

BATH PRESS SITE (10/03380/EFUL)

Introduction:

St James's Investments has made proposals for the Bath Press Site (10/03380/EFUL). Its main purpose and occupant is to be a large Tesco supermarket, but the plans also show housing, offices, workshops and a community area, while preserving and incorporating the old façade. Development of this site is to be welcomed. However, there are serious questions about the volume of traffic, its management at the crossroads with Windsor Bridge, and severe congestion along the Lower Bristol Road (A36), Windsor Bridge Road and the Upper Bristol Road on the other side of the bridge.

Traffic:

- The most important issue in this proposal, **by far**, is the effect of traffic on the A36, Windsor Bridge and the Upper Bristol Road on the other side of that bridge. According to the applicant's own assessment, Table 7.3 of the Environmental Statement, the Lower Bristol Road/Windsor Bridge junction ('Junction 1') is already 99% saturated at the morning peak, 100% at the evening peak, and 97% on Saturdays. For the Upper Bristol Road/Windsor Bridge junction ('Junction 2'), the figures are 108%, 90% and 77% respectively. These junctions are both *already* operating over capacity. The proposed development is forecast to add as much as 21% to the 2020 estimate of traffic (which itself will be much heavier than today). The result, as set out in Table 7.10, will be traffic that will be seriously over the capacity of the road system, and lengthy queues. This is likely to have widespread effects on the whole road system in the city, to the detriment of residential amenity, and the economy of the city.
- The Environmental Statement proposes only the bare minimum of mitigation (one extra westwards lane on the Lower Bristol Road; rearrangement of Brook Road exit; and some tinkering with light sequences).
- Thus:
 - **Even if these mitigation measures work**, the report admits that they will only perpetuate the admitted dreadful saturation and clogging, especially around the two junctions at either end of Windsor Bridge Road, not improve it in any way. Nothing radical has been proposed, nor demanded by B&NES through "planning gain", although this is the best opportunity in a generation to tackle and solve the problems at these junctions.
 - Any worsening of the situation is likely to encourage car drivers, and even HGVs, to go straight through the centre of the city via Queen Square whereas, if one has any aspiration to reduce the volume of traffic passing through the architecturally most sensitive parts of the city including John Wood's Palladian masterpiece and the Paragon (both

Grade 1 listed), traffic needs to be able to flow as freely as possible along the recommended through-route (via the A36).

- Air pollution in the area is consistently high. Local figures for '09 show Nitrogen Dioxide concentrations of well over the legally acceptable figure of 40µg/cu.m (Lower Bristol Road 42; Wells Road (bottom) 54; Victoria Terrace 58; Argyll Terrace 52; Windsor Bridge 40). Particulate (PM₁₀) levels at the Windsor Bridge monitoring point are just below the permitted level but would probably exceed it with the extra traffic that this development would generate. The last thing B&NES should be doing is to permit a traffic-intensive new development at this site, until a full traffic impact assessment has been conducted, as this is likely to exacerbate the already illegally high pollution.
- Further, despite the scheme's reference to encouraging non-car use, an enormous car park is being provided for the Tesco shoppers (free of charge?) while little seems to be being done to encourage them to use alternatives, such as sustainable modes of transport (eg by means of shuttle buses or free delivery). The predicted 21% traffic volume increase is the consequence, exacerbating to gridlock proportions the situation that we see today.

Conclusions:

Any architectural considerations on this site pale into insignificance beside the traffic issues, which already have Bath-wide implications and which have to be competently and believably solved, preferably by introducing measures which:

- reduce post-development congestion on the junctions at either end of Windsor Bridge below the 2010 situation. This would probably require the applicants to propose the acquisition of more land there and the construction of major facilities such as large roundabouts or flyovers. The solution is not FoBRA's business but the consequences are, because they affect every resident. The present proposals are so inadequate that they barely scratch the surface.
- reduce below legal limits post-development pollution on all the roads and junctions affected.

These problems are so acute, and so little has been done to alleviate them, that FoBRA must object to the whole proposal and recommend its refusal. If we are concerned about the VOLUME of traffic, the solution must be to devise measures to reduce it, as well as mitigate it. This may require more significant road improvements as well as encouraging people to shop on foot/cycle/use public transport, and for large shopping loads to be brought home through a delivery service.

R.G.Kerr, Secretary of FoBRA

7th Sept 10
Final