

PLANNING APPLICATION 22/01221/F: ST. CHRISTOPHER'S SITE STATEMENT FROM THE WESTBURY PARK COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION (WPCA)

People in our community were very sorry when the St. Christopher's School finally closed and also concerned about the reduction in SEN provision within Bristol. We initially supported – in principle - the proposals for an 'Extended Care' facility on the site, allowing local people (and others) to downsize without leaving an area they love, and potentially creating a scheme open to all and including facilities for our community.

We were also pleased with the early commitment by the developers to a programme of community engagement. However, that pleasure very soon dissipated at the first community workshops when the early designs were revealed, showing what was unanimously agreed to be massive overdevelopment. Annoyance then slowly turned to frustration as more events were held but the basic design did not change at all, despite the endless negative comments made. After the application was first submitted further changes were made but they were all very minor, doing nothing to address the fundamental issue of significant overdevelopment. We, as the WPCA, and many of our members, therefore submitted a large number of often highly detailed objections to the application.

We were therefore extremely pleased to read the officer's report which, to a striking degree, echoed almost all of our and our community's objections. We – and that report – noted:

- the insensitivity to local character, in a Conservation Area, in terms of layout, quantity of development and design;
- the number of new buildings, their inappropriate heights and how much of the site they would take up;
- their damaging proximity to the listed Grace House (a five storey building less than 12 metres away) and to neighbours (also well below standard distances),
- the considerable loss of important trees, including prejudice to a very important veteran tree;
- the lack of genuine open space, the small spaces being no more than what is left after locating five large buildings and
- the lack of serious recovery of the lost SEN provision, an issue for the city as a whole.

There are two exceptions to our otherwise strong support for the officers' conclusions:

1. While it is stated that "*the application must be refused unless a scheme of area-wide parking measures can be implemented*", the suggested delegation to officers to determine a scheme simply pushes the overspill parking issue into the future with no guarantee that, even with a planning agreement in place, a wider area parking scheme would either be implemented or enforced.
2. We are also disappointed that no social housing is included in the proposed development as a consequence of the marginal decision to categorise the development as use class C2 rather than use class C3.

No doubt for viability reasons, the designs from the first sketches to what was finally submitted include an amount of development that self-evidently could never have secured permission on such an important site with so many significant constraints significantly reducing the developable area. The cosmetic changes that were made over time never addressed the core question of the basic amount of development.

In conclusion Westbury Park Community Association welcome and fully support the conclusions set out in the Committee report and the recommendation to refuse the application on the stated grounds.