

## **STATEMENT NUMER C2**

### **Bristol City Council Development Management Committee A Planning Application 21/00288/F Ferro Wapping Wharf Harbourside Statement by John Baker, Merchants Row and Point Consultancy Ltd**

#### **Members of the Committee**

National Planning Policy establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, unless there are clear and specific development plan policies to the contrary, or important assets would be harmed.

The applicant has taken a concrete barge formerly used in the dock, and with a long established residential use in its current location, and replaced the unsightly and dilapidated part of the accommodation with a construction built to modern standards and better suited to use by the family. It is an excellent example of sustainable development.

This endeavour is a fine example too of self-build housing as encouraged by government policy, specifically addressing the difficulty for families to access decent housing in a time of housing crisis.

The application was validated in January and has been with the Council for 29 weeks on today's date. In that time the only engagement initiated by the Council's case officer has been a request for a description of the bike hooks to be installed in the accommodation, and comments that the elevations consist of 'randomly placed window and external stairway', and that 'the complex roofscape using three different materials ... represents visual clutter'. A request was made to the applicant that consideration be given to changing the design, though as noted, the application seeking planning permission is largely a retrospective one.

The windows which actually appear very ordered along simple lines, are the external manifestation of the well organised and efficient internal layout. There is an access ramp as there has to be and its position is inevitable between the door and the wharfside. It is fixed but Ferro is not fixed to the harbour wall. The roofscape can hardly be described as 'complex' and is certainly far simpler visually and less cluttered than the assembly of superstructure, masts, rigging, radar and other apparatus visible on many ships and boats nearby.

The officer report seems rather contradictory on some aspects of the appearance of Ferro, applauding its sustainability credentials whilst being critical of the consequential, though actually very limited, range of materials from which the replacement accommodation to the houseboat is constructed.

The officer's report seems to boil down to the authors not really liking the appearance of the proposal, whilst not being able to demonstrate precisely why. The report actually says in the body of the text that the appearance of the structure would cause 'less than significant harm'. It is not evident that this assessment translates into a credible and sound reason for refusal consistent with national planning policy.

The officer's dislike of the proposal is in overwhelming contrast with the very many responses to the Council's consultation. There is not a single objection to the proposal from respondents. This is a rare situation indeed, as the members will be aware from other planning consultations. The contrast between the consultation response and the officer recommendation rather invites the question, what does the Council think the consultation process is for?

The great majority of consultation responses deal specifically with planning issues and very many comment on the appearance of the structure, all in positive terms. Yet the officer report talks about the appearance of the structure only in negative terms. The consultation responses are also incidentally very supportive of the considerable efforts this family – very much a part of an established and close community – have gone to to meet their housing needs.

The consultation responses are largely from people who see the structure from their properties, including the immediate land-side neighbours and other residential boats, and from people who pass Ferro very regularly. These are people who are very familiar with the harbourside and have chosen to enjoy what the harbourside offers. Not a single respondent suggests that their immediate environment or the wider harbourside environment is any way harmed by the proposal, and they can of course see it almost completed, rather than relying on 'artists' impressions'.

Many respondents have made very positive comments on the appearance of Ferro and how it is both appropriate in appearance and adds to the diversity of the harbourside conservation area.

Diversity indeed is the overwhelming characteristic of the harbourside conservation area. The area was designated in full knowledge of the diversity of uses and appearance already present, and all of the development that has continued to take place and been granted permission by the Council has added to the aesthetic variety and increased this diversity. There is a mix of heritage industrial uses, cultural centres, corporate office buildings, flats and houses in all styles, and latterly shops and very busy eating and drinking places. There is also a lot of parking and the regular if 'temporary' occupation of large areas by the film industry and by festivals of various sorts.

The harbourside gets noticeably busier every month and visitors are clearly not put off by the appearance of Ferro, contrary to the Council officer's apparent concerns.

The appearance of buildings in the harbourside area varies enormously ranging from historic working buildings, through large commercial glazed blocks, to warehouse pastiche. Whilst Ferro sits immediately alongside and between the most modern looking and colourful buildings on harbourside – from which many of the positive responses have been received from residents. Ferro's material palette is actually closest to those of the incredibly successful and much lauded recent Cargo 2 development.

On the water Ferro sits amongst a rich variety of craft and structures, many of which could hardly be described as 'heritage boats' in their appearance, however interesting they may be, and this is true all around the harbourside. Many of these boats and modified structures are in residential or commercial use, including the Kyle Bleu hotel close by, and the Noble Masts production barge on the opposite side of the Floating Harbour from Ferro. Both of these are longer and higher than Ferro, and Ferro by no means has the largest mass of the craft and structures floating in the harbour.

The officer report refers to views around harbourside, and as all floating boats and structures in the harbour, Ferro can be seen from various locations, though not as it happens from Prince Street Bridge, though this location is specifically referenced in the officer report. There are no views that were available before the replacement works to Ferro that are no longer available or significantly changed.

The history of the houseboat, its previous and proposed appearance, and its context are all fully addressed and illustrated in the Design and Access Statement that was submitted with the application and is on the Council's application webpage.

The works to Ferro are sustainable, self-build accommodation. They are not the cause of any actual harm, there is no sound reason to deny the grant of planning permission, and there is no planning reason to prevent this local family continuing to live sustainably in this location by its own efforts and amongst its community.

**A short summary of this statement will be presented at the Committee Meeting  
on 11 August 2021**

**John Baker**