

Rejecting bridge will put jobs and £120m investment at risk



● The proposed bridge: “a real green jewel in the city’s crown” or “over dominant and incongruous”

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A HUGE investment in homes and offices in Bristol city centre will be under threat if planners turn down an application for a bridge across the Floating Harbour this week.

The *Bristol Post* reported last week that city council officials are recommending refusal for the bridge between the Finzel’s Reach development on the site of the former Courage Brewery and Castle Park.

Now the developer Cubex has told the *Post* that refusing the pedestrian and cycle bridge would jeopardise £120 million of investment.

Cubex Land managing director Gavin Bridge said: “If we get the thumbs up, we can start building straight away – and we can secure the huge investment in jobs and homes that are dependent on the bridge.” The Clifton-based company rescued the regenera-

tion project last year after the previous American owner went into administration with £96 million debts leaving the site a boarded-up eyesore for two years.

Cubex has since sold all the apartments and leased office and shop space that has been built so far.

Investment in the pipeline includes a 168-bedroom Premier Inn hotel, several restaurants and another 69 flats. It will also be asking for permission to build big new office block, helping to bring new jobs.

But Mr Bridge says the bridge is vital to unlocking that further investment, worth £120 million.

“Bristol needs this bridge,” he said. “Almost everyone agrees a bridge should go ahead. Our simple and elegant design, which weaves across to the existing ferry landing at Castle Park, will be a real green jewel in the city’s crown.”

The developer has created walkways in the site, one of which leads to the proposed bridge, with the aim of it becoming a key link for people

walking from Temple Meads towards Broadmead and Cabot Circus, and creating vital passing trade for the shops and restaurants in the development.

The council supports a bridge in principle but planning officers are recommending refusal for the design, which curves and weaves over the waterway to make it long enough to easily climb the 7.2 metre difference in height between the two sides.

A plan by the previous developer had been approved for a straight bridge but this involved using a lift on the Finzel’s Reach side, which the new developer believes would be a bad idea because it would be prone to break down and costly to maintain.

The plans have been changed to tackle some objections, including widening it to 4m to give room for pedestrians and cyclists, safeguarding a war memorial in Castle Park and widening the

distance between the supporting piers so that rowers and ferry boats can see better.

But planning officials say it should be turned down because the design would be “over dominant and incongruous” and “visually intrusive within the open character of the Floating Harbour and Castle Park”.



● In last week’s report we incorrectly printed an image of the old bridge design. We apologise for the error and are happy to put this right today.

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Gavin Bridge

FOR AND AGAINST

THE application for a new foot bridge has prompted lots of support and opposition.

FOR:

- Whitbread, owner of Premier Inn, says the bridge is vital to its plans to build a 168-bedroom hotel in Finzel’s Reach, a £20 million investment that would create 60 full and part-time jobs. Spokesman Richard Pearson said: “It is a prerequisite of our substantial investment in the new hotel that this

bridge connecting Finzel’s Reach to the core of the city is approved and constructed without delay.”

Cycling charity Sustrans supports the plan after the design widened to 4m and reassurance given about a non-slip surface on the wooden decking.

Jo Hawkins from Destination Bristol, which represents traders around Broadmead, said: This new link will be welcomed by all the retail businesses who will benefit from the additional footfall from staff and residents located in the Finzel’s Reach area.

AGAINST

- Many of the objections came from water users and in particular member of the City of Bristol Rowing Club who say the bridge is on a blind bend that is already difficult to navigate and they fear it could jeopardise races on the river.

The Environment Agency says the plans don’t take the impacts of climate change into account nor show that the bridge won’t increase the risk of flooding.