
Portsmouth Society News

DESIGN AWARDS 1998

We had a marvellously varied collection of buildings to choose from in making our Best New Building and Best Restoration awards this year - seven new buildings and seven restoration/conversions. Sadly there was no entry for the Best Landscaping award.

The judges found it impossible to decide between two excellent but totally different new buildings; so Admiral Lord Nelson School, Dundas Lane, and the Materials Recycling Centre in Quatremaire Road are joint Best New Buildings of 1998. The school is the last to be designed in Portsmouth by Hampshire County Architects famously led by Sir Colin Stansfield Smith, and it sets a new standard for secondary school design. Once you are inside the wall facing Dundas Lane you are in a different world. The spectacular full height curving glazed atrium with its brightly coloured floor is an inspiration. "When children first arrive in the school they feel they can achieve everything" according to Dianne Smith, the Headteacher. "The building has a 'wow' factor" she said. Our judges agreed.

The recycling centre, the largest of its kind in Europe, by the French architect Jean-Robert Mazaud, impressed the judges in the way its design admirably fits its unusual function - sorting and baling recyclable household waste. With its dramatic shell roof, it is an all too rare example of elegant industrial design.

A highly imaginative conversion of a church into houses won the award for Best Restoration. St. Andrew's Church Eastney, formerly the Royal Marines' church, has been divided



Admiral Lord Nelson School showing the spectacular curving atrium

vertically to make seven most exciting houses, by Mick Morris, architect, and Steve Cupples, builder/developer. The houses make good use of the building's great height (without the rooms themselves being uncomfortably high) and the work has been done without spoiling or even making much difference to the outside appearance. The architect and developer had proved their hunch that people are prepared to pay more for something of quality and out of the ordinary.

There were several close contestants for the award, among them the immaculate restoration of the tower and spire of St. Jude's Church, Southsea, which the Society has been campaigning for since 1984. The church authorities had wanted to demolish the whole church (of 1851); but they had been opposed by

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Portsmouth Society Design Awards 1998 (continued)

the Society and the County and City Councils.

The Sunstone Building by Mark Summarskill, a library and computer centre at Portsmouth College which fits well into the predominantly 1950s and 60s buildings of the college and at the same time stands out, was a worthy runner up for Best New Building. Other new buildings judged were: 'The Spinnaker', a new well-designed and varied residential development (nothing to do with the Millennium Tower!) by Wimpeys, on the HMS Phoenix site, Hilsea; somewhat uninspired new housing by The Shaftesbury Housing Association, which the judges were critical of, replacing a 1960s block of flats in Somers Town; The Victory Vauxhall car showroom in London Road, Hilsea; Holmbush Court, McCarthy & Stone retirement flats in Southsea.

Other restorations and conversions were: The Ministry of Defence Library rehoused from Whitehall in a building adjacent to the Royal Naval Museum in the Dockyard -

disappointing the judges felt; the Harvesters restaurant in Eastern Road which did not do justice to what was Great Salterns House the early 19th century mansion which houses it; the praiseworthy restoration and extension of the Barn in Milton Park for the use of the Southsea Players; the very effective reuse of the former Social Security office building of late 1930s in the city centre as a Language School to provide spacious learning and teaching facilities, mainly for professionals. At present the three top floors are unused but will in due course provide living accommodation and spectacular views for

students, thus providing a welcome insertion of life into the city centre. We judged also the Clocktower and the Colonnade, the final stage of the very successful conversion to residential use of the Royal Marine Barracks at Eastney; the conversion of a derelict factory building - foundry then glass works - in St. George's Way, Portsea into student accommodation, also by Mick Morris, architect of the winning conversion.



St Andrew's Church - view of the staircase in one of the newly converted houses.

The judges were Peter Faller, retired professor of architecture at Stuttgart University, an old friend who has judged for us several times before; Jeremy Young of Young & Butt, estate agents, who found it interesting to be judging buildings from a point of view other than value; Celia Clark, chairman, and Wendy Whitten, executive committee member of the Society. As secretary, I made the arrangements and travelled round with the team

On Friday 11 December the Lord

Mayor will unveil the plaques on the three winning buildings, beginning at 1.15 with Admiral Lord Nelson School in Dundas Lane. Next at about 2.15 we shall go to the MRF in Quatremaire Road on the same site as the still standing old incinerator. Finally, at 3.00 will shall go to the former St. Andrew's Church in Henderson Road. Members are warmly welcome to attend any or all of these ceremonies. It will be an opportunity to see inside which I can sure you is a rewarding experience.

Roger James

The Millenium Tower

Members will recall that instead of an international architectural design competition for the tower which we had asked for as long ago as December 1995, the Portsmouth Partnership announced that there was to be “an international trawl for companies interested in designing, building and operating the tower.” The Project Co-ordinator, Paul Spooner, said “We will not succeed by an architectural competition alone. There is no doubt that lots of people would love to design the tower, and we could end up with a wonderful plan. But if we don’t have a developer and operator on board, we won’t have a tower”, Berkeleys, being on the spot, were selected. They told the public that we would be getting to choose from designs prepared by the German firm Leonhardt, Andre and Partners who had “designed more towers around the world than anybody else”. In the end of course the designs that were put up for the public to choose from were by Peter Warlow of the local architectural firm of Hedley Greentree and Partners who had been architects of the Gunwharf scheme and from the beginning partners with Berkeleys.

During the summer of this year a crisis developed when the consultants who had estimated the visitor figures for the tower announced a new forecast down from some 600,000 a year to 300,000. At this point Berkeleys withdrew from both the building and the operation of the tower.

Up to then we were constantly assured that all was going well. Now we thought we saw a chance to intervene once again to get a world class design. We, that is to say Celia, myself and the late Karl Sparrow, had in February 1997 seen the design prepared by Robin Partington of Foster and Partners, which they had prepared at Berkeleys’ invitation and which very much excited us. For some reason Fosters asked us not to push it. But now with the crisis of funding in summer 1998 we approached Fosters again and asked if we might promote it now. We got a cautious yes, and they sent us a copy of the design. Our difficulty was to locate the centre of responsibility. Who was capable of making a decision to change course? Our strength was that Celia and I were the only people in Portsmouth who had seen the Foster design. We asked the leader of the Council if, provided he liked the design, if he was free to invite Fosters to go ahead. He wasn’t, apparently because of shortage of time.

The fact was that in opting for the selection of a

developer to design, build and operate the tower the Portsmouth Partnership and the City Council had abdicated control of the design. Berkeleys withdrew from the project but Portsmouth was still saddled with their choice of designer and with the design costs to date. And we have ended up, temporarily only perhaps, in the situation Paul Spooner had warned against: a design without a developer or operator - a design furthermore that has not won an international competition.

In the course of the past few months we have shown the Foster design to the City Planning Officer, the Director of Flagship Portsmouth and (through the good offices of Mike Hancock MP) to Director of the Millennium Commission. We also wrote to all the commissioners telling them of the existence of the design and of its potential advantages. After their meeting the Commission wrote to Portsmouth saying that “while the Commission supported the Spinnaker design, it would be happy to consider alternative proposals if they were achievable within the same budgets and timetable and had public support.”

The advantages of adopting the Foster design would be firstly just Sir Norman Foster’s name which carries a world- wide reputation which would put Portsmouth on the map, and secondly that Foster’s design, which is engineered by Ove Arup (another world-famous name), echoes a dockyard crane, while having a viewing platform at the top is counterbalanced by a much lower and larger platform in, as it were, the crane driver’s cab, accessed by escalator. From the practical point of view this design by Robin Partington, who also designed the Foster towers at Barcelona and at Santiago de Compostela, has the huge economic advantage in that the lower platform would provide for a restaurant and/or bar and thus would generate far more revenue than the high level viewing platforms which are all the Spinnaker has to offer. Once you have seen the view you have seen it; but people might well go to the restaurant or bar quite often. It would still have a fine view over the whole harbour and a better view of the ships than the high platform. This is important because, echoing as it does the dockyard cranes, it is a more appropriate symbol of Portsmouth than the Spinnaker with its yachting image. The Queen’s Harbour Master discourages yachts from the Portsmouth side of the harbour except for Port Solent.

According to the journal Building Design two other internationally famous designers were interested in designing the Portsmouth tower: Michael Wilford and Partners, the successors to James Stirling, and the great Spanish architect/engineer Santiago

The Millenium Tower (continued)

Calatrava, who among many other things designed the Barcelona Olympics tower; but they were not invited to submit designs.

When we now try to suggest that the Foster design should be given a chance we are told that there simply isn't time - exactly what we were told, nearly three years ago, when we urged a competition!

The planning application for the Spinnaker tower is now available in the planning department but it is remarkably incomplete. Start: Apr 99, to be done in 18 months. Likely (sic) materials coated steel concrete and glass, colour to be advised, 2 lifts and staircase, 165 metres high, viewing decks at 100, 105, 110 metres, to resist external bomb, wind not thought to be a difficulty, some possible impact on TV reception in East of Portsea Island. The language is confident, but the design is vague and

unresearched. Neither the material of construction is yet decided upon nor the type of coating or cladding to keep it from deterioration and streaking. Wind tests for noise have yet to be done. Again a Transport & Works Act application will have to be made as this, like Gunwharf, will interfere with navigation.

It has appeared in the last few days to be the case that Fosters themselves do not wish to be involved. It also appears that potential operators are already looking for modifications to the spinnaker.

In responding to the planning application the executive committee have decided not to oppose the principle of having a tower but we shall be objecting to the spinnaker as unworthy of the site and occasion, and we shall be asking for much more detail.

New Road School

Architect Mick Morris who has an excellent track record in converting churches such as St. Andrews, Henderson Road and St. Patricks Eastney, the glass factory behind St. George's Square and schools such as one in Milford to residential uses has put in a commercial bid to make about 10 cottage starter homes of New Road School by vertical subdivision and insertion of mezzanines and use of standard joinery. He has a developer who has put in a bid and will finance the conversion. Another local need might be small workshop space, which the building and its yards lends itself to. The chances are that several developers with experience of reusing old buildings will want to bid, provided the price isn't too high to preclude the cost of conversion.

People who live nearby would like to see the site used for low density housing for the elderly which conversion of the whole block could provide, without the massive intrusion of comprehensive redevelopment. They are concerned about not increasing the car parking load by whatever happens to the school, though it has operated all these years without any at all. Car free developments are becoming more common: indeed there is an association of local authorities who have formed an EU sponsored Car Free Group. There will soon be a precedent in Portsmouth: the John Brown block in Buckingham Street in the city centre is to be

converted to 96 public and private sector flats, with only 18 parking spaces. We hope to persuade the City Property Department that conversion would bring a good return, not least in giving new life to a familiar and much used part of the New Road streetscape. One of the Local History Group's first booklets was a history of New Road, which has the school building on the cover.

Developers Sapcotes in London have successfully converted a number of board schools in London, including several you can see from the Portsmouth-Waterloo line. We do hope that Portsmouth Property Department and the local councillors will see the city's properties as serving the whole of the community's needs, rather than just as assets to be sold to swell the city's coffers. Proceeds from the sale of New Road School have to be placed in the special charitable fund managed by the Education Committee to benefit elementary age children. New Road School is a key building in Hampshire's history of state education, and Mick Morris's ingenious conversion provides 12 unusual homes with private gardens and off street parking in the playgrounds. Such a development would uplift the whole area and should prove attractive to people looking for out of the ordinary homes with lots of space. Such loft conversions are increasingly popular.
Celia Clark

The Proposed Incinerator

As was announced in our last newsletter, we have adopted a position against the proposed new incinerator for Quartremaine Road. The planning application is now in and an application for a licence is shortly being made to the Environment Agency (successor to the old Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution). Both planning permission and a licence from the E.A. are necessary before the incinerator can be built. Below is the letter of objection sent to the City Planning Officer on behalf of the Society dated 31 October 1998.

Dear Mr Newbold,

The proposed incinerator, Quartremaine Road The executive committee of the Society have asked me to write to object to the proposal to build an incinerator in Quartremaine Road.

The Health Issue

We object mainly on account of the uncertain threat to health that the incinerator poses. Though the risk may in fact be very small we cannot be sure; and whatever it is we shall be committed to it for at least twenty years. Hampshire Waste Services (HWS) have said that the new plant will be modelled on SELCHP (South East London Combined Heat and Power) at Deptford, with some improvements; but we know from the Environment Agency itself that the safety precautions at SELCHP have broken down many times. Mr Collis, project manager of HWS, has said there have been no ill effects; but how can anybody know?

Mr Collis has also said that the risk of somebody getting cancer from this plant is less than that of being struck by lightning. This is probably true; but though cancer is a risk, we are principally bothered about asthma. It is not entirely clear why there is such a high incidence here; but it seems possible that it is connected with the layout of the city with Portsdown Hill lying along the north side of the very low-lying flat Portsea Island. There is some evidence that on occasions the air is partly trapped here and comes down to recirculate rather than being blown away over the hill. Whatever the reason, the incinerator is likely to exacerbate the problem. It is a risk we must not take.

The two pollutants that we are particularly concerned about are dioxins and micro-particulates. The chemistry of dioxins is very imperfectly understood and it may well turn out that they are even more dangerous than is now known. The dangers of micro-particulates, particles smaller than one micron, has only recently emerged. They are so small they can penetrate the bag filters; and the human nose and throat have no defence against

them. In the combustion chamber these particles can adsorb, for example, dioxins. Bypassing the body's defences they may pass down straight into the alveoli, the smaller sacs of the lungs, more or less straight into the blood stream. This is new knowledge (see ref. 1 below). It could be scaremongering; but we don't know. We understand that under EU law planning authorities have a duty to take health matters into account - even perceived risks that may not be substantiated in fact. We think it would be irresponsible for any council in the present state of knowledge to commit us to this danger - which would be for at least twenty years.

Working against re-use and recycling

Working against reuse and recycling. The fact that the incinerator will demand 165,000 tons of fuel a year must put a brake on any campaign to reduce waste and increase recycling and composting. HWS argue that it will not; but commonsense calculation shows that if recycling is carried towards its reasonable limits there will not be a residue of 165,000 tons of residual waste. HWS say that this is not the case as they intend to use East Hampshire as a kind of bank. E.Hampshire will use landfill until it is filled up and then they will have more to contribute to feeding the incinerator. In Germany, Switzerland and the US there are already cases of incinerators crying out for rubbish. This must result in unnecessary cost. Indeed it seems that no proper analysis of relative costs has been done. We realise this is not a planning ground for refusal. Just a commonsense and economic one.

Consider the application, not the alternatives

Equally in determining this application it is not for the planning committee to consider what should be done instead, nor is it incumbent on objectors to come up with an alternative, although we would be happy to make suggestions, which would include a new comprehensive Portsmouth-based waste management plan. We are now saddled with what remains of Hampshire's plan. It would almost certainly include a radical increase of recycling. The recent comprehensive report by the Environment Agency and LPAC Re-Inventing Waste - A Waste Strategy for London (1998) is full of ideas for doing this, for example how to do kerbside collections of segregated recyclables in busy streets.

Traffic Generation

There is a third lesser planning reason for refusal - that is on traffic grounds. The increase of lorry traffic caused by the incinerator together with the three other waste installations established or about to be established in this area, the MRF, the Household

The Proposed Incinerator (continued)

Waste Recycling Centre and the Transfer Station in Dundas Spur, will be unacceptable both from the point of view of Admiral Lord Nelson School and the residents of Anchorage Park. The danger is especially to the pupils of ALN School in making their way there from Anchorage Park and the Norway Road area and in their lunch time, especially as we know that the school authorities have made a special effort to encourage the children to come to school on foot or bicycle. The consultants employed by HWS diverted attention from the problem by concentrating on the increased traffic on Eastern Road and showed it to be very small. It is traffic on the roads in the vicinity of the plant, the school and Anchorage Park that we are concerned with.

Although we have no desire to wish the incinerator

on Havant, we think the reasons (based on the Waste and Minerals Plan) for ruling out the two possible Havant sites were spurious. The Havant old incinerator site is better from the point of view of lorry access, being approached directly off the A27, and well away from any vulnerable pedestrian route.

The existence of the Paulsgrove tip means that there is no hurry to make a 25-year commitment of this sort. We can pause to see what comes up. There is a great deal of experimentation going on world wide.

We trust that the committee will reject the application. It is dangerously uncertain.

Yours sincerely, Roger James, Secretary.

1. *Seaton et al The Lancet Vol 345, 21 January 1995*

Gunwharf and the Transport & Works Act

As our last newsletter reported, we objected to the application Berkeleys made under the Transport & Works Act 1992, to "interfere with navigation" in fact to make navigation impossible for ever in Gunwharf Creek by piling it and covering it over, the purpose being to build part of the retail development on it.

The Secretary of State decided not to hold a public inquiry but to make his decision by the "Written submissions procedure". Berkeleys were invited to respond to our objections. Their responses were sent to us and we in our turn responded. This exchange continued for several rounds; but our latest response, dated 6 October, was sent to Berkeleys with instructions that they should respond by 2 November. This will be the end: the Minister will then make his decision whether or not to grant the order.

Another objector, Major Tony Pheby, has lasted the course with us. He was the (Army) Officer Commanding Gunwharf. He commanded the Army vessels based there. Knowing the potential of the Gunwharf as a harbour, he has been particularly keen that it should be developed as a base for passenger water transport to Priddy's Hard, Fareham and Port Solent. He also has urged, as we have, that Gunwharf should be used as a mooring for visiting yachts, for which there is no provision on this side of the harbour, and especially for large 'super' yachts which with maintenance and chandlery services would provide some

permanent jobs.

The other unfinished business from the Gunwharf application concerns the proposals for houses and flats between the Vulcan building and the harbour. These were withdrawn from the application before it was determined in June this year as a result of a threat from English Heritage to get the whole application called in by the Minister. The housing is being put out to a limited architectural competition. Designs are to be in before the end of the year. PLB of Winchester and HGP are among the selected architects. McCormac who were selected have dropped out. The designs will be chosen by agreement between the City Council and English Heritage.

Sadly, everything except for the ancient monuments and two or three other historic buildings has now been demolished and the only delays to completing the scheme are the Minister's decision on the T & W Act and the architecture for the harbour-side housing. According to the Friends of Old Portsmouth newsletter Sarah Quail has said that Vulcan building is in too bad a state of repair for the museum to take it on - too expensive. She had indicated that it could be reconsidered as Gunwharf progresses. We shall follow this up. On a recent visit, CC and RJ had seen some historic storehouses in the Arsenale (the ancient dockyard) in Venice being used by a high-tech nautical research company, Thetis. That sort of thing would be ideal here.

Roger James

October Party

Our 2nd party at the Square Tower was arranged from start to finish by Rosemary Flewitt. Ticket sales to members were initially slow - the day being saved at the eleventh hour by the celebrating Burns group!

Annie Kettle's delicious choice of 3 hot dishes, a glass of wine, a cheerful tuneful band with singer playing all evening rounded off by Deane Clark's words and humour describing our surroundings and the work of the society.

Apologies to Rosemary for the late thank you.

Southern Comfort 1998

This annual meeting of Civic Societies was held on 10th October in Horsham West Sussex. Horsham has a population of 40,000, a District Council, and a problem with the government's demand for an extra 9,000 houses to cover a 25% increase in households, occasioned by family break-ups. West Sussex has gone to appeal about the size of the housing demand on the county, so, to the disappointment of many members, the Senior Planning Officer for Surrey and Sussex had felt it inappropriate to give her talk.

The theme of the day was the management of development. Conservation was represented by a lively talk on medieval timber-framed houses hiding behind eighteenth century and later facades, now recognisable only by crawling through lofts. A town walk in the afternoon showed what attractive low-rise shops and buildings had been saved by this research, preserved among high commercial show-pieces.

For consultation on town development, Horsham has set up a Town Forum, consisting of representatives of residents, store managers, small retailers, police, consumer groups, voluntary groups and health authorities. Its task is to maintain, improve, manage and review the quality of communal life in the town. It has subcommittees on marketing the town, on transport, access and car parking, on signs and circulation, and monitors the town's health, population growth, redevelopment, shopping mix, empty offices, public transport, cycling, car parking and evening culture. It meets four times a year, has a small fund from the District Council for administration, and networks various interests to contribute to decision making.

The manager of a covered shopping centre gave a commercial view: of particular use had been the setting up of brown signs to points of interest, and 'shop mobility', the hiring out of wheel chairs, which had been well used. The Director of Environmental Services then outlined the need to sell the town

centre back to its residents, to market it, both as a shopping centre with a good mix of traditional open shopping and covered centres, and as a centre of interest with museum, arts centre and theatre, restaurants, especially continental, places of family entertainment, and facilities after 1 pm for young people. Horsham had inconspicuous CCTV, provided ample outdoor seating to prevent groups of youngsters looking threatening as they stood about, was encouraging better public transport into the town, and hoped to increase residence in the town centre.

The District Planning Officer then spoke of the problems raised by government expansion of housing. Their own calculations for the district showed by 2011 55% of new housing could be within towns and villages, but 2,300 would still have to be on greenfield sites; then John Prescott added 12,300 more; Horsham itself would have to accommodate 5-7000 on greenfield sites. The government's figures were upheld in judicial review, but the County was now appealing. Every cranny in towns would be used, but sites could be oddly shaped and difficult; the recycling of brownfield sites might involve contaminated land, and in the countryside such sites were often isolated. New settlements seemed a solution, but would involve major loss of countryside and a long timescale; in the end this might be more popular with the future residents. A council's task was no longer to predict and provide, but to plan, monitor and manage, and affordable housing must be part of the mix.

After town and country walks we met to discuss the geographical scope of Southern Comfort and its name, until Roger revealed the firm had once provided two bottles of its liquor for the occasion!). Should its boundaries be those of the Government Office Of the South East? Clearly whatever made it more compact would still involve a mix of tiny villages, small towns and great cities. At present it was decided to let our informal annual get-together remain informal, and Reading had volunteered to be host next year.

Betty Owen

Palmerston Folly Up for Auction

The News 1st October published this article under the banner headline: "A Fort with A View - Yours for £300,000": A silent sentinel which has guarded Portsmouth for more than a century is to be sold at auction.

Spit Bank Fort, one of the famous Palmerston's follies, is a tourist attraction with views of the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Spithead.

The granite and steel fort - about a mile from Portsmouth Harbour - is expected to fetch about £300,000 at auction in London later this month.

One of the bidders could be the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust, which is responsible for buildings inside Portsmouth naval base.

The trust wants to run day-trips to the fort from Southsea. Trust chief executive Peter Goodship said it had secured about £400,000 from English Heritage. He said it hoped to get a similar amount from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which this month turned down its bid for help with a £3m scheme to buy and repair the fort. The Trust also owns Horse Sand Fort, which is too far out to sea for this purpose.

Mr. Goodship said: 'Spit Bank is only a short hop from Southsea beach and we would be

able to run an excursion and a trip on the water at the same time. We haven't decided whether we will bid but we are still interested in acquiring the fort.'

Shaun Maguire, who has run a restaurant, disco and conference centre on the fort since buying it from the government 17 years ago, is retiring and has opted for an auction after failing to find a buyer elsewhere.

Spit Bank, which has a small two-bedroom flat on its roof, was built in the 1860s to guard against invasion from France. It is one of four Palmerston follies in the Solent, named after the prime minister who commissioned them.

Postscript: The auction was held at the London Churchill Inter-Continental Hotel in Portman Square on October 21, but the reserve price, which was revealed as £500,000, was not reached.

The Palmerston Fort Society were offered one of the forts by the MoD in the early 1980s - for £17,000!

Fort Cumberland - European Centre for Archaeology

Reproduced with permission from the Palmerston Forts Society News Nov. 98

Portsmouth is to become home to the largest archaeological centre in Western Europe under £2m plans to expand English Heritage's site at Eastney. English Heritage intend to open up the 18th Century Fort Cumberland in a future phase of development so that visitors can see the archaeologists at work.

About 55 staff scientists from the English Heritage Headquarters in London are planned to move to the Fort, increasing the total staff to 80 on site. Laboratories and office space will be created in refurbished existing buildings such as the two hundred year old storehouse/hospital.

Geoffrey Wainwright, Chief Archaeologist, said: "We are restructuring our organisation. We are creating nine regional centres from which we

are going to undertake our work... We want to put our archaeologists together at one site to ensure multi-disciplinary work. It will be a more effective and efficient organisation".

It is possible that a future phase of the development of Fort Cumberland, yet to be finalised, could create a visitor centre.

Fort Cumberland was built in the 1780s over approximately 24 acres of the Eastney Peninsular and is recognised as being one of the finest examples of 18th Century defence structures remaining in the UK.

English Heritage is responsible for securing the preservation of ancient monuments and historic buildings and promoting the public's enjoyment of them. English Heritage is funded by the government Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Modern Local Government

Earlier this year the government published a White Paper proposing changes in the way local government is run. Here is a brief review of the paper, taken from the National Council of Civic Trust Societies newsletter.

Sustainable development will be at the heart of council decision making and will provide an overall framework within which councils must perform all their existing functions. The Government intends to introduce legislation to place on councils a duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their ' areas.

Take me to your leader!

This is one of the key proposals in the Government's White Paper *Modern Local Government: in Touch with the People*. The new statutory duty will ensure that councils must at all times consider the long term well-being of their area.

Community Planning

The new duty includes a requirement for councils to secure a comprehensive strategy for the area's well-being - community planning.

'It is essential that there should be a clear and understandable strategy for every area. It should be developed with local people, local businesses and with public and voluntary sector bodies who operate in the local area.'

Councils' other plans (such as their strategies for education, local transport, or land use) must take account of this wider picture.

The Problems

Too often local people are indifferent about local democracy. The turnout at local elections is low (and has been getting lower). The White Paper says that this may reflect 'a culture of inwardness' among council members and officers - a paternalistic view based on what suits the council.

Political Structures

Arising from the Government's analysis of the problems are proposals to shake up the political management of councils.

'Traditional committee structures... lead to inefficient and opaque decision making. Significant decisions are, in many councils, taken behind closed doors by political groups or even a small group of key people within the majority group. Consequently, many

councillors, even those in the majority group, have little influence over council decisions.

'Councillors also spend too much time in committee meetings which, because the decisions have already effectively been taken, are unproductive. The evidence is that many wish to spend much more time in direct contact with those they represent... The emphasis ought to be on bringing the views of their community to bear on the council's decisions, and on scrutinising their performance.'

'Equality, there is little clear political leadership. This is not a reflection on the qualities of council leaders. It is caused by the structure in which they work.'

New Models

The Government's answer is the separation of the executive and backbench roles, widely adopted abroad. The executive role would be to propose the policy framework and implement policies within the agreed framework. Backbench councillors would represent their Constituents, share in the full council's policy and budget decisions, suggest policy improvements, and scrutinise the executive's policy proposals and their implementation.

New legislation will make a number of options available to councils. These include: a directly elected mayor with a cabinet; a directly elected mayor with a council manager; a leader, elected by the council, with a cabinet. All councils (except parish councils) will be required to prepare proposals for their decision-taking arrangements, based on these models, and a timetable for their implementation

A New Culture

These changes designed to make councillors more responsive to local views, and more effective, are only part of the renewal of local government proposed. Where the relationships between the council and its essential partners (business, voluntary organisations, and other public bodies) is weak the council cannot lead the community effectively. In the worst cases such an inward looking culture can open the door to corruption and wrongdoing.

Consultation

Renewal requires not only higher participation in local elections and new decision-making arrangements for councils, but also ways of promoting close and regular contact between

Modern Local Government (continued)

councils and local people between elections. Apart from elections the formal framework in which councils test public opinion is weak or non-existent.'

There will be a new statutory duty on councils to consult. The methods are not specified, although powers to hold local referenda will be confirmed in new legislation. It seems clear that the next year or two will see much effort devoted to experimenting with a range of consultation techniques.

'Modern Local Government: in Touch with the People' is available from HMSO (price £12.50) Tel. 0345 023474 Fax 0171 873 8200.

Gwen May

It is with great sadness that we report the death, after a long illness, of Gwen May - one of our longest serving members. Her family have kindly allowed us to publish a poem written by her daughter Caroline which paints a picture of the lady we shall greatly miss.

Gwendoline Elizabeth

She taught me how to dance
At 3 years old
To Carmina Burana.

No, she didn't teach me how to dance.... She
made dancing part of my life.

She showed me how to talk to people. How to
look into their faces,
And to really want to know them.
Because other people were as interesting to her as
herself.

She taught me how to love life, How to look at the
world and see it as good, To trust people and
believe them to be sincere.

She even managed to keep seeing life as good
When Parkinson's Disease took her and bent her
over like a hawthorn tree on the moors.

She showed me how to enjoy crying, As much as
laughing, (which she also did a lot).
Because she wasn't afraid of her emotions.
She let them run through her
like dancing
like music.

She passed on to me a delight in small children.
And this interest in the developing mind has given
me, like her, a career which is more than a job.
It has given me work which is one of the most
enjoyable aspects of my life.

She had this the secret of a balanced life the ability
to enjoy her work and play with equal enthusiasm.

Gwendoline Elizabeth
a beautiful name
an outstanding mother
a Woman to remember.

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 2nd December at 7.30pm

Christmas Lecture

David Lloyd, architectural historian, Revising Pevsner (Buildings of England) in Hampshire.

Friday 11th December at 1.00pm

1998 Design Awards Ceremony

Unveiling of plaques by the Lord Mayor

2.15 pm - MRF Quartermaine Road

1.15 pm - Admiral Lord Nelson School

3.00 pm - St Andrew's Church, Henderson Road, Eastney.

All members are welcome to attend. Come and see the buildings for yourselves!

Wednesday 3rd February at 7.30pm

Review of the 1998 Design Awards

Hear from the judges how they reached their decisions.

Wednesday 3rd March at 7.30pm

Interesting the younger generation

Wednesday 7th April at 7.30pm

Annual General Meeting & open discussion

A chance to air your views and discuss any issues concerning the society.

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.
