

Portsmouth Society Annual Report 2007-8

Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Consultations	1
Your City, Your Future – the Society's Core Strategy Submission	1
Blue Skies Thinking - Vision for the mid-21st century	3
Vision for Portsmouth	3
Developments – Portsmouth Football Club	3
'Northern Quarter'	4
Tipner Regeneration Masterplan	6
Planning white paper to cut local control – and put us out of a job!	6
New projects: Portsmouth Harbour, the Isle of Wight and Spithead as a World Heritage Site?	6
Hilsea Lido	7
The Pyramids	7
Transport	8
Wymering Manor and Buckingham House	8
Design Awards	8
The work of the Executive Committee and the website	8

Introduction

Planning events for the Society to respond to this year have been dramatic: controversial proposals for a new Pompey football stadium, for the 'Northern Quarter' – the site of the Tricorn, and for Tipner. Under way are large developments in Portsea including the elegant tower and massive block of flats adjacent to the dockyard wall. We have a new Planning subcommittee which works well in monitoring proposed change, large and small. Members of the Society have also been active in implementing their own initiatives. In advance of the Quirk report on the disposal of local authority assets to local groups, the Hilsea Lido Pool for the People group to take on Hilsea Lido was set up with brilliant media coverage, and this March the Save the Pyramids group conducted a successful campaign to reverse the council's proposed immediate closure, to allow a year's grace to put together a repair plan involving user groups in its management.

An even more ambitious proposal involving five local authorities and civic societies around Portsmouth Harbour and Spithead is to inscribe this precious cultural seascape as the first on the World Heritage list. After a year's preparatory work at the end of January 2008 over 150 delegates from a wide range of organisations representing local government, heritage bodies, companies, property / landowners, community groups, and local societies attended the launch of the World Heritage site in Boathouse 6. The launch followed closely on the good news of the Heritage Lottery Fund's massive grant for a new museum for the Mary Rose. Many offered their support to the campaign. The city's and News's campaign to retain the naval base in Portsmouth was successful, and new development by very large private firms: BAE and VT Shipbuilding continues inside the dockyard.

The city also lost an irreplaceable old friend: Pitt Street Baths, which we saved from demolition in 1985, now destroyed for an unnecessarily wide tranche of approach roads to the 'Northern Quarter'. The Odeon cinema is likely to go too, though we are pressing for the entrance tower to be retained in the residential redevelopment – as has been done in Streatham High Road. The Carlton in Cosham closed too.

Consultations

On the whole it has been a year of consultations where the consultees usually feel they have been ignored....The Creative Thinker initiative looked promising, but seemed to come to a stop with no commitment by the council to take its recommendations further. We are pleased to learn that more will now be done. We look forward to working more closely with the Cultural Forum on this and other initiatives. There is a proposal to establish a Cultural Centre, but we feel this should not come before essential maintenance of the city's historic properties.

Your City, Your Future – the Society's Core Strategy Submission

This year the City Council's Planning Policy team produced and consulted about three options but with the sub text of how the City is to respond in a sustainable way to the South East Plan requirement to provide 14700 homes by 2026. The consultation offered choice between "green development" concentrating development on the main transport spines, "dispersed development" - really the status

quo or the “balanced approach”; or a combination of the other two. We recognised that the consultation was to respond to government dictate, so decided not to be constrained by the options. A subcommittee of the Society was set up to consider the consultation document. This is a summary of their proposals and comments.

Accessibility Commuting should be minimised but the City must be accessible and safe to move around in by different modes (walking, cycling, bus, train, taxi and ferry). We ask for the monorail proposal not to be abandoned and we support a reincarnation of the LRT. Seamless travel can be achieved by integrated ticketing (e.g. the Oyster Card) and the City should be working with and encouraging neighbouring PUSH authorities set up a Transport Authority/Executive. Rail is an under used asset. A park & ride station at Farlington, and other stations at Paulsgrove, Copnor & Westleigh (in Havant) are needed. New waterborne links across the Harbour would tap into an almost ignored resource.

Housing A proper assessment of infrastructure needs wherever housing is approved. High quality design should be required for ALL developments, which should also incorporate use of renewable energy. A range of housing is needed to suit a wide social mix and minimum space standards for all new housing, public or private should be introduced. Guidance and help to refurbish existing housing stock is needed. Some housing will be built on ‘flood risk’ areas, but the city council should require those to be designed to be ‘flood friendly’.

Regeneration Efforts should be dispersed across the City, targeting needs where ever they are. A culture-and-heritage-led regeneration should be adopted as an appropriate strategy for relevant areas. Large redevelopment schemes such as the Northern Quarter must contain a cultural element. The city should welcome opportunities for mixed use development, especially residential, cultural and commercial development, as we are so short of land.

Employment The Naval Base should be retained as an employment site. Policies should encourage expansion of commercial dock activities and marine industry as military uses diminish. The existing spread of employment sites should be kept but allow some mixed use developments so long as employment space is retained. Flexibility is required to respond to changing employment needs. The major employment opportunities by 2030 are likely to be in jobs which haven’t yet been invented. High-tech industries should be encouraged. An adequate supply of start up and move on business premises are needed to encourage entrepreneur set ups.

Retail and Town Centres The existing City Centre boundaries should remain and Gunwharf declared a separate Town Centre. The Hard interchange, Brunel House and Portsmouth Harbour station need redevelopment. Robust retail policies are needed to support Southsea, North End, Cosham and local centres. The present policy, sympathetic towards permitting single stand-alone retail developments, should be cancelled as it is causing an outbreak of stand-alone convenience stores which are undermining sub-centres (e.g.Lidl and Tesco Express).

Leisure, Culture, Tourism & Seafront. An emphasis on family provision, with facilities for young & old is needed. A culture-led strategy should develop a modern studio theatre & ice rink. There should be a development levy to fund public art. We also need an outdoor swimming pool, opportunities for adult education and flexible multi-use spaces.

An independent Public Art Panel is needed to review proposals before they are implemented. Local residents should be encouraged to explore and enjoy the rich variety of natural, built and cultural environments - this should be a target for the Education authority. Other tourist and educational themes should be developed, e.g. a celebration of Owen’s Southsea. Heritage, architecture and literary trails should be identified. There should be a robust Policy to maintain the City council owned heritage estate including Southsea Castle, the Round Tower, Square Tower, Cumberland House and the forts on Portsdown Hill. The Core Strategy should include the current Sea Front Strategy where we need a much higher standard of new development.

There is a need for a city centre hotel/conference centre. The need for a maintenance plan for all city assets including those on the seafront should be a stated objective within the capital and revenue budget. All parks in the city should be retained and made more attractive for all age groups

Built environment including development control policies and maintenance of historic buildings. The city needs a Heritage Strategy. Since much of our tourism is focussed on the historic environment, efforts should be made to ensure that historic buildings are properly and regularly maintained. There should be more conservation areas. An urban designer should be reappointed and design education bought in for the planning staff. Architects’ Panel recommendations should rarely be overturned. The City Vision centre - a giant model of the city which would be used to discuss proposed new developments with local people – should be a stated objective of the plan.

Archaeology must be acknowledged and funded as a planning function. We believe that the city's physical history is being destroyed in the process of redevelopment. An archaeologist should be appointed. Developers for larger schemes (over 10 residential units) must undertake neighbourhood consultation. The city should develop a Tall Buildings Policy as recommended by English Heritage. There should be a presumption that developments where there will be shared maintenance are set up as Commonholds.

The planners are currently considering all the responses with the aim of producing a 'final option' for consultation during the autumn of 2008 so members need to be watching out for that.

Blue Skies Thinking - Vision for the mid-21st century

The recommended 'think tank' looking at the city's direction should be set up immediately, drawing in creative people from all sectors who have a vision and commitment to the city's future. PCC should explore with local people the cultural and heritage regeneration possibilities of culture- and heritage-led regeneration in the World Heritage Site.

We would like to see the Isle of Wight car ferry terminal moved from Old Portsmouth to the Ferry Port, thereby saving more than 1,000,000 vehicles having to pass round the city Centre each year. The city council should revisit the idea of reclaiming the Winner Bank and consider using the Langstone Harbour tidal race to generate electricity. The city council should facilitate the transfer of Hilsea Lido to the specially formed community group, and support the potential for locating a Centre for Local Climate change there or another suitable site.

Vision for Portsmouth

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), a group of major service providers including the City Council, Police and Health together with business, voluntary and community representation who are responsible for preparing, approving and monitoring the delivery of the Community Strategy linking in with government funding delivered through Local Area Agreements, has been consulting about a replacement community strategy for the 10 years starting 2009. We were dismayed that what was meant to be a visioning process eventually delivered ten objectives which do little more than state the delivery of good services to the whole community which is what our public services should be doing in any case.

However, all is not lost because the City's new head of Cultural services, Steven Bailey funded the 'Creative Thinker' research to try and bring together a range of ideas as to how arts and leisure could help regenerate the City, but the responses and eventual report went much further than this and cut across and fundamentally challenged the LSP's visioning process. The present position is that the LSP has agreed and confirmed the 10 headline objectives for the new Community Strategy which enables the partners to negotiate the three year LAA with the Government Office of the South East but the LSP is considering how the final document to be published later in the year can reflect more of the visioning which happened during the consultation and been mirrored through the Creative Thinker process.

It is interesting to note that the Isle of Wight LSP has just launched its Eco Isle Community Strategy to a packed and enthusiastic conference where government agendas and LAA's did not get a single mention.

Developments – Portsmouth Football Club

The new owner of Portsmouth Football Club wanted a brand new stadium, something special, not in the concrete jungle of Fratton. The club proposed to build a huge block of 1400 flats with a stadium inside, completely filling the Hard in Portsea. The building which would have ranged from 11 storeys to 22 storey in four sloping walls was designed by world famous Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron who transformed Giles Gilbert Scott's Bankside power station into the Tate Modern. The developers were Sellars, one of the largest privately owned property companies in the country, who already had interests in Pompey Village. As far as we know, this was the biggest development ever proposed in the city. Four of the Executive Committee met Peter Storrie, Chief Executive / general manager of Portsmouth Football Club in June to find out more detail. Single aspect flats on three sides wrapped round the stadium, connected by two bridges to an outer ring of flats; a new stadium for 36,000 people with 785 parking spaces underneath; total provision 1400 for residents and 300 for match days. The Warrior would have been dwarfed by its huge neighbour and displaced northwards inside the Historic Dockyard. The Hard was to get a new bus station with a large public piazza on top, and a 'town beach' with tidal access for boats under a bridge replaced the ancient public landing place on the Hard. Relocation of Gosport Ferry at end of the stadium was one option, and Gosport waterfront was to have a new complex to enhance the other side of the harbour. They claimed that the scheme for 850 homes adjacent to the stadium for which they had planning permission did not stack up financially –

they couldn't find a developer to do it. They were to apply for planning permission at the same time for a new scheme for 600 houses and flats in Fratton designed by MAKE Architects. As 60% of Portsmouth Football Club supporters live on Portsea Island, the club gave itself the four years taken to build the stadium and flats to break people's habits and re-educate the fans that they can't come to matches by car. They were considering ferries from Clarence Pier and South Parade Pier.

The Society was impressed by the club's ambition, but, like many others, was fiercely opposed to losing one of the best public views in Portsmouth for private profit. Mick Morris's perspectives gave some idea of the huge scale and bulk of the flats. How much did we value the Hard as it is - with all its traditions and the wonderful panorama which opens as you pass through the pinch point at the end of Queen Street between the Ship & Castle (the first building the Society saved) and the Victory Gate? Warrior would no longer have been visible, and one of our greatest views - ships large and small passing against Gosport's backdrop would have been taken away for ever. It is true, however, that the Portsmouth Harbour station and some sections of the Hard, particularly Brunel House are shabby and in desperate need of investment. Buildings by great architects are thin on the ground too. The proposal raised our ambition to see brilliantly designed structures which enhance the public realm - as is likely to happen with the new harbour transport interchange at Ryde by London Eye designers, Marks Barfield. Luckily, the navy eventually voiced their operational and security concerns following the government's decision to make the Royal Navy in Portsmouth the home base for two new super aircraft carriers and several Type 45 destroyers. The Queen's Harbour Master would not have been able to see his domain which stretches to the east of the Isle of Wight - and the plan was dropped. Unfortunately it delayed the Naval Base Property Trust's launch of their scheme for the reuse of Boathouse 4 by Eric Parry Associates.

In autumn 2007 Portsmouth Football Club and Sellar Property Group announced that their new plans for a new 36,000-capacity waterfront stadium and residential development on 30 acres of Horsea Island, the majority owned by the navy and council. The new site is only half a mile from the M275 and the interchange with the M27, easing traffic pressure on the city centre. The club plans to build new access roads and create bridge and pedestrian connections to assist with matchday spectator flow. Around 1,500 new homes are planned as part of the stadium development. No dredging and no reclamation of land from the sea would be necessary. The club's website shows the island divided into three: the easternmost labeled 'Enabling development', the centre 'Diving School Zone' and the western end, by the M275 as 'Stadia Zone'. The reclaimed land to the north including the 'Alps' is labelled 'Public Open Space'. "By putting in a bridge for buses, cycles and pedestrians from Tipner to Horsea Island, we will open a link between Port Solent and the northern perimeter of Portsmouth. That's something that the council have always wanted. There will also be significant park and ride spaces on both sides of the water. The new site fits all the criteria as before and, in addition, creates new opportunities which will also enable us to be in the new stadium by 2011 as originally planned." We await details with interest.

'Northern Quarter'

The developers Centros who now have a leasehold interest in the site of the Tricorn held a public exhibition of their massive scheme for 3 days in March-April 2007 at The Haven in Lake Road. (Centros-Miller became Centros following Delancey's buy-out of Miller Developments on 17th January 2008). The model and all the many boxes of documents are now on display in the foyer of the Civic Offices. We are profoundly disappointed by the proposal and very critical of it - for sheer dullness and lack of ambition. It crams as many shops as possible on to the site of the Tricorn - with very little if any gain to the public realm, and its design is as dull as the nearby 50s and 60s rebuilding of Commercial Road. Nothing about it speaks of the Twenty-first Century.

We are pleased that the scheme is mixed use, but despite housing a new city centre community of several hundred on the upper floors, there are no social spaces for them to meet, and the poorest site - for social renting tenants - has no rooftop green space unlike the other two housing areas. Such a major scheme should have a large element of leisure and community use. The application mentions 2000m² of leisure facilities split between two sites - but these could just be amusement arcades. The community and leisure elements should be spread throughout the scheme and not concentrated in one space near the hotel. A multi-purpose hall for community, arts & leisure with an arts cinema would serve the residents and visitors alike and contribute to the otherwise non-existent night-time economy. Will the whole scheme close down when the shops and the restaurants close? We have quite enough of that already. Where is the 24-hour city?

As well as being dull, none of the buildings - with the possible exception of Marks and Spencers, though it does not have a green roof and is arcaded - come up to current standards of sustainability - grey water re-use, energy conservation / generation. We were disappointed that CABE approved the John Lewis store, which as well as not being designed to the latest standards of sustainability,

presents a hostile impenetrable wall towering over the flats to the north of the scheme. The central lightwell is too small to make much use of daylight - so the whole interior will have to be artificially lit. This is probably true of Marks and Spencers too. The John Lewis building is the subject of a separate, revised, application which will see the relocation of the plant machinery to the main roof space. Some design changes are proposed to the materials (copper coloured rather than blue/green as used on the Cardiff Opera House).

Only one of the four pedestrian bridges has any interest as a design. The others, connecting the carpark to John Lewis and Marks and Spencer, are dully utilitarian. They should be redesigned. We are depressed by the lack of ambition of the developers. They tried a bit harder in Exeter! When we visit Birmingham and Future Systems' Selfridges department store with its dramatic bridges, we assume that Portsmouth is not considered worthy of cutting edge architecture - but of course, everywhere is, particularly a city whose ambition is waking up quite dramatically - as exemplified by the recent Creative Thinker exercise.

Earlier models of the dull straight shopping streets implied that there would be colonnades in front of the shops, but this proved to be an illusion. Why should anyone want to shop here, if it looks just like any other shopping street? We are not impressed by the Design Statement, which includes the rather grey landscaping. We are particularly critical of the proposals for public art, which are confined to about three sites and to be decided by a committee of the developers and one employee of the city council. A publicly funded public art collaboration by Seran Kubisa produced some beautiful designs arising from the local environment, but they are ignored in favour of a few lighting strips. Again, Portsmouth deserves better. In earlier discussions the possibility of an open square in the central crossing streets was suggested by the developers, but there is no sign of it in these latest proposals. The public art is, we were told, going to be the subject of a public art strategy to be announced later. We think that art and landscape design should be an integral part of the design process and not be brought in at a later stage as an afterthought. We have quite enough third rate 'public art' - a few sculptures planted about - in Gunwharf for example. All such proposals should be subject to a consultation process with expertise in public art - for example the Hampshire Sculpture Trust - which has members in Portsmouth. Public art should be integrated into the design process from the start.

The developers have not responded to those who said the consultation that the scheme lacked a children's play area. There should be a crèche funded by the developer, and there should also be imaginative activities for children designed into the landscaping. A major design concern is the derisory 'square' by St. Agatha's. There is nothing to replace the delightful tree-lined little park to the north-east of the church or the large trees and shrubs between St. Agatha's and Cascades. The mature Italianate planting is all to be destroyed and built on, hemming in the church with Marks and Spencers on one side and a bookshop on the other. What is left is two very small linked spaces - the only place where people who live, shop or work here can enjoy being outside. We are particularly concerned that St. Agatha's is wholly or partly hidden along the axes of both new main streets. Another major lost opportunity is for the developers to pay for the reconstruction of the Lady Chapel of St. Agatha's, brutally amputated when the area was first redeveloped. This should have been the subject of a Section 106 agreement at the outline permission stage. All that agreement now offers is upgrading of public spaces in Commercial Road and Edinburgh Road - not nearly enough in our view, and right off the site of where the damage is being done.

Building No. 8 dwarfs St Agatha's and blocks views to it from several angles - it does not enhance the setting of the church. The size of this building should be halved to allow a significant increase in the size of the public space. The Society has already objected to the Listed Building consent application which proposes blocking the view of the major pedestrian route which passes to the south of St. Agatha's with a 'screen wall' and a bridging block to the church. This route, from the Isle of Wight and Gosport Ferries along Queen Street is probably the most important pedestrian access to the Northern Quarter, and yet it is to be obscured and diminished in the interests of 'reconnecting' the church to the townscape. What is proposed in this application is not the way to do it.

We are also seriously disappointed that in such a massive development there are no cultural facilities eg art cinema, theatre/performance space/gallery - a mistake also made by Gunwharf Quays, and only now rectified at our suggestion by the Aspex Gallery. We were not reassured when the location of cafes and restaurants was not yet clarified, nor whether there is any intention to make this huge development part of the 24 hour city, rather than everything closing after the shoppers leave.

The access ramps to the car-parking layers are very ugly. The whole scheme will be overwhelmed and potentially destroyed by the road system which is now apparently cast in stone. We criticised it at the Development Control Committee. It not only imposes unnecessary delay on the main south-north route with four extra sets of traffic lights but provides no direct access for traffic from the south and west, as well as, incidentally, destroying the at-present agreeably pleasant and green central

reservation and large trees on either side planted thirty years ago by the County planners, forming the approach from the north along Mile End Road.

Archaeology - we are not happy with the Watching Brief, particularly the John Lewis site where the ancient strip fields converged until relatively recent times. The developers should fund a proper investigation in this area. We asked CABE to call for a more contemporary and sustainable design, but their criticisms were pretty tepid. The News says there is some doubt whether the finance to build the scheme stacks out and Miller has been bought out by Delancey. Will this lead to a rethink? Apart from some much needed social housing, what are we, the citizens of Portsmouth, going to gain from this scheme?

An associated public inquiry into the proposed closure of Commercial Road (southern section) and Edinburgh Road (eastern section) to vehicular traffic was held in the Guildhall in June. The City Council's intentions are to close these roads to buses and cycles so that they can be pedestrianised and allow the relocation of the market. Losers in the scheme would be bus passengers whose stops would be scattered along Station Street, Stanhope Road, Unicorn Road and Edinburgh Road (west). We objected that the alleged improvements were largely spurious and quite often disadvantages. Dr Caroline Cahm and Mrs Phil Priest showed convincingly how much more difficult this scheme would make it for bus passengers to get to the shops. The case was so full of holes that it ought to have been knocked on the head long before it got to the stage of a public inquiry. It appeared that the £2.5 million cost of the scheme was to be paid for out of Section 106 money from the developers of Northern Quarter, money which it seemed to us should have been spent *in* the Northern Quarter. But the inspector let the council have their way...

Tipner Regeneration Masterplan

The Tipner masterplan proposes a mixed use scheme which includes affordable housing, office space, a hotel, surgery and community centre, a Park & Ride facility, public open space and access to the waterfront. The Tipner Regeneration Company (TRC) had several rounds of public consultation.

Planning white paper to cut local control – and put us out of a job!

We share the concerns of the Civic Trust in the recent Planning White Paper issued by the Government. The abolition of the requirement to demonstrate a need for major new developments will spell death for many town centres and local shopping parades, already suffering from the expansion of out-of-town retailing. In addition, the spectre of a presumption in favour of development will cripple the ability of local communities to have any effective role in the holistic planning of their areas.

Just as bad, the expansion of permitted development will take a massive 30 of all "householder" developments out of planning control. This will severely reduce local communities' ability to have an effective say on the nature, scale, impact and appearance of development, negating years of effort by communities to ensure that their local areas are improved sensitively and carefully.

The white paper places primacy on economic development. It will therefore severely limit local communities' ability to have any useful say in planning. Despite its assurances of greater community involvement, this will only be in the production of development plans; if the individual developments comply with a tick-box assessment set in stone by the local development plan, people will be unable to comment on design, however bad it may be. The planning white paper is piecemeal, ill-conceived and disjointed. An immediate return to the drawing board is urgently required. We need to lobby our MPs to support us.

We are pleased that the Civic Trust South East – the regional grouping of societies is being resuscitated. Roger James and Celia Clark are serving on the new EC. CTSE has offered to help restart Southern Comfort, which lapsed last year.

New projects: Portsmouth Harbour, the Isle of Wight and Spithead as a World Heritage Site?

In June to celebrate Architecture Week, a boat trip with 150 Society members, friends and guests on board toured the harbour - with detailed commentaries on the historic sites around the harbour provided by Celia Clark and Lesley Burton of the Gosport Society, We've now had bus tours and a boat trip - how about chartering a Chinook helicopter for next year's Society outing - anyone know the right contact in MOD circles?

David and Jackie Baynes had worked tirelessly to bring together many diverse interests to the launch. Local people's support is needed – because without universal stakeholder support, the project cannot get off the ground. Ann Coats drafted an informative leaflet, designed by Gail Baird of 131 Design; printing costs were paid by Portsmouth City Council. Following the launch, this ambitious proposal has now entered a second phase. An administrative structure is being set up to deliver the project, drawing on the many offers of help and people with particular expertise and influence. Last month

Portsmouth council leader called a meeting with the Naval Base Commander for reassurance that the navy would not be impeded in its operations. The local authorities and other stakeholders are to begin to 'horsetrade' on what they will get out of it. The hard work of drafting the Nomination document – enriched by more information each time a presentation is made – continues. A harder task still will be to get historic property owners, such as the city council and MOD to commit themselves to a regular maintenance regime as part of the Management Plan process.

Those involved are convinced of the benefit of the process itself irrespective of whether the ultimate goal is achieved. If this led to the creation of common policies for the conservation, presentation, promotion and sustainable development of this rich cultural asset then the exercise would have proved to be worthwhile in its own right. For tourist attractions around the harbour – worth £300m income to the local economy but currently separately marketed, joint world wide marketing would be of tremendous benefit. We are also conscious that sites of maritime and marine industry need to be safeguarded. Other aims might be higher quality new developments and urban design; a tall buildings policy; genuine sustainable development; the rediscovery of the key importance of water transport, reducing traffic congestion and pollution; and the protection and enhancement of public access to the water. The opportunity offered to lodge the proposal in the draft Local Development frameworks in each local authority is clearly timely - and the Portsmouth Society has put this forward in its representations. There would be enhanced planning controls over design and location of new buildings affecting the core and buffer zones. WH sites are monitored by ICOMOS – and can be placed on the World Heritage in Danger list if proposed changes are perceived as damaging.

Further research is needed, but much of the documentation already exists – listed buildings, ancient monuments, conservation areas, as well as the many policies which protect the underwater environment. However, these have not prevented the deterioration of the Grade I Block Mills in the care of the MOD – though, thankfully, the building has now been made weather-tight. What is needed is a use for it – and for the Naval Academy, vacated last June.

Thomas Telford's 250th Anniversary in 2007 was marked by Dr. Douglas Allenby, Chairman of the Institute of Civil Engineers Southern Branch unveiling a plaque on Storehouse 9 in Portsmouth dockyard on 8 June. Telford worked in Portsmouth dockyard as young clerk of works on several buildings including the Commissioner's House designed by Samuel Wyatt, St. Anne's Church and No.9 Storehouse. A graduate of the closing Restoration and Decorative Studies course proposes to convert the Cell Block by Unicorn Gate to teach traditional building restoration skills. Our distinguished thousandth member, Dillie Keane is the patron. The Naval Base Property Trustees have agreed to consider applying for conversion funding, since they are already a charity.

Hilsea Lido

The City Council decided that they cannot afford to keep the main pool at Hilsea Lido going after the date in 2009 when the new Olympic standard pool is opened at the Mountbatten Centre. The plans for closure do not apply to the paddling pool nor to the Blue Lagoon refreshment and meeting hall, which makes a profit. A group: HILSEA LIDO POOL FOR THE PEOPLE is meeting regularly. It needs to be either a registered charity or company soon, to be able to put itself forward to take over the management and possibly the ownership of the site. Petersfield and Arundel have similar volunteer groups running open air pools which have been taken over from their councils. Both made impressive presentations to the Hilsea group, demonstrating what can be done. A Chichester builder has offered to do necessary work at no charge, providing only that he be allowed to display his board while work is going on.

The Pyramids

A Friends of the Pyramids group, chaired by Bob Adderley was formed with the aim of keeping the building open, rather than closed on 31 March 2008 - in the face of a £700,000 repair estimate. This would have been to the serious detriment of many hundred users: the disabled, elderly, mothers with babes in arms and toddlers, youngsters and people of many ages who come here for relaxation. All benefit by learning life-saving skills and/or improving both their physical fitness and their mental well being. Thousands of youngsters would lose access to the frequent sell-out entertainment events at the only middle scale musical venue in the City. The Council was considering fencing the building, and paying for additional security services to protect the abandoned building from the inevitable vandalism before demolition. The group seeks to co-operate and help the council and to investigate options for keeping the Pyramids open; to become viable, possibly with an alternative or Community operator. The raw figures failed to place a value upon the benefits of the Pyramids directly and indirectly over two decades, neither do they measure the dis-benefits that will occur and penalties to the health service, such as increase in obesity, when the unique facilities at the Pyramids are withdrawn, and not adequately replaced elsewhere in the city. The overwhelming response to surveys

and the feedback from the hundreds of customers, confirms that a leisure centre is preferred over any other development. Other options have been rejected. As the Pyramids is only twenty years old it must be questioned why it cannot be more economically repaired than demolishing and then rebuilding it. Portsmouth's share of the £45 m set aside by Central government for seaside resort regeneration should be claimed and promotion of the Pyramids as a attraction on the seafront and thus an asset to the City. In response to brilliant lobbying, the city council reversed the closure to allow another year for new management and repairs assessments to be undertaken.

Transport

South West Trains have refused to relax their policy of using cramped, high-density, suburban rolling stock on many of the trains between London and Portsmouth. These class 450 blue trains often feature on the faster services whilst the more comfortable mainline stock, class 444 white trains, are used elsewhere. The reason given for the changes was to relieve overcrowding but studies have shown that the overcrowding is not an issue and, when it does occur, it happens only between Woking and Waterloo, a short section of the journey to Portsmouth. The reality of the issue is that SWT are saving money by a rolling-stock cascade which saw the release the 24 x Wessex trains which were used until recently on the Bournemouth line.

We continue to lobby SWT, MPs and councillors and we attended the Portsmouth Line Rail User's Group meeting at Rowlands Castle which was attended by SWT Portsmouth Area Manager, Mark Dunn. Mark reported that the findings of the health and safety review of the use of 450s' on long distance trains were due to be released shortly but that the full report would not be published. Why should this be? Does SWT have something to hide? We have written to both MPs to ask them to request full copies as and when the report is published.

Wymering Manor and Buckingham House

Over 500 people came along to the open days on 18/19 August - the last ones to be held before the main restoration programme commenced. A new glossy 16-page A4 booklet all about the Manor details its history and architecture, together with memories, stories and legends plus excellent photographs. Dendrochronology paid for by the Friends and Hampshire Building Preservation Trust dates timbers in the manor to 1521. We are inquiring why the city council has still not issued the least to Ian Young.

The radical reshaping of Buckingham House and Felton House into a heritage hotel has produced fascinating revelations including a seventeenth century ceiling above the modern one in the southern wing of Buckingham House.

Design Awards

Judging for the annual Design Awards took place in September. The Best New Building was the University Library; architects Penoyre and Prasad; client Ian Bonar, librarian; contractor Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd; Structural design and mechanical design: Gifford; landscape design Jennifer Coe. A commendation was awarded to Bill Sargeant Crescent, a development of flats and houses for Portsmouth Housing Association in Fratton by Boyce. There were two winners in the category of Best Re-use: the Aspex Gallery in the Vulcan Building, Gunwharf: Director Joanne Bushnell, architect Glen Howell; and to Liquid - Envy night club in the former Connaught Drill Hall of the Territorial Army, saved from demolition by the Society after listing had been secured by the city's conservation officer. A commendation was awarded to Casemate in Hilsea Lines, re-used for band practice, with a specially designed sewage installation on recycling principles. Best Landscaping Award went to the Blue Reef Aquarium garden and play area, Southsea Esplanade.

There was also a special one-off Developer's Award given to Neale Brickwood for his outstanding work in Hereford Road, Southsea: a small new-built house together with the refurbishment into blocks of small flats of three large late nineteenth century houses, all very well designed using fine materials and in some cases specially made furniture.

The work of the Executive Committee and the website

As members know well from the feedback at our monthly meetings, an enormous amount of work goes on every day to keep the Society as responsive and creative as it continues to be. We can only thank all those who put so much time and energy into our work, and hope that they feel their effort is worthwhile!

Celia Clark