

Planning Report for FoBRA Committee Meeting 9 May 2017

Regeneration of Foxhill Estate (16/05219/EOUT)

There has been little if any formal and notifiable movement either from the Council or from CURO on this issue since the PSC's last report, and when the Vice-Chairman sought advice from senior Council planning officers at a recent meeting at the end of March, they were not prepared to be drawn.

Stakeholders still do not accept CURO's argument that the combined Affordable Housing (AH) delivery on Mulberry Park and Foxhill equals the current level of provision of AH and that therefore all is well and ask why the proposed regeneration benefits cannot be met by less drastic redevelopment or indeed softer revenue-based regeneration initiatives coupled with refurbishment or remodelling of the problematic flats/areas of housing stock. The key issue from FoBRA's and B&NES's planning policy perspective remains the overall loss of AH (241 social homes) which is contrary to the emerging Placemaking Plan Policy H8. Clearly this needs to be balanced against the regeneration benefits that the scheme provides, but this evidence or justification has not yet been provided. However, the underlying threat to 94 owner-occupiers of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) of course also remains a major concern.

The Foxhill Resident Association (FRA) pressed CURO for information at a Foxhill Forum meeting in early April, seeking to know whether they were going to make any substantial changes to their plans. The answer was negative, their response directed at making more arguments to justify their plans using more data. It is understood that they are not considering building fewer units, although they have however have taken height restrictions into account. The FRA believe that any new application will consist of more flats and fewer houses in order to still fit 700 homes into the area. When it was pointed out that the threat of CPOs was having a seriously detrimental effect on some residents and when presented with an eloquent letter from one resident who is experiencing panic attacks and paying for therapy in order to help her cope with her anxiety, it apparently fell on deaf ears. Behind the scenes, the Ward Councillor has also met a CURO-built brick wall, confirming that there was no forward movement and that no one in CURO appeared to be listening to the major concerns of the residents and other stakeholders. Neither, he claims, are CURO prepared to withdraw their planning application. He will shortly be meeting not only senior planners but also the Leader of the Council to look at ways to cut this Gordian knot.

Interestingly, Archaeology, on 7 April challenged the developers submitted archaeology and heritage assessment which claimed that there were insignificant Roman remains on the site that had been developed into the current estate in the 1950s, and have recommended that no development takes place until a field evaluation of the site, a programme of archaeological work or mitigation, etc. has been conducted.

The chairman of the PSC has continued to offer whatever help FoBRA can give, but has stated that he is not prepared to meet CURO without both the Ward Councillor and FRA present.

Redevelopment of the Pickford's Site (16/05504/OUT)

Reaction to the developer's resubmission of new drawings on 28 Feb have not all been positive. Landscape, Urban Design, Economic Development/Regeneration and Planning Policy departments within B&NES and other stakeholders have objected for one reason or another, typically the loss of a most useful amenity for the residents and businesses in the centre of Bath, and its bulk and height (Historic England state that the proposed buildings are higher and bulkier than the present warehouse, but do not explicitly object

to the plans to redevelop the site); B&NES's Conservation Officer is concerned at the bulk/height issue and the projected loss of more industrial floorspace in Bath. Bath Spa University have suggested that a proportion of the space be used for social housing, key workers and young professionals. The last point is emphasised by the Bath Preservation Trust (BPT). Further and more recent objections in particular to the height of the buildings now that the South Quays developers have knocked off a storey of their's is emphasised by Widcombe Association. The DMC is scheduled to consider this application on 3 May with the Council's Case Officer recommending approval...

Bath Quays South Development Site, Riverside Business Park, Westmoreland (16/04818/ERE03 & 16/04819/REG13)

Much verbal water and electronic mail has passed to the north of the Bath Quays South Development Site since January when many key stakeholders, including many Council departments and, not least, residents, expressed their concerns and objected to the second iteration of plans to regenerate this site, not only because of its continuing excessive height, bulk and massing which they believe would have an overbearing impact on the old Newark Works opposite Green Park but, importantly, it would have a harmful impact on views within the World Heritage Site and its setting. Wisely noting these influential objections, on 10 February, the developers submitted a third iteration of their plans to develop this site which, although, unsurprisingly, was not to all stakeholders' liking, has not drawn quite as much flack as previous proposals. Principally, the reduction in height and the change of cladding of the sides of the buildings facing the river to Bath stone and dark brick has "...lessened the visual impact of the proposal, which now have a greater degree of harmony with the surrounding townscape..."

An unbalanced Sunday Times article on 12 March prompted concern within FoBRA so, to allay people's fears, the Chairman of the PSC wrote to members on 23 March and opined that the developer's latest proposals would not, in his view, jeopardise Bath's WH status. He reckoned the Council would note objectors' concerns about South Quays, especially now that it had had wider exposure in the national press and concluded that the ST article (a) would have made its mark and (b) believed that B&NES would consider a more pro-active way ahead to counter any potential threat of future planned development to Bath's WHS status. These assertions prompted three members and BPT to offer contrary views including some less enthusiastic opinions of the Council's commitment to its responsibility to prevent development that would cause such culminative harm to the City's WH status that would trigger notification to UNESCO. All of these comments were no doubt taken into consideration when the DMC considered this in committee on 5 April and approved (9:1) the development of this site which has remained derelict for nearly 50 years.

Christmas Market

Bath Tourism Plus (BTP), the Destination Marketing Organisation for Bath, have made a major effort to brief all stakeholders, including some of the FoBRA Executive, on their plans for the Christmas Market 2017. Recognising that they were not well-prepared for the strength of the opposition to their proposals to extend the duration of the 2016 market from three to four weeks, principally from a majority in FoBRA and from hundreds of independent retailers (Indies), and that the congestion caused by so many visitors to the city in such a short timeframe often resulted in a negative visitor, Indie trading and resident experience, BTP's Events Team have been working all year around to try and make it better. Their proposals this year include the expansion of the footprint and an increase in the duration of the market. They hope that the expansion of the footprint and the relocation of many of the chalets to Union, Southgate and Hot Bath streets, and the running of a number of fringe community engagement events in Walcot Street, Kingsmead Square and Queen Square will allow visitors to explore and enjoy

more of what Bath has to offer. There will be no increase in the number of chalets and as such BTP hope there will be more circulation and less congestion.

At a meeting with BTP's Events Team on 12 April the Chairman and Vice-Chairman raised the need for additional parking enforcement officers in key residential areas; a review of the feasibility of using P&R sites to drop coach visitors; mid-week incentives for coach visitors and a cap on Saturday coach bookings; marketing strategy to communicate the additional week and to encourage the fringe events in Walcot Street, Kingsmead and Queen Square; the introduction of a Bath community chalet to be used by local non charity community groups; and a residents only event at the beginning of the market (22 November 6 – 8pm). Planning application will be submitted shortly.

DCLG's Housing White Paper (HWP)

The PSC's brief summary of the 104 page HWP, together with NORA's perhaps more authoritative and substantive draft response, were circulated to FoBRA's representatives on 12 April for comments by 24 April. Members were advised that both the Executive and the PSC supported the thrust of NORA's pithy introduction and draft answers to the 38 questions asked in the consultation and have informed NORA's Chairman, Alan Shrank, accordingly. Time constraints mean that FoBRA will not be able to submit any counter or additional comments before NORA's deadline. NORA has been told that FoBRA would submit any differing comments to DCLG independently.

Land to the Rear of Argos (17/00186/FUL)

Between 2011 and 2016 developers have sought permission to build accommodation on this derelict site and in 2013 approval to build town houses was permitted. However, in 2016 a submission was made to change tack and to build 115 student rooms instead. Stakeholders, including BPT, suggested that the site could be better developed for residential housing. So, in January 2017, the developers, reflecting on these comments, submitted an amended application to erect 94 student rooms and 14 residential studios for key workers. Only two objections: Argos because they are concerned about any disruption to their service access, and one Ben Howlett (Bath's MP?) would like only 2nd, 3rd, 4th year or graduates to be accommodated and more key worker accommodation in this site. The Council's Urban Design department believe the massing and height are too great for the site and the public realm elements disproportionately small; BPT also would prefer more housing rather than student accommodation and they also rightly question whether the proposed mix is workable. Decision pending.