

Portsmouth Society News

The newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - September 1997

DESIGN AWARDS

The **Best New Building Award** of 1997 is being given to the University's architecture and environmental sciences building, the Portland Building in Portsea, for its beautiful internal spaces and finishes and its delightful outdoor space linking it with the older Buckingham Building. One of its many special features is that it has no air conditioning. Instead ventilation is by natural thermal currents facilitated by the glass towers which are a prominent external feature of the building. This really is a glorious, uncompromisingly modern yet unaggressive building, something the City can be proud of for many years. It was designed by Sir Colin Stansfield Smith CBE, Professor of Design in the University and lately County Architect.

The prize for **Best Restoration** goes to the huge Gymnasium and its associated buildings in HMS Nelson, the naval barracks. This is a building not easily seen by the public. The clocktower and the upper part of it are seen over the rebuilt high wall on the north side of Alfred Road opposite the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Here the prize is for the enormously high standard of workmanship and attention to detail in replacing the decayed brickwork and stone to the highest standard, supervised with great enthusiasm by Mr Peter Williams and Mr O'Shaughnessy.



The Portland Building - the Best New Building.

The **Best Landscaping Award** goes to the restoration and repair work on Hilsea Lines, "Portsmouth's hidden jewel", carried out over the years by Ron Dooler, the Parks Department's Ranger. The Lines form a linear park of woodland and water - the moat as well as Portsea Creek - and brick casemates, stretching right across the northern end of Portsea Island. They are based on the ancient fortifications, totally peaceful except for the incessant roar of the motorway, and unknown to thousands of Portsmouth people. Ron has done marvellous work with teams of volunteers in repairing the damage done by motorcyclists and the great storm of 1987; in creating clearings among the densely packed trees; in getting school children to grow oaks from acorns and plant them; in improving the paths and sightlines to make people feel safer and encourage wildlife; and in constructing bridges. It is particularly his and his team's work we are celebrating.

The judges were Robin Partington of the Sir Norman Foster architectural partnership; Kate Mackintosh, formerly of the County Architect's Department; and Celia Clark and John Holland of the Society. They will report their findings

In this issue: Gunwharf Update, Flagship Projects, Millenium Tower & LRT

Gunwharf - Outline Permission Granted

At a special meeting in the Council Chamber on 4 June the Planning Committee unanimously agreed to grant outline planning permission for the Gunwharf scheme applied for by the developers, Berkeley Homes and Lordland. This was despite twenty deputations, almost all against the application. These included one by Roger James speaking on behalf of the Society and the Solent Protection Society, Celia Clark and Charles Burns of the Society but speaking on their own account, and a powerful representation by Simone McKeown of the Southsea Retailers.

Improved scheme, but..

We admitted that the urban design of the scheme was much improved over that originally submitted in December. This was thanks to English Heritage, the City Planning Officer, and the 'focus group' meetings which he chaired. These had been suggested to him by Celia Clark. There were three meetings: on traffic and the environment; on the economy (retail/employment); and on design. People known to be interested in these subjects were invited by the Planning Officer, and representatives of the developers and their expert advisers were also present. Undoubtedly these had an effect.

In our view the scheme is certainly better in design terms but still not good enough in land use terms. Of course we want to see Gunwharf developed and open to the public after centuries of being walled off. But this scheme does not make the best of this wonderful site.

Still too much retail

The improvements had in no way reduced the number of shops proposed. This was our principal criticism: too much shopping, associated with too much car parking, leading to insuperable traffic problems. The amount of shopping proposed - 17,000sq. m - is slightly larger than the central Southsea shopping centre which includes Debenhams and Knight & Lee. Reduced, this would cut down the huge cost of the underground car park. It might well be a more secure investment. Above all more houses and fewer shops would lessen the traffic which is the insuperable objection to the scheme as it stands.

Even the developers' own consultants state that

even after the junction improvements which they advocate there will be queuing at times on the northbound carriageways, particularly on Anglesey Road. Gunwharf lies adjacent to a major public transport interchange of trains, buses, coaches, ferries and perhaps LRT. You couldn't imagine a site better served by public transport. But the buses and coaches depend on roads and if the roads are clogged they cannot get there. The boss of Provincial buses said yes, he could run a Park and Ride bus service from the ferry port or the mainland but at the moment his regular buses were often stationary half way along Anglesey Road; and obviously a Park and Ride service wouldn't work if the buses can't move.

300 dwellings

The scheme proposes 300 dwellings, presumably what are called luxury. The city's great need is also for social housing. There is no reason for not having both, and with the release of the capital receipts there will be money to make it worthwhile for the developers. At Eastney barracks, a very successful re-use of MOD property, both are side by side. We suggested some medium rise blocks at the back of the Gunwharf site, giving many more people a share of the view.

Specialist shopping

The developers insist that this is to be no ordinary shopping centre. It is to consist of specialist shops aimed at the upper end of the market and mainly at the richer customers from outside Portsmouth on the mainland. It makes no sense to site these shops aimed at mainland residents, on the very edge of Portsea Island, as far away as they could be and accessible only by one already overloaded road. And the sort of people who are in the market for cut-price Armani suits are the very last people to leave their cars at home and take the bus.

Detailed applications to follow

However, all is not yet lost. Detailed planning applications will have to be made for the individual buildings and there will be a chance to object again to the shopping. So far there have been applications for the modification of some of the ancient monuments which are to remain and for demolition of many more. Some of the buildings are to be improved. For example the chimneys are to be reinstated on the Customs House (Vernon Building).

The Millennium Tower

As has been publicly announced, a choice has been made from ten submissions to design, construct and operate the proposed Millennium Tower. Berkeley Homes, the chosen developers of the Gunwharf site were unsurprisingly, selected on the basis of capacity to do the job in terms of financial and technical resources and experience, not at all on design. In fact designs have not yet been submitted; but it will be up to Berkeleys to come up with a selection of designs. The source of these is likely to be a German firm, who we are told have built monumental towers around the world starting with the Stuttgart television tower of the 1950s. The public (via a vote) as well as the Portsmouth Partnership and the Millennium Commission are to be consulted about the final choice. This is rather different from an architectural competition which is what we pressed for, as did Virginia Bottomley when she was the Secretary of State concerned. We are told that the reason for not holding such a competition is that the winning design might be impracticable in some way - too expensive to

construct or not capable of bringing in the necessary revenue.

Earlier this year, three members of the executive committee of the Society, all of us sceptical about the idea of having a tower at all, were invited to the offices of a very well known firm of architects and shown their designs for a tower for Portsmouth. We were thrilled by it. It was designed very much with Portsmouth in mind and is quite unlike any tower in existence anywhere. They had researched the matter thoroughly, for example they knew how deep the piles would have to go, and had worked it to a budget of £24 million. If it were built it would be absolutely unique. It may well not be the best possible design. What we want to ensure is that we, the public, are not made to choose between designs none of which is anywhere near as good as this. Being architects they were not able to tender for construction and operation. They need a developer to commission them. We are trying to do what we can to persuade Berkeleys to put this forward as one of their submitted designs.

End of Eden? Somerstown Community Wildlife Garden

This little garden occupying a third of an acre among the highrise blocks of Somerstown was developed in 1986 by a group associated with the Portsmouth Society who had attended the Greening of the Cities conference in Liverpool. It was run by a Trust, registered as a charity, on a peppercorn lease from the City Council, two of the trustees being members of the Society. The aim was to create a little bit of country in the town.

In July the lease was terminated without notice. The gates were chained up two days before the trustees received a letter informing them that the lease had been summarily terminated. The same letter informed them that the Property Service intended to reclaim from the trustees the costs, estimated at £1,000, incurred in restoring the garden to "an acceptable standard". However, this threat was withdrawn when it was discovered that one of the trustees

was a City Councillor. Since then all vegetation including two trees has been severely cut down.

If the City Council intends to develop genuine partnerships with local environmental groups as Local Agenda 21 recommends, then they need to consider what lessons might be learnt from this sorry story of a community initiative wiped out after eleven years without any notice that they were unhappy with the state of the garden since Bonfire Night 1996.

The lessons which need to be learnt are: much greater co-ordination between City housing, leisure, property departments; in this case all three independently threatened us. A helpful rather than a punitive attitude to volunteers should be a priority along with listening to local residents and helping those prepared to devote time to making the city a pleasanter place to live in. The City should recognise, as the County always did, that at the very least, volunteers represent 'value added' to the city's environment.

Flagship Projects: their place in urban development and regeneration

The overwhelming focus in Britain on the dawn of the second millennium is a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right. No other country has seen the year 2000 as so important that it must be marked by celebration on a huge scale, but also by very large flamboyant building projects.

It is illuminating to contrast the projected Millennium Tower and associated redevelopment of Gunwharf with the regeneration over more than twenty years of three former shipbuilding sites in Göteborg, Sweden, where now more people work than did in the old shipbuilding days.

Catalysts

In contrast to Portsmouth's flamboyant tower and water jets, the Göteborg scheme's catalysts were a small restaurant which now has a Michelin star, and a symbolic lighthouse which functions as a 'think-tank', office and ferry service base. These were built as an act of faith on prominent disused quays on the river Götaälva opposite the city centre. They attracted curious visitors who began to see the potential of the long stretch of empty buildings and quays on the river's north shore. Though it started off small, the renewal in Göteborg is a very much larger and longer-term project than Gunwharf.

There was intense activity on these three sites until the early 1970s when shipbuilding suddenly came to an end. A far-sighted former manager of a shipyard, the director of education, and the project manager with experience in estate development, wished to 'heal the wounds' after the 'mourning period' caused by the catastrophic loss of shipbuilding employment. Unlike many developers faced with regenerating maritime sites, including Berkeley/Lordlands, they recognised the existing buildings as assets. In the 1970s they embarked on a programme of conversion and renewal, resulting in thousands of square metres of adaptable, well sited space. New public access to the waterfront was considered essential and new ferry links were made to the



The symbolic lighthouse at Göteborg - a 'think tank', office and ferry service base.

city centre across the river. In order to create a living community from scratch, mixed uses: work, housing, culture, recreation and education were deliberately intertwined. Industrial activity including Sweden's biggest flour mill continues on the site.

"Make haste slowly"

These two flagship projects are vastly different in scale and achievement. The Portsmouth scheme began with large funds promised from the Millennium Commission but with very difficult conditions attached, which has led to snail's pace progress, despite the short timescale of the Millennium which is being daily concertina-ed. This is bound to affect the quality and acceptability of the result. In Sweden, as the waterfront leaflet says, there is every reason to "make haste slowly" in an area that has meant so much to so many; whereas in the UK Millennium money can be granted only for quickly achieved projects with an element of

Flagship Projects... (continued)

fantasy, that are not a substitute for necessary infrastructure.

Sustainable development

Both Gunwharf and the Göteborg shipyards were once centres of technical innovation. In Portsmouth there is unease that the new role for military sites is so far from their original role as the bases for national power: leisure/tourism, luxury housing and museums. Becoming principally a museum city surely cannot offer a viable new life to our children and grandchildren. Manufacturing employment, innovation and highly skilled cross-boundary services are needed too.

The example of Göteborg shows that a large flagship project is not essential to trigger large scale renewal. The empty shipbuilding sites, so important to the development of Sweden's

second city, have once again become a centre of innovation and employment. There is long term political commitment in both places, and the Portsmouth Harbour Renaissance project has led to useful cross-authority alliances.

Financial vs social & environmental

But whereas the criteria for development in Britain are financial, in Göteborg it is social and environmental. In Sweden a minimum site disposal price for publicly owned sites gives local communities room for creative thinking according to local needs. Centralised control from the Millennium Commission was the only way to get the investment the Portsmouth Harbour communities need, whereas the inspiration, energy and implementation were local to Göteborg. Perhaps the messages from this comparison are that although flagship projects have their place in urban renewal, local

forces need access to finance, and they also need to develop real listening powers in order to enlist whole sectors of the community in the regeneration process, which is as much emotional as environmental and financial.

This article is a summary of the paper presented by Celia Clark at the "Strategies for the City Conference: Flagship Projects: their place in urban development and



Elevation of "Ornen": the Eagle : architect Håkon Cullberg

Harbour tunnelling costs must not sink LRT project

The cost of tunnelling under Portsmouth Harbour should not be allowed to sink the LRT project but provide the incentive to realign it.

The present plans largely duplicate transport links and will prematurely destroy Gosport town centre and the generally effective water-bus that links Gosport with Portsmouth.

Phase 1 should be recast to run from a terminus at Gosport ferry, through Fareham and on to Southampton by using the railway line that runs through Swanwick to St Denys.

This could be achieved in two ways: Either by allowing dual use of this line by light and heavy trains or by down-grading the line just for rapid transit use and redirecting heavy trains from

Harbour tunnelling costs & LRT (continued)

Fareham to Southampton via a new link at Eastleigh which would give south coast services a direct link with Southampton airport.

With a Southampton-to-Gosport LRT link in place, increasing passenger levels would create pressure and the financial justification for building the tunnel under the harbour in just the same way as the successful introduction of London Docklands Light Railway generated the need and finance for it to be extended.

Charles Burns

Help Wanted!

We desperately need volunteers to deliver newsletters to our members. If you are able to deliver just a few newsletters in your area then this will help our distribution and save postage costs. Areas where we need distributors are Cosham, Drayton, North End/Hilsea, Baffins, Kingston and parts of Southsea. If you can help please contact Jean Thompson on 821667.



*Design competition best restoration : The
Clocktower at HMS Nelson.*

Future Programme

Meetings are held at the Norrish Central Library (Room F, 3rd Floor), Guildhall Square, Portsmouth unless otherwise stated. There is no admission charge and the meetings are open to the public.

Wednesday 1st October at 7.30 pm

Kate Macintosh, formerly of Hampshire County Architect's Department, architect of Priory School Sports Hall and Solent First School, Drayton (both winners of the Portsmouth Society's annual design awards).

Wednesday 5th November at 7.30 pm

Sustainable Development : Local Agenda 21.
Speaker: Mike Jacques.

Saturday 22nd November at 7.30 pm

Autumn Party at the Square Tower, Old Portsmouth. For full details see insert.

Wednesday 3rd December at 7.30 pm

A Hampshire Kaleidoscope - Historic Buildings in Hampshire, Speaker Deane Clark. Our Christmas meeting with mince pies and wine.

(January - no meeting)

Wednesday 4th February 1998 at 7.30 pm

Review of the Society's Design Awards Best New Building, Best Restoration and Best Landscaping of 1997 presented by the competition's judges.

Wednesday 4th March at 7.30 pm

To be announced.

Wednesday 1st April at 7.30 pm

Annual General Meeting.

The Portsmouth Society, Registered Charity no. 266116

CHAIRMAN: CELIA CLARK, 8 Florence Road, Southsea, Hants, PO5 2NA, Tel 01705 732912

SECRETARY: ROGER JAMES, 10 Captains Row, Old Portsmouth, Hants, PO1 2TT, Tel 01705 734555

TREASURER: JEAN THOMPSON, 4 Malvern Road, Southsea, Hants, PO5 2NA. Tel 01705 821667

We welcome new members. Please come to any of our meetings or contact Jean Thompson for more details.
