

STATEMENT BY WESTBURY PARK COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION FOLLOWING THE WORKSHOP MEETINGS HELD ON 21st SEPTEMBER

URGENT: THE FUTURE OF ST. CHRISTOPHER'S: TWO STEPS UP, A HUGE STEP BACK

First Step Up

When the WPCA first heard that a developer of a care home had bought the St. Christopher's site we were extremely concerned. Was this to be yet another gated development shutting off a site that many local people knew well and had often used?

We and others then had an opportunity to walk around the site with the development team and hear what exactly they had in mind. It was to be an 'Extra Care' facility, basically for those living ordinary lives if with some health condition requiring regular or occasional support: and it would **not** be gated. Not only would it be open to the community but it would also include facilities (meeting rooms etc.) that we could use and local links on things like food growing with children from our primary school. The overwhelming response from those contacted was to support the proposal – '*an incredible opportunity for our community*' was one of the comments.

Second Step Up

We were also concerned that the developers might act as many do and only show us plans when it was too late for us to change anything. However, the development team made clear that they wanted to engage with the community from the very start – which we very much supported.

We never got involved in discussing the content of the project. We focused exclusively on advising on the best ways to engage the Westbury Park community and others who might have an interest. So we advised on who the near neighbours are and how best to contact them, and on key organisations to involve (e.g. The Friends of The Downs). We contributed to the first one-to-one contacts with neighbours in July and helped to set up opportunities to visit what is, for many people, a huge, unknown site behind the front lodges. These initial contacts with the developers gave the Community Association and local residents the chance to raise a number of issues of potential concerns including the retention of key buildings and trees, access and parking.

The involvement and actions of the three of us to date as summarised above stemmed from the belief that it was beneficial to work on your behalf with the developers to try to get a genuinely supportable and positive project. **But now**

A Huge Step Back!

All of the above occurred before we knew any details of how much development was planned for the site (some suggestions had circulated, but nothing definite) and certainly before any early sketch designs had been produced.

Now we know! The developers ran two workshops on the afternoon and evening of 21st September with a mix of what are called 'stakeholders' (WPCA, The Civic Society, councillors, etc.) and immediate neighbours. Prior to the workshops we made a number of suggestions about how best to organise the sessions and present the sketch designs so as to get the most useful feedback but most of these suggestions were not acted on.

The single sketch scheme presented (no options were shown) showed conversion of the 2/3 storey frontage lodges to apartments, eight two storey 'cottages' on the edges of land at

the rear but also, most importantly, **five big apartment blocks varying in height from 4 storeys at the end of The Glen, close to Royal Albert Road and facing Bayswater Avenue to 6 storeys near the centre of the site!**

A number of concerns about the development were raised at the workshops but by far the most vociferous concerns were about the scale of development and the heights of buildings. The response was overwhelmingly and often angrily negative (unanimously so for the evening group after a vote was taken) because what was being shown for a mainly 2/3 storey suburban neighbourhood was more dense and higher than the Wapping Wharf development at Harbourside. **This is serious overdevelopment and we agree with and fully support what everybody else at the workshops said – it is simply not acceptable.** Having since chatted to other local people and the two councillors we feel confident that the Westbury Park community as a whole would be as appalled as all at the workshops were; the negative response came not only from the near neighbours who would be most adversely affected but from those living further afield.

So What Now?

The September 21st workshops dramatically revealed the huge gap between what the developers wish to build on the site and what is acceptable to the local community. This will presumably be reported back by staff at the workshops to their senior managers and financiers behind the scheme. We will also be writing to the developers to convey a clear message that the community is unanimously opposed to the plans concerning the proposed heights of the five new flats buildings. We will make clear that if they persist with these plans the Community Association, street groups and many others will formally object in the strongest of terms to the planning application when it is submitted later this year.

With regard to future working with the developers we would now appear to have two options:

(i) We could decide that further involvement with the developers is pointless given the strength of opposition to the plans now put forward. Were we to go our separate ways the community would have to depend entirely on the formal planning application process to contest the plans, leaving it to the City Council to decide the outcome. We don't think that's the best way to proceed, not least because the project is well short of being ready for an application so we do have time to try to shift it back to an acceptable approach

(ii) Continue to maintain a working relationship with the developers which will include:

- Asking the developers for more detailed plans including site cross sections and three dimensional images so that we can gauge more clearly the impact of their current proposals on people living in adjoining areas.
- Asking the developers to organise further opportunities for people to visit the site (*quite a few people attending the workshops on 21st September had not seen the site*).
- Advising the developers on the proposed drop-in sessions planned in October at which everybody can get to see the next stage (and hopefully more sensitive) designs.
- Asking the developers to mount a month-long exhibition of the detailed plans at a suitable accessible location (Henleaze Library ?)

We will continue to keep Community Association members, street groups and the wider community fully informed about the developer's plans as they evolve and monitor whether views and concerns expressed by the community are being taken on board – particularly with regard to the critical heights of buildings and density of development issues.

If invited we will continue to advise and support local street groups and other interested parties (eg. Westbury Park School) where there is common ground between the Community Association and these groups / organisations on specific issues and opportunities.

In summary the Community Association intends to continue playing an active and positive role in providing a channel of communication and feedback between the local community and the developers.

We should also make clear that we are not the only interface with the developers and have never intended to be so. As has been explained at the various developer hosted events street groups, other interested parties and individuals have the opportunity to make comments direct to the developers via the developers St. Christopher's website - www.stchristophersbristol.com/)

Jeff Bishop, Kevin Chidgey and Andrew Lewis-Barned

Westbury Park Community Association