelchair and walking frame users who will presumably continue to use this facility?

## 6. Minor elevation changes to lower levels

Although no revised Design and Access Statement has been provided by the new architect, the current proposals rip up much of the detail of the original plans that made all the difference between approval and refusal. It seems the new architects have given no thought to the sensitivity of the location marking the gateway to the City Centre from one perspective and the gateway to the Longbrook Conservation Area from the other.

There are numerous changes, some of which are pointed out in the agent's covering letter. However there is one change that does not receive a mention – the demolition of the medieval wall! Scrutiny of the East elevations clearly shows that this historic section of wall incorporated in the original permitted design but absent from the new proposal. This difference is confirmed by the ground floor plans.

The drawings make clear the desire of the applicant to be rid of the wall that no doubt would complicate the construction process; it would seem that it was deemed too much to expect to be granted permission for this attack on Exeter's heritage, hence a decision made not only to leave it to the drawings to record the intention, but further to carry out the destruction before it could be prevented.

The attitude of the developer, demonstrated by this act, towards the locality of Exeter City Centre and St James, and to the importance of the statutory controls the planning system is designed to afford, should make us all very determined that the careful decision-making that led to the original consented proposals, must not be overturned. **Please pick at least one issue you are not happy about and write a sentence or two as an OBJECTION to this application by the deadline of 10 December.** Comments may be made online [here](#) on the Council's planning page or by emailing the case officer Goran Molin at [goran.molin@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:goran.molin@exeter.gov.uk). We suggest you copy any submission to our Ward Councillors, [cllr.kevin.mitchell@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.kevin.mitchell@exeter.gov.uk), [cllr.michael.mitchell@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.michael.mitchell@exeter.gov.uk) and [cllr.martin.pearce@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.martin.pearce@exeter.gov.uk), as well as [planning@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:planning@exeter.gov.uk).