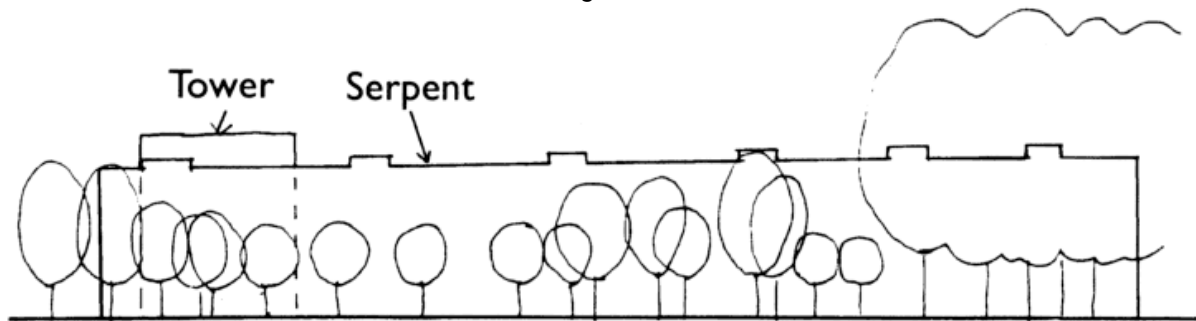


## St John Reade Hostel *Alison Bromilow*

- now to become *The Great Wall of Ware* - or *Ferguson's Fortress*



Viewed from Redland Green, the trees will do little to conceal the impact of this 115 metre long, 16 metre (53 feet) high block of flats.

**The Planning Inspector appointed by the Government has ruled that the scheme by Edward Ware Homes should be permitted.** This follows the four-day Public Inquiry held at the Council House from Tuesday to Friday June 19th to 22nd 2001. The City Council's Planning Committee decision to refuse permission has thus been overturned by the Environment Minister.

This outcome will be a bitter disappointment to the many RCAS objectors, especially those who attended the Inquiry. The objections of English Heritage and the Conservation Advisory Panel have also been discounted, and the Conservation Area policies of Bristol belittled.

The scheme that was being considered at the Planning Inquiry was the 65 apartment scheme that was refused permission at the planning committee meeting in February 2001, though many amendments to this scheme were made by the applicants since then. These involved moving the 'serpentine block' closer to the boundary with Redland Green and away from the three lime trees on the East of the building, and making minor changes to the design of the vehicular access road and ramp. **None of these amendments affected our contention that the building is too large for the site; turns its back on the surrounding community; materially damages the views from and into Redland Green, and from Redland Green Road and Redland Court Road; and will adversely affect traffic and pedestrian movements in the area of the site.**

The Planning Inquiry started on the Tuesday morning, at which point the developer's team submitted documents that either added to or amended information previously submitted. Over an hour was spent listing and numbering each document. These were not issued to the third parties, i.e. the members of the public. This set the pattern for each of the next four days when each morning new drawings or amended proposals were submitted. By the third day additional copies were being provided for the public but no time was allocated for inspection and assimilation of this new information. The copies provided for the third parties were marked for use only in the Council Chamber and third parties were not allowed to remove them! This was extremely frustrating, especially as the standard letter sent out by the Planning Inspectorate points out that the raising of new information which delays the Inquiry can lead to costs being sought from the parties bringing this new information. Each morning the Inspector asked the barristers representing the two sides whether they thought that the four days allocated for the Inquiry would be exceeded. At later stages we too were asked the same question. Pretty daunting question when the mounting costs of the two sides far exceeded our resources!

The Inspector made a site visit on the first day to acquaint himself with the area, and with the distant viewpoints that were a major factor in the objections against the proposals. Any member of the public or developer's and council's teams was allowed to attend, but evidence could not be discussed that should be raised in the Inquiry proper. A further site visit was made on the Tuesday after the Inquiry, again with any interested parties allowed to attend.

The Inquiry proper concerned itself with examining the evidence produced under Urban Design, Traffic Management, Landscape Design, Arboricultural Assessment and Architectural headings.

The Council had appointed a barrister from London, and had also commissioned a report from an Arboricultural Consultant as well as producing reports on each of the other issues. The consultants acting for Edward Ware New Homes also produced reports on all these topics and we obtained copies of all this documentation for preparation of our own statement. We had asked a consultant to present evidence for the RCAS, but unfortunately he had to withdraw; Roger Mortimer and myself therefore represented the RCAS.

The case was opened with the council witnesses. In order to speed the process the proofs of evidence produced by each of the developers and council witnesses were not read out, but the witnesses were cross-examined by the barrister for the opposing side. During the Inquiry the third parties were allowed to cross-examine the developer's team but not the council team as they were, without exception, opposed to the development, and therefore 'on the council's side'.

At the closing of the Inquiry the Inspector thanked the members of the public for their interest and their commitment. It was seldom that members of the public attended an Inquiry from start to finish, he said. This could explain the perceived sidelining of the third parties. The Inquiry was an open meeting, and a number of RCAS members called there at some stage, some for the whole period. This helped to demonstrate the depth of interest of the residents in this project. Members of the public are not normally expected to take such a positive role in the Inquiry process, which does not therefore lend itself to such involvement. It seems to us in retrospect that the concept of a Public Inquiry is more to do with the case being heard in public than the participation of the public in the Inquiry process.

RCAS Planning Group and Committee remain convinced that the scheme, albeit reduced in size by 20% from the original plans of May 2000, is inappropriate for this site. On the positive side, our detailed representations from May 2000 onwards have certainly prevented a much more damaging scheme being built. More recently, the spotlight of the approaching Inquiry led to the developer replacing both their landscape architect and Arboricultural consultant, and making a host of minor changes, concessions and legal undertakings which may modestly improve the final development. They also agreed that building works would be restricted to 0800 -1800 hrs Monday-Friday and to 1300 on Saturday, with no work on Sundays or Public Holidays.

We feel for the Council's Planning team — they had to defend their decision against a developer's team that included a top Planning QC and the largest firm of Planning Consultants in the UK. Even the evidence on behalf of RCAS was not enough to persuade the Inspector!

The three Edward Ware applications caused a huge amount of participation by members and other residents. Residents were certainly well informed about the schemes, as the developer commendably held open evening meetings. It is a measure of dissatisfaction that these meetings did not generate any letters to the planners supporting the schemes. The Planning Group was delighted to be doing their work in such an obvious climate of public interest, and pleased to be able to organise meetings, distribute information and help explain the schemes. We are very grateful to the many members who helped us — it has encouraged us to continue efforts to secure the best for our area.

The Planning Inquiry was a gruelling four days for all concerned, and our thanks to all those residents and other members who came along to support us.

*AB/RM  
July 2001*