

BEDMINSTER GREY

What happened at Development Committee A on 30th September 2020?

Wolfgang Kuchler 07.10.20

A scheme that

- breaks with Bristol City Council's Urban Design Guide
- breaks with the combined developers' "framework" guidance for Bedminster Green
- has three times the max recommended density for central Bristol
- guarantees darkness for most of the day for residents of Stafford Street
- overshadows the very Green it's built next to, for 1/3 or more of each day
- has half its private flats without adequate daylight, 1/5 th with less than the absolute minimum
- has approx 40% of these flats below national minimum size standards
- is designed to be constructed with extremely high embodied energy and CO2 emissions
- is designed with minimal amenity and renewable energy
- offers 5% social housing in a Cinderella block, only possible by pulling down 8 mature trees and erecting a multi-storey car park
- is objected to by the council's own design panel and fails on basics like refuse collection

was approved by all the Labour and Tory councillors united. Why?

I believe it was wrong and will have dreadful and probably irreversible consequences. But I believe it was also a logical decision within the true terms of Labour strategy, and that to challenge that forces us into direct confrontation with capitalism, even if we don't want that.

So here is the logic. Labour expect to be measured for their time in office, and that includes by overall housing numbers. Central government have set stupid levels, based purely on what the market expects - ie a guess at how many people with money will buy or rent in Bristol in the near future.

They also need to retain working class votes. But with honourable exceptions they don't have the presence in the community they used to, eg in South Bristol, for many reasons. How do they deal with that?

They could try to do real things. Like free bus travel for kids who have never been to a bookshop. Or social housing for the 14,000 plus people waiting. But they don't have the money to do more than nibble at these problems, and there is no prospect of a change of government policy that would bring that kind of money.

So they need to ape Tory councils in 2 ways. One is to suck up to business so they invest, on pretty much whatever terms they want, and hope that they can get credit for any positive effects of that investment.

The second is to divert people's criticism by populism. It's not as naked as Trump or Johnson but it's a similar idea. If you can portray your critics - environmental campaigners, housing campaigners - as middle-class, unrealistic and obstacles to getting money in - you can look as though you are the workers' friends. While wining and dining with the rich almost as a professional duty.

This played out last week. Opposition to the development plans from local people was portrayed as nimbyism based on not wanting tower blocks to spoil the view, and a handful of "traders" - hard-core individualists proving themselves by ignoring all covid guidance during the meeting - were lined up as the voice of the people "we want development, just get on with it".

And the developers were indulged because to refuse the scheme, no matter how morally and ethically correct that was, would have risked

- a long delay before a satisfactory scheme could be presented
- an appeal to the Secretary of State to overturn the planning decision

and perhaps as important, the only meaningful bit of affordable housing hoped for in the whole area, which the same developer is offering to build on the site of the Green Building and car park.

Councillors and their top officers probably imagine themselves as Frank Underwood from House of Cards, prepared to do the dirty work others avoid, in order to get things done.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

The alternative would be to stick to agreed original policies on affordable housing, density, height and sustainability, across all sites. Contest the appeals, go public on the money that developers are costing us by this process, and the government's role - or contest them politically ie without much legal involvement, use the appeal as a place to demonstrate the wrongness of policy.

It would mean councillors risk jail and disqualification, but could win back support where it matters and help change government policy and developers expectations.

The council, under Paul Smith, has been active in starting to build good social housing, but has generally had to do this on the scraps of land developers don't want (so much). That programme should be expanded, an offer made to council tax payers to increase the higher rates to pay for these, and for improving existing homes, at the next elections. Again there is a risk, but it's a risk incurred by doing the right thing.

And if developers know councillors aren't going to lay down and let them walk over them then some of the better sites could become available at a more sensible price. Right now every property agent developer and investor is trying to outdo the density of the others, because there is literally no limit - and last week's decision was catnip and cocaine for the men and women of the property business.

If any councillors emerge brave enough to nail this kind of principled program to their mast we need to do our bit and organise in the community to back them, on the streets and across the city and region.

APPENDIX - SOME IMAGES FROM THE PRESENTATION



1. Existing 2 storey buildings on the site already cast shadows across the whole of Stafford Street



2. CGI view down Stafford Street must be at about 11am, the only time when any sunlight will shine down the street. Same is true of the view from the north (inset) which must be early morning.



3. This view down Little Paradise shows the brown affordable block in the left foreground (which takes out 4 semi and mature trees) but doesn't show the multi-storey car park to the right - happy to use the trees to make the street look more acceptable before felling them (7 more, mature).

COMMITTEE SECRETARY Democratic Servic...	NO Cllr Olly Mead	YES Cllr Don Alexander	OFFICER - recommended YES Laurence Fallon
CASE OFFICER - recommended YES David Grattan	NO Cllr Mark Wright	OFFICER - recommended YES Jim Cliffe	CHIEF OFFICER - recommended YES Gary Collins, Head ...
YES Cllr Chris Windows	YES Cllr Marg Hickman	YES Cllr Mike Davies	YES Cllr Barry Clark
NO Cllr Fi Hance	YES Cllr Steve Smith	NO Cllr Stephen Clarke	YES Cllr Hibaq Jama

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE A 30th SEPT 2020 - VOTE ON DANDARA LITTLE PARADISE SCHEME

4. The vote.