

21, Furze Croft, Furze Hill, Hove, BN31PB

22 November 2016

to

Mr. Rob Sloper

Project Director, Preston Barracks (Momentum)

U+I plc

7a Howick Place

London SW1P1DZ

copy to

Paula Seager

Dear Mr. Sloper,

I am writing, somewhat belatedly, on behalf of the Trustees of the Regency Society of Brighton and Hove, to thank you for having invited us to view your proposals for the Preston Barracks and Mithras House sites and to share with you our considered response.

The Society welcomes moves to develop what has been for many years a derelict site. We find the proposed mix of academic buildings, student accommodation and housing to be quite appropriate and indeed filled with exciting potential. We are also impressed by the attempt being made to create a unified 'campus' out of what is at present a disconnected collection of buildings and to create campus-like public spaces. We appreciate that there is a need to develop the site to a relatively high density in order to build up a critical mass of activities and we accept the arguments advanced to justify relatively tall buildings along this valley site. The Lewes Road corridor is, in our view, a suitable location for tall buildings.

Having thus registered our agreement with the general strategy we find ourselves less impressed by the architectural quality of what is being proposed, at least on the west side of Lewes Road. We believe that such an important development should incorporate architecture of the highest standard. The fact that two separate firms of architects are involved has led to something of a dichotomy between the developments on

the two sides of Lewes Road. The proposed towers on the Mithras site exhibit a simple elegance, suggesting that they would act as a suitable foil to the cliff-face of Mithras House and would act as pylons along Lewes Road, signalling the beginning of urban Brighton. However, the buildings proposed for the Preston Barracks site have been jiggled around using arbitrary shifts of axis, and have been clad in a totally artificial *pot pourri* of materials. The relative heights of the buildings seem to have been determined in arbitrary fashion and the resultant composition lacks order or repose. This architectural neurosis will, like some oft repeated joke, soon lose its power to surprise or amuse and over time will simply irritate.

It is interesting to compare the proposals for the Barracks site with the Sussex University campus where Basil Spence created a strong sense of unity and repose by imposing a formal grid and using a powerful but limited palette of materials..... or indeed to look at Regency Brighton where great urban architecture results from spatial formality and restricted palette of materials.

We are concerned by the inappropriate use of the word 'village' in this context. It may be that this has led the designers to resort to contrived casualness. By virtue of their height and density these buildings will be urban in character and scale, and there will be nothing village-like about them. That is not to say that the spaces that are proposed do not have the potential to be successful as places in which people can interact – but these will be urban places – squares, piazzas, streets – not village greens. Their success will be dependent on their orientation in relation to sun and prevailing wind – this site is a notorious wind tunnel – and the judicious use of tree-planting

We are particularly concerned by the scale of the proposed central north-south street. Its length and width in conjunction with the heights of the buildings which line it suggest that it will be in shadow for almost the whole of the day and that it will serve as a wind tunnel. At the first meeting that we attended we did suggest that the architects produce detailed east-west sections through the street (indeed through the whole site): sections across the site are essential to developing an appreciation of what is being proposed in terms of height and proportion. But sections were not presented at the subsequent meeting, suggesting that there is some reluctance on the part of the Momentum team to reveal the true nature of what they are proposing.

Finally, we welcome the proposal to build a bridge to cross Lewes Road. Again, however, we are concerned this will be exposed to wind and wind-blown rain and

suggest that it should be provided at the very least with screening on its southern side with perhaps the addition of a canopy. Will the bridge be used by cyclists?

We hope that you will accept our suggestions in the spirit that they are offered and look forward to seeing next iteration of the design.

With best wishes

David Robson  
Vice Chair  
Regency Society of Brighton and Hove