

I have consistently opposed the council administration selling off the family silver, but here we have a situation where the silver seems to be classed as silver gilt, and the value of the property on the one hand is distorted by assumptions about the planning process, and on the other by questionable methods of decision-taking.

Firstly, what I have to say should not be taken to prejudice in any way my view of whatever planning application may appear. Under the current planning regime, offices may be converted to flats, but is this an office block or a children's centre (change of use)? The word 'apartment' is used. That usually means there will be a management fee for garden maintenance, cleaning of common facilities and so on, and as any resident of private sheltered housing and so on can tell you, that can be far from 'affordable'. Leasehold properties also have drawbacks, which may discourage purchasers/tenants. But planning is not about the actual use beyond the question of amenities such as sufficient light to the dwelling, 'sustainability' and parking.

Looking at the track record of the Planning Committee since 2019, it cannot and should not be assumed that planning consent would be given for an HMO, or a hotel, or holiday accommodation. Yet until I read this paper, I had assumed that encouraging tourism and accommodating students was an essential part of policies for Bath and income generation for the council. This is not an area with HMO restrictions at present, but we have refused plans for Locksbrook Road, Newbridge Road and so on. We might (I stress *might*) consider six apartments 'overdevelopment of the site' or that the damage to a heritage building was unacceptable. The assumptions about planning made here clearly affect the valuation. Secondly, in my experience as a parish councillor, and, long ago, in connection with Sirona, three valuations are needed. Westfield Council is buying the Waterside fields – we have three quotations for every step of the way. I cannot believe a different rule applies here - this is hardly an emergency supply of PPE! Has the property been surveyed? Is there asbestos?

So today I would request the cabinet member to go back to the drawing board and get at least two more quotations, and while he is at it, produce the evidence of the need for this accommodation. Will Sandry did so in his 'graduate retention survey' in 2014, but times change. So while you are at it, produce evidence of need.
Cllr Eleanor Jackson.

