
Portsmouth Society News

The newsletter of the Portsmouth Society - April 1999

The Tower

The long running saga of the Millennium Tower seems to be dissolving into farce. Since our last newsletter it has been announced in The News that the plan now is for a consortium of four firms to construct and operate it - and not just the tower, free-fall jumps and other 'attractions'. Much still needs to be done. As far as we know the Millennium Commission have not finally agreed the funding. The plan for the tower itself is not complete and when it is a new planning application will be required. The Transport and Works Act authority to build it in the harbour has been applied for (by Berkeleys on behalf of the City Council) and objected to by us among at least seven others.

On 23 April the Secretary of State was due to decide whether to judge the matter by means of a public inquiry or by written submissions as he did for the Gunwharf application; but he cannot decide until the planning application has been granted.

Completion 2001!

We have been given an unofficial estimate that the tower is unlikely to be completed before the summer of 2001. It had been considered vital that it be ready for construction before the piling for Gunwharf is finished. Otherwise the piling contractors now at work there in a big way will have to go away and come back again, adding enormously to the cost.

Cold Feet

Last summer, the Berkeley Festival Waterfront Company who had been selected as designer, builder, and operator of the tower, got cold feet and withdrew from the building and operating part of it when the estimate for visitor attendance was almost halved; but they left £3 million in the kitty as their contribution. The planning application was submitted at the end of last year but has still not been to the planning committee. the necessary Transport & Works



I hope I make it in time!

Act permission (necessary because the tower too is to be in the harbour), has been applied for

Contracts not finalised

As far as we know the details of the tower are still not settled. The contracts have not been tied up with the four members of the consortium who are Buigues (the large French construction firm), the specialists in bungee jumps and stunts of that sort, the experts in leisure provision, and the financiers and providers of some of the capital. There has been no official information

In this issue: Southsea Water Pollution, Camber Sheds, City Centre (North) Planning Brief, The Incinerator, Local Transport Plan, LRT, McDonalds, Park Building, Towards 2000, ...

The Tower (continued)

about the progress of the tower since our last newsletter but we have heard from two sources within the council that there is now a distinct possibility that the tower will not go ahead.

Build the tower on land?

We have had no authoritative answer to the question why not build the tower on land except that Berkeleys seem very much to be dissociating themselves from the tower and may not want it on their land. Building on land would (a) be cheaper, (b) avoid the necessity for a T&W Act application and would be aesthetically more pleasing in that it could be lined up with the Millennium Boulevard planned to continue the line of Park Road.

Millennium Commission

According to a 'reliable source' the Millennium Commission are thought to be divided among themselves between those who think they should pursue all the projects to the end no matter what the difficulties and those who think they should cut, when they run into trouble and give the money saved to the Dome which needs more.

They are also "impaled on the horns of a dilemma"(!) in that from the start they have always insisted that the projects should be commercial to the extent of being self-supporting, but not so commercial that they make a lot of money for their developers on the strength of publicly subscribed capital. With the bunjee jump and all that Portsmouth is dangerously near to the latter, they think.

Southsea Beach Water Pollution

In March the Environmental Forum were given a detailed presentation about the works that had been done to try to locate the source of pollution of the sea water in the vicinity of South Parade Pier. There was a 'hot spot' on the south west side of the pier near the sixth column from the shore. In spite of the work that had been done in repairing and replacing nearby sewers on land this had consistently remained the spot for the highest concentration of E. coli, the bacteria which of themselves were usually fairly harmless but acted as a marker of animal or human faecal contamination.

The Forum were given an outline of the geology of the area from which it transpired that the official theory is that somewhere in the region north of Granada Road (we were told that nearer possible sources had been eliminated) there is a blocked and broken house drain which is leaking into the subsoil. The escaped sewage tracks along the subterranean clay layer which

surfaces a short distance out to shore and makes its presence felt there.

In answer to a question, Malcolm Hill of ERASE was told that there is a low level of coliform bacteria along the rest of Southsea. He asked how it got there and the answer was that it poses no kind of threat to health. The suggestion was made that the possibility that the long sea outfall was the source of at least some of the trouble had been ruled out too early. The degree of dilution was admittedly enormous but the outfall discharges particulate matter which tends to aggregate rather than disperse.

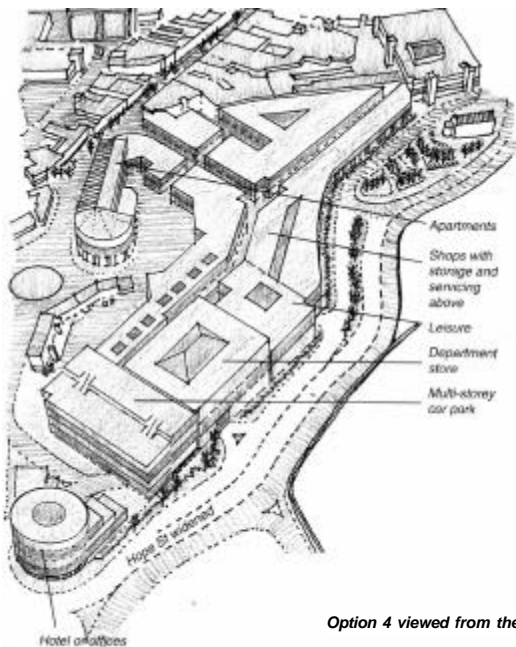
The question was also raised at the Forum: had they measured the level of the contamination further out at sea at intervals from the shore as indication of the possibility of pollution from the gyre or more directly from the Ryde outfall? No, they hadn't.

St James's Park

The group under the chairmanship of Dr Caroline Scott who are working towards buying for the public that part of the St. James's grounds which are at present designated for housing is now the St. James's Park Trust. The process of applying for a lottery grant for this purpose is very tedious and we have met a lot

of obstruction. For example we were required to get a professional valuation. It took six months to get the funding for a professional valuer and then another six months to get permission from the Health Authority for our valuer to go on the site! We hope we are slowly getting there. Dr David Bellamy has agreed to be our patron.

City Centre (North) Planning Brief



Option 4 viewed from the north

We have discussed at some length the recently published planning brief for the redevelopment of the northern part of the city centre. That is the area from the Tricorn to the Mile End roundabout. There are four options. The first two involve demolishing the Tricorn and retaining Market Way, the other two more ambitious ones close and perhaps build over Market Way at the same time widening Hope Street alongside the Dockyard wall to a dual lane dual carriageway either by demolishing the very successful Pitt Street Gymnastics Centre or by taking a bite out of the dockyard wall.

Some of us are doubtful about the need for all this shopping in view of the huge expansion of Southampton centre already under way, not to mention Whiteley, Fareham and Gunwharf. Where are all the shoppers coming from? We have written a letter of cautious support, insisting on three things: that the new development must be of the highest quality of design and materials; that if Pitt Street is to be closed as a gymnastics centre it must be replaced to the full - and more - and at the developers' expense and a new use found for the old building; and that it is vital to get the transport arrangements right. We need

City Centre (North) Planning Brief (continued)

to cash in on the huge advantage Portsmouth has over its neighbours, in having the motorway coming right into the centre, by building an exciting centre to greet you when you get there. The DCMS have told us that Pitt Street's immunity to listing had now expired. We have also heard from the Sports and Arts Fund who

granted £450,000 to enable Pitt Street to be restored and converted that their grant is repayable unless the facility is transferred to another site. At the meeting of Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust on 19 March, Chairman Dudley Keep signed a letter of objection to the draft plan if it involves demolition of Pitt St.

The Incinerator

As we reported last time, very soon after we heard news of the application to build an energy-from-waste incinerator on the site of the old one which is still standing in Quatremaire Road we decided to position ourselves against it. Together with Friends of the Earth and some others we formed a small group called Ban the Burner to educate the public and councillors about it.

We were introduced to Phil Shiner, a Birmingham lawyer, who makes a speciality of fighting environmental cases. With his fees paid by Friends of the Earth Phil Shiner has convinced and reassured councillors of all parties and the officers who were afraid that if the Council refused planning permission there would be an appeal that they would lose. With no fewer than nine legal reasons Shiner has convinced them that the opposite is the case. Indeed it is their duty to refuse permission. Much of this is European and case law which up to now has been ignored by judges and planning officers alike.

We know that not all of our members are convinced that it is right to oppose the burner.

You ask quite reasonably what do we do instead? There is no simple answer but we have convinced ourselves that there is a good one. It means taking recycling, reuse and composting much more seriously and involves the adjoining boroughs in taking care of some of their own waste. At present Portsmouth disposes of all the waste from Fareham, Gosport and Havant as well as some from East Hampshire. There will of course be also some landfill or rather land build-up of the tip at Paulsgrove whose life has been prolonged. At present there is an unexplained lull.

Planning permission has been applied for but not brought to committee. The necessary licence from the Environment Agency (successors to the National Rivers Authority and H.M. Inspectorate of Pollution) has only just been applied for, although it has been expected for six months, and may be something of a formality. According to Shiner neither the EA nor its predecessor the HMIP has ever refused a licence nor an incinerator. But they too have been made aware of Shiner's powerful legal case against incinerators.

Towards 2000 and Beyond

More than a year ago we were asked for our views on a planning brief with this title about the southern part of the city centre; we sent in a lot of ideas. Quite suddenly action is to be taken on some of it. That junction just north of the station which notoriously keeps everybody - cars and pedestrians at a standstill is to be reorganised this summer.

Car traffic will be east-west only between Stanhope Road and Station Street. Only buses will be allowed under the railway bridge. Entrance to the station will still be open via Isambard Brunel Road and Station Street. The junction is to be made the centre of a new square. Again we are being cautiously supportive and again emphasising quality of design for the new square.

Maintenance of Council Owned Property

We have continued to be concerned at the deteriorating state of city-owned buildings especially Priory School, a listed building, and the north side of Pitt Street Gymnastic Centre. Too little is allocated in budgets to carry out adequate maintenance.

Minor and cheap-to-repair but potentially damaging defects such as blocked gutters and leaking downpipes are neglected simply because the particular building is not at the top of the list of priority. priority.

URBAN LIVING "Putting the Heart back into our towns & cities"

Portsmouth combined with Southampton and Hampshire to sponsor this one day conference in Winchester in October.

The conference was chaired by well known planner David Hall and started with a challenging contribution from former Secretary of State for the Environment John Gummer who set the scene by stating that the need for 4.4 million new homes was a robust estimate and was going to have to be addressed by cramming more people into existing cities. Around 60% of these dwellings would be to cater for the rapidly increasing number of people living alone and desiring to reside close to work, amenities and entertainments. Cities should have their own character; a "sense of place".

Brown Fields Sites

Gummer suggested that this could be significantly achieved by redeveloping redundant land (i.e. the Marine Barracks, Fratton Goodsyrd & the Gunwharf Site) known as "brown fields sites".

Bill Stevenson, MD of Bellway Urban Renewal gave a gung-hopresentation of how his company has undertaken several regeneration projects but not many in the South of England. What this teased out as the day progressed was that whilst there are a vast amount of "brown fields" they tend to be in the North and people wanted to live in the south so the likelihood was that there is still need for greenfield development. People from Eagle Star grabbed the opportunity to remind the conference of the plans for Micheldever new town.

Alan Whitehead

Former leader of Southampton City Council, Alan Whitehead, now MP for Southampton Test reminded the conference that it was the Department of the Environment that had approved many out of town shopping projects on appeal including that at Segensworth which had been opposed by all Hampshire authorities and caused significant diversion of trade from existing commercial centres.

The economic case for revitalising towns was to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and capital facilities such as schools and hospitals but that towns had to be pleasant places where people would be from choice. There was a need for social housing schemes yet the Housing Corporation which should act as a catalyst for these was strapped for cash.

Alan lamented that parks were out of fashion and that there was a real need to "green cities" perhaps by developing linear parks (e.g. Hilslea Lines which has just obtained Lottery funding and encouragement for the Milton folk who are trying to take over some of the St. James' Hospital site for a park). As a member of the Parliamentary Select Committee for Housing Alan had toured the Penbury development sponsored

by the Prince of Wales and was surprised that he found it so pleasant as he had gone determined to hate it! As an aside he mentioned during his speech that Southampton is experimenting with turning street lights round to light pavements rather than roads. (The writer is seeking more information about this).

Representatives from market researchers Llewellyn-Davies stated that the consultants had undertaken a range of Hampshire wide surveys about how cities could be made the "place of choice to live" which had highlighted that people were looking for space, privacy and safety.

SE Hampshire Partnership

Martin Dennison, Urban Regeneration Manager for the SE Hampshire Partnership spoke of 200 projects worth £24m over a 10 year programme (nb all this public money under the control of a Quango which is only accountable to a government department and not through the ballot box!) He exemplified 18 practical things that could be done to work with communities and stressed the need to get communities involved citing Landport as a good example. Portsmouth was praised for the Empty Property Campaign which has helped bring many properties back into use.

Urban Deprivation

Judith Smyth, a management consultant and the Chair of the Portsmouth & SE Hants Health Authority spoke about urban deprivation caused by the concentration of the poor which is manifest in areas without facilities and banks and above average health problems. Judith who clearly loves living in central Southsea spoke enthusiastically about the need for diversity in cities with a mixture of housing types and tenure and the need for art and design. Guildford's Development Control Officer, Simon Birch (ex Hants CC Planning Dept) spoke of the need to allow some development in the Green Belt and of the difficulties of dealing with the five-car owning household and BANANAs (build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone).

Pride of Place

Michael Gwilliam from the Civic Trust finished the presentations calling for the planning system to be positive to encourage debate, for residents to have a sense and a "pride of place", for urban regeneration, some greenfield development and of the tremendous scope to provide accommodation within existing suburbs through less regulation for back yard development and dividing large premises.

Reflections of the day

Some general reflections of the day of particular relevance to the Portsmouth Society:

The PS Executive Committee have been noting for some time that every list of planning applications for Portsmouth contains bids to create more dwellings

through new construction and/or conversion so our City is already being crammed. Also, there is an increasing concern that in trying to hasten the administrative processing of applications planners are overlooking the opportunity to influence architectural, design and environmental considerations which

create the "sense of place" for those who have to live in and with the buildings.

Regarding "sense of place" considerations it would be good if Judith Smyth could be invited to re run her conference presentation at one of the PS monthly meetings. C. M. Burns

The Park Building, King Henry Street

The Society is objecting strongly to the University's proposals to change the Park Building, the very fine building by G.E. Smith behind the Guildhall. It was the original Municipal College. We are particularly concerned about the changes proposed for the Upper Hall which is the most important Edwardian 'civic' space/hall remaining in the city. It is a listed building and alterations do require the consent of the City Council.

The proposal is to change the hall into a lecture theatre with raked seating fixed to the side walls, acoustic baffles on walls and ceiling, with removal of the chandeliers into 'safe storage'. The parquet floor also is to be covered over. The scheme, like most of the recent changes to the building, fights against its existing features and character. The acoustic wall panels will hide the pilasters, and the acoustic ceiling baffles will hide the decorative plaster work. Much less damage would be done by installing retractable seating as is done in many multi-use halls, notably in the new Admiral Lord Nelson School.

If a new lecture theatre of this size is needed we would ask the University to consider first other possibilities, for example the Theatre Royal and the

now empty Territorial Army Drill Centre, which would accommodate two theatres of this size

The Society were very upset some years ago by the way the splendid main staircase was ruined by the unimaginative installation of the lift. (The architects rejected the obvious solution of a glass lift in the well of the stairs, because it would look like a supermarket! Have they been to the Royal Academy?) We are very keen that this important building should not be further damaged. We urge that in future work on historic buildings the University engage architects experienced in this kind of adaptation and go to see how it is managed in other places.

If these proposed changes are allowed, almost the only remaining area to give any indication of the civic pride that inspired the original Municipal College will be lost and trivialised. The University will lose a hall for entertaining, for examinations (which may well return in force in the future) and for music. The citizens of Portsmouth will lose part of their civic history which ought to be made more accessible to them by the University which is custodian of this listed building, part of Portsmouth's and their own history.

LRT

Charles Burns has been active on the Society's part, representing us at the recent public inquiry and putting forward the view that it would be better to leave the tunnel under the Harbour to a later stage in view of its cost which is disproportionate to the rest of the scheme. He advocated that the section from the Gosport Ferry terminal to Fareham Station should be constructed first together with arrangements to continue the light rail vehicles on to Southampton via the existing heavy rail route with extra stops. With a short new rail link at Eastleigh the heavy rail trains could then go from Fareham to Southampton via Eastleigh and Southampton Parkway, giving Portsmouth passengers direct access to Southampton airport.

Drawing on his own experience taking his bicycle on the Isle of Wight railway, Charles was able to interest the inspector at the inquiry in the advantages to be gained by allowing bikes on the LRT trams, a possibility hitherto ruled out by the promoters of the scheme.

New Road School

We reported last time that Mick Morris, the architect of the St. Andrew's Church conversion had, with a developer, put in a bid to convert New Road School. His bid has been neither accepted nor refused. His scheme would divide the building vertically into 10 or 11 dwellings, some on one floor, some partly on two, each with a car park space and a bit of individual garden. The car approach would be through the two accesses from Balliol Road.

The Society has always stood for conservation of old buildings where a good use could be found for them. Instead the Council are applying for planning permission to demolish the school and advertising for offers to replace the front half with 12 flats, removing the distinctive cottagey front with its little tower. We understand that the north half of the site would be a relocation for the centre for those with learning difficulties at present in Dundas Lane. We are opposing this plan.

Local Agenda 21

The motivation of our Society is local pride and enhancing the positive value of local character and identity. This is the special strength of the local amenity society movement. There are about 900 societies throughout the country.

Local Agenda 21 was intended to offer opportunities for local communities and local authorities to develop sustainable policies. Research by South Bank University shows that discussions of sustainable development by the public are informed and detailed. However planning documents and development plans have very limited sections on sustainable development. This suggests that much of the public's values and opinions on environmental

values are not being translated into planning policies and certainly not being implemented through land use policy.

There have been Focus Groups, Citizens's Juries, Visioning, profiling etc. across the country between local authorities and their electorate under the auspices of sustainable development and Local Agenda 21. These participation methods have been promoted as a vehicle for empowering people and democratizing policy-making.

Local Agenda 21 was intended for us; yet we and the Portsmouth Environmental Forum have heard nothing from the City Council about Portsmouth's efforts for Local Agenda 21 for at least a year.

The Local Transport Plan

In January Charles and Roger attended a conference called jointly by the Civic Trust, Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000 to alert voluntary organisations throughout the country to the opportunities being held out by the Government's new plans for local transport. The Government means business in giving a new look to transport planning. In producing the new

plans local authorities are obliged to set themselves targets such as reducing vehicular traffic and improving conditions for pedestrians which should be of a form that they could be measured for success. We were urged to let our councils know that we intended to prod them, ask them what they proposed and see that they prepared plans on a 5-year rolling programme.

The first draft has to be submitted to the DETR by July 1999. It would include travel choice, traffic management & demand restraint, integrated transport and integration with wider policies. We are

particularly urged to check that initiatives in other council departments such as economic development and tourism do not undermine efforts to reduce car use.

We have set up a small subgroup together with Friends of the Earth and the Bus Action Group, to meet regularly, tell the council what we are doing in keeping a watch on what they are doing, and ask that we be allowed to speak to Neighbourhood Forums. At its first meeting the group decided to ask for a meeting with the City Engineer to discuss all this; but he replied that public consultation would take place only after the publication of the plan which only councillors would be consulted about. We have written to Jim Patey (8 March), chairman of the T & T committee pointing out that this is contrary to Government Policy which is that there should public consultation before the plan is decided on. We have asked to see him and the City Engineer but have had no reply so far.

Gunwharf Residential Development

When the planning permission was given last summer for the Gunwharf development, the residential part on the south-west frontage of the scheme was left out. On the insistence of English Heritage this part of the scheme was sent back for re-design. New architects were to be selected from a small number nominated by agreement between English Heritage and the City Council. John Thompson were the firm chosen and their designs are now on display for approval.

Our committee found them disappointing. At first sight there is not much difference. The striking thing

is that the style of architecture is the same. On close inspection there is improvement in that the new buildings will better open up the view of the Vulcan building, the ancient monument, from the water and from the Millennium promenade. But we hoped for more than this. We hoped for a building that would make a sparkling statement on this waterfront site.

We still think it would be possible to devise a design that would by contrast in style make a show for itself and at the same time show off the Vulcan. We also want to see a restaurant incorporated at the north-west corner of this new building commanding the marvellous view across the harbour in the north-westerly direction.

McDonalds at Cosham

The planning officer had recommended acceptance of McDonald's application for a drive-through restaurant on the old pumping station site at Portsmouth Road, Cosham, because he expected, rightly as it turned out, that a refusal would be overturned at appeal. The Society supported the residents in opposing the application and the councillors, sticking to their guns, refused permission. McDonalds then appealed and there was a public inquiry at which Roger James appeared for the Society. Our grounds of objection were that the simultaneous exit and entrance on to four lanes of traffic would cause dangerous chaos. The appeal, as the planning officer had predicted, was allowed.

This is one of several instances where the government has been saying one thing and then doing another.

The Camber Sheds

The row of eight industrial sheds on the north shore of the Camber are no beauties but they are reminder of the Camber's industrial past. The council owns them and the estates officer wants to pull six of them down, alleging that they have outlived their natural life - fifty years being more than enough for corrugated iron. It so happens that corrugated iron was invented in Portsmouth and the oldest corrugated iron building in the world, the old fire station, still stands in the Dockyard.

As the sheds are in a Conservation Area the government guidance applies: buildings in CAs should not be demolished until plans for replacement have been agreed. It was on the strength of this that we objected to demolition knowing that the council would have to refer to Government Office of the South East (GOSE) for conservation area consent. This was at once given without question. We had hoped for a public inquiry in which the conflicting needs of the existing industrial tenant, repair or replacement of the buildings, and the tourist potential of the area as well as the enjoyment it brings to Portsmouth citizens could all be aired and resolved. Nearby are the sheds in Broad Street occupied by the very popular preserved public transport division; but they too are under sentence. They have too have to vacate their premises. There is much to be discussed. But no, in spite of the rhetoric, no public consultation!

Theatre Royal

We are delighted to see much more activity, including much needed repairs, in the Theatre Royal after the half life of many years. Perhaps we should hold a fund-raising event for it as we did for St. Judes.

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 all.

Wednesday 5th May

Paul Quinn on

THE REBUILDING OF THE RAGGED SCHOOL

Wednesday 2nd June

Paul Newbold, City Planning Officer on

THE CITY PLAN

Wednesday 7th July

Dr Steven Cope on

EXECUTIVE MAYORS AND LOCAL CABINETS

Wednesday 14th July

A WALK AROUND PETERSFIELD

Meet at the Railway Station at 7pm.

(Train from Ports Harbour 18:20, P&S 18:25, Fratton 18:28, Havant 18:39 - arr 18:54)

Wednesday 6th October

Speaker to be announced.

Portsmouth 2000

Last November Celia gathered together a group to organise a **Millenium Exhibition** in St. Agatha's Church in mid July 2000 - to celebrate the buildings and sounds of Portsmouth.

Anybody who has any expertise in organising exhibitions or can help would be very welcome to join us. Contact Celia Clark for more details.

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.

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