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## Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 17 June 2025

by **A Tucker BA (Hons) IHBC**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

**Decision date: 11 September 2025**

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### **Appeal A Ref: APP/Z0116/W/24/3353519**

#### **Former Bristol General Hospital, Guinea Street, Redcliff, Bristol BS1 6SY**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by City and Country Bristol Limited against the decision of Bristol City Council.
  - The application Ref is 24/00621/F.
  - The development proposed is amendments to the construction details for the new ogee dome on building BGH01, specifically the finished roof material.
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### **Appeal B Ref: APP/Z0116/Y/24/3353520**

#### **Former Bristol General Hospital, Guinea Street, Redcliff, Bristol BS1 6SY**

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
  - The appeal is made by City and Country Bristol Limited against the decision of Bristol City Council.
  - The application Ref is 24/00122/LA.
  - The works proposed are amendments to the construction details for the new ogee dome on building BGH01, specifically the finished roof material.
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## **Decisions**

1. The appeals are dismissed.

## **Preliminary Matters**

2. The Former Bristol General Hospital has recently been converted into dwellings and these are occupied. The dome was reinstated as part of the conversion work, but the details and materials did not accord with the planning permission and listed building consent. Applications for planning permission and listed building consent to retain the dome as constructed were refused by the Council. The appeals follow these refusals. They relate to the same scheme under different legislation. I have dealt with both appeals together in my reasoning.
3. On 12 December 2024 the Government published its revised National Planning Policy Framework (Framework). Its content relative to the main issue of the appeals is largely unchanged. It has not therefore been necessary to give the parties opportunity to comment on the revisions.
4. The Council is updating its local plan. It is currently at the examination stage, and its policies therefore attract limited weight.

## Main Issues

5. The main issues are the effect of the works upon the significance of the grade II listed building known as Bristol General Hospital<sup>1</sup>, and whether it preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Redcliffe Conservation Area (RCA).

## Reasons

6. Sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (LBCA) require the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Additionally, section 72 of the LBCA requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
7. The General is a Victorian and Edwardian building complex that is built primarily in the Italianate style, and dates from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The list description is detailed and summarises the principal reasons for designation to include: its architectural interest, which includes its high quality Italianate and Baroque styles and its design by well-regarded Bristol architects; its historic interest derived from its hospital function; its intactness despite its alteration and extension; and its group value as a good ensemble of hospital buildings.
8. The dome emphasised the southwest corner and would have given the building a striking appearance when first constructed, especially in the working environment of the docks. It would have created a distinctive silhouette that would have been visible across a wide area and was described as a handsome octagonal tower<sup>2</sup> in 1868. It was lost during World War II, and its reinstatement secured as part of the recent permissions to convert the building into dwellings. This means that it was not in place when the building was listed, and the building was considered worthy of its status as a listed building without it. However, it was clearly a highly significant component of the original building.
9. The building stands at the southwest corner of the RCA. The appellant has provided extracts of the Council's conservation area appraisal for the RCA. This states that the RCA provides a pivotal link between the south of Bristol, the City Centre and the Floating Harbour. Its development has been determined by the surrounding water, and is characterised by historic commercial and industrial development. Built form contrasts significantly, with buildings that include large warehouses and residential terraces. Historically it was a vibrant port and hub of industry and now provides an attractive waterside setting for high density residential development. These characteristics contribute to the significance of the RCA.
10. The appeal building is a prominent and substantial historic building within the RCA. Its historic form and particularly its imposing silhouette alongside the edge of the Bathurst Basin makes it a significant positive contributor to the character and appearance of the RCA. Additionally, the building is prominently sited in relation to the adjacent areas of the City Docks Conservation Area and Bedminster Conservation Area which abut the RCA to the south and west of the appeal site.

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<sup>1</sup> List Entry Number: 1207586

<sup>2</sup> The National Gazetteer

11. The dome is a modern reconstruction. As such there is a case for using modern materials and this accords with established conservation principles. The appellant suggests that it should be considered an enhancement based on what it replaced. However, the dome is the reinstatement of a highly important historic element of the building that was originally built primarily for architectural embellishment as the crown of its southwest octagonal tower. Therefore, it needs to look the part. It needs to be constructed in materials of an appropriate quality and appearance to sustain the building's architectural significance and hold a clear and coherent relationship of all parts to the whole, as encouraged by paragraph 143 of English Heritage Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance 2008.
12. The Armourplan membrane system falls short of this requirement. At my visit I saw that the surface of the membrane has puckered and wrinkled significantly in places. This was easily discernible at ground level from a number of perspectives. As a result it looks cheap and has the appearance of a stretched fabric rather than the solid appearance and sense of rigidity that would be achieved with a metal finish. It has a particularly dull appearance when compared within the building's courtyard to the zinc finishes to the north.
13. It is correct that zinc can undulate as illustrated in the submitted images, however this is a different characteristic as it retains the appearance of a pliable metal rather than that of the existing modern membrane that looks more like a fabric that is slumping and losing its adherence to the surface beneath.
14. The quality of the dome and its success as a reinstatement of a lost original component of the building is undermined by the membrane material for these reasons. The membrane does not reflect the high quality of the building's original materials and detailing, and neither could it be said to accord with its original innovative features.
15. It is suggested that the membrane is durable and has a guarantee that is referred to as either 25 or 30 years in the submissions, and that it fully adheres to the substrate. The membrane has clearly already failed with regard to the latter point, which casts doubt over whether it would provide a watertight finish for the dome for the length of time suggested.
16. Considerable care will need to be given if the surface is to be re-formed in zinc. It is suggested that this would be difficult and that it may not provide an adequate waterproof finish. However, there is nothing before me to suggest that it would not be possible to use zinc, and neither is there anything to establish whether other metals could be used instead.
17. Examples are provided where a similar modern material has been used on roofs of highly graded and prominently positioned historic buildings. The spire at Ashridge Chapel was erected in 1969, which significantly pre-dates the current legislative framework for the protection of heritage assets, and at a time when our approach to historic building conservation was very different to today. The roof at St John the Baptist Church looks to be largely hidden, and it is clear from the evidence that the use of a modern material in this case was not agreed easily. Furthermore, the full circumstances and reasons for the change of material at this building, including any public benefits that it may have secured, are not set out in the submissions to enable me to make a proper comparison with the appeal case. These examples do

not therefore alter my findings on the suitability of the membrane material at The General.

18. The impact on the building's architectural interest is considerable, as a result of the prominent use of a poor quality material. The dome is highly prominent in the wider area. The building is a key building within the RCA, and is seen from the adjacent conservation areas. Thus, the use of a substandard material fails to preserve the character and appearance of the RCA, although the level of harm is low when considering the size of the proposal in the context of the large area that the RCA covers.
19. In terms of the Framework, the harms would be less than substantial but would nevertheless be of considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 215 of the Framework establishes that any harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
20. The public benefits need to be tied to the proposal. Therefore, the wider benefit of the repair of the building and securing its new residential use cannot be taken into account as they do not form part of the proposal before me, and in any case these benefits have been realised already. It is suggested that the membrane material is the better choice for the building in terms of its durability and ease of application to the profile of the dome. Yet the membrane has already lost its shape; zinc, or potentially an alternative metal, if laid carefully, should provide a level of durability that would be at least equal but probably greater. As such, the case for retaining the existing membrane as a public benefit is very limited.
21. Paragraph 212 of the Framework states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a heritage asset. The public benefits carry limited weight and are insufficient to outweigh the harm identified.
22. In summary, the works fail to meet the requirements of the LBCA as they harm the special interest of the listed building and fail to preserve the character and appearance of the RCA. The works also fail to accord with Policies BCS22 of the Bristol Core Strategy 2011, and Policy DM31 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies 2014. Together these seek to ensure that proposals safeguard heritage assets.

## **Conclusion**

23. For the reasons above I conclude that the appeals should be dismissed.

*A Tucker*

INSPECTOR