

LETTER to the EDITOR

From Mary Bailey

MUSEUM OF BRISTOL

As the support group for Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives Service, Bristol Magpies welcomes the idea of a Museum of Bristol as an opportunity to bring together items from the City's collections at various sites to tell the story of Bristol - but not the proposed design.

We are concerned about the impact of the Museum of Bristol, to be housed in the two 1950s transit sheds, L and M sheds, on the important heritage site at Princes Wharf. With its four big cranes it is a focal point of the docks, the backdrop for the important view from the Centre, and one of the last areas of the harbour to preserve its working character. It receives over 100,000 visitors a year. The combination of general cargo wharf with cranes, rail lines and transit sheds is becoming nationally rare. This is the best surviving example in the UK, and the best placed to be preserved. It is now under immediate threat from this scheme.



Despite representations from our committee, the current plan discards the original corrugated iron frontage and replaces it with industrial glass planks. This will completely alter the appearance and feel of the whole site. This last surviving area where the texture of the working docks can still be appreciated and enjoyed by Bristolians and by visitors from across the world will be lost. The corrugated iron doors make the transit sheds more than simply a building: they are part of the whole character of the quayside in this area.

The proposal claims that the historic dockside cranes and railway line will be preserved next to the new museum (however incongruous they may appear in front of a 21st century glass building). However, the Phase II bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund includes no funding or architectural planning for workshops, engine shed or facilities for the volunteers who maintain and run the historic dockside working exhibits (cranes, boats, trains, printing workshop, bus, lorry). These exhibits are important and popular attractions and very much part of Bristol's heritage. The importance of the site and its working exhibits was demonstrated by the unique theatrical event *Up The Feeder, Down The Mouth*, (2001).

Only a small selection of the exhibits currently on display in the Industrial Museum will be on show in the new museum. There appears to be no funding provision for proper storage of and access to displaced large exhibits, nor for the large objects now in store at L shed.

From recent media reports it appears that most of the public response to the architectural proposals is unfavourable. Had open public consultation commenced earlier and comments been taken on board, this could have been avoided. We hope that there will now be a radical re-think on this project to ensure that it will be successful.

Yours faithfully

Mary Bailey
Chairman, Bristol Magpies

Petitions to the council, including two on this subject, can be viewed at:

www.bristol-city.gov.uk/item/epetition.html

and, if you wish, signatures can be added on-line.