

Again we are gathered around to debate proposals that will have the biggest impact on the city since the Georgians took the medieval town and completely transformed it in the finest style of the time.

Here the similarity ends as the style here had its time some 50 years ago. Despite the revisions it remains, as one commentator recently remarked, a series of regimented cliff like blocks from the Joseph Stalin school of architecture. The finest, it is not. The original applications raised a storm of outrage that something so utterly out of context in scale form and mass could be considered remotely acceptable for a World Heritage Site, yet they were deemed to be so.

That decision led to UNESCO sending a mission to Bath. Such were the concerns, and despite the positive gloss put on it, the Seville report was unambiguous. The World Heritage Committee required the State Party [i.e. the British Government] to "submit to the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS, for review, a revised plan showing that all necessary social facilities have been included in the first Phase of the Bath Western Riverside project". They have not!

The World Heritage Committee also required "the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS, for review, a time-bound revised plan for the second and third phases of the Bath Western Riverside project, including revised density and volume of the ensemble, so as not to impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, its integrity and on important views to and from the property so as not to add a new barrier within the Northern and Southern parts of the City" (as it currently is in these proposals)

This review is due next February when DCMS are supposed to inform UNESCO of their plans to make the Western Riverside compatible with the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site, and the Committee needs to consider very carefully whether it is appropriate at this point to pre-empt that report. It should be remembered that UNESCO do not bluff.

It is clear none of this has been taken on board as the proposals remain largely unchanged. The words of UNESCO dismissed with the line they carry no weight in UK planning law. This is not true. The recently issued PPS5 requires planning authorities to be guided by expert advice, and UNESCO are the experts on World Heritage, and final arbiters. PPS5 has been introduced but there is no reference to it in the Officer's report, nor the World Heritage Circular 07/09. How can you make a proper decision when some relevant facts have been kept from you?

Yes there are some revisions some of which are positive but even the new houses proposed are bland and devoid of character. The form is as before, the object buildings remain, heights have been increased in some places. Density has not been lowered in real terms and we would draw attention to the latest update of PPS3 which lowers the minimum density from the previous 80 dwellings per hectare to 30 dph. This too has not been reported to you, yet when the Local Plan demands no more than 600 dwellings on the Western Riverside, this fact is surely relevant.

Recent approvals for site enabling works show buildings on footprints that differ from those being considered here. You cannot build both.

We are still left with what to all intents and purposes is a housing estate with its roots firmly planted in communist eastern Europe, deposited in the bowl of one of western Europe's finest architectural jewels. It is said a World Heritage Site belongs to the people of the world and UNESCO protects those interests. They found it wanting along with the vast majority of its residents. As residents of the world this should be above all other issues. The applications should be refused or deferred until the wishes of UNESCO and the public are satisfied.