

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of The Portsmouth Society - Summer 2004

EXCITING SCHEME FOR HERITAGE CAR PARK

It is very rare that a planning application comes in for a major new development which we can wholeheartedly approve. The scheme is for the redevelopment of the old brewery site at the western end of Queen Street, which has for some years been a ground level car park for the historic dockyard.

The new scheme is sponsored by the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust and designed by David Richmond and Partners, who won an architectural competition to design. We were given a preview by the Trust, developers, Crest Nicholson (South) and the architect. The scheme is for a two deck car park surrounded by apartments, with an enclosed garden on top



View from Queen Street looking west

of the car parks and accompanied on the Queen street side by an elegant 23 storey point block. The blocks of flats are not in straight lines but are nicely serrated to give a sparkling textured appearance to the whole development.

The ground floor of the car park will serve the Dockyard as does the existing one and the upper floor will serve the residents of the 540 units of housing which will be of varying sizes from single room upwards.

The only thing to be said against the scheme is sadly that it involves demolition of a an eighteenth century listed house in Admiralty Road. How about rebuilding it in the Dockyard?!



Aerial view from the west

RJ

In this edition .. Tricorn Fest, Pompey Stadium and Village, PFI for Roads Rebuilding and Maintenance, A Portsmouth Treasure - dimly revealed, Determination of Planning Applications, Kate Crowley's Fund, The Mainline they Shouldn't Ignore, Thomas Ellis Owen Festival, Southern Comfort Meeting, New Venue for Monthly Meetings What's On?

Pompey Stadium and Village

The scheme for the rearrangement of the Fratton Park Stadium and its accompanying village of blocks of flats of varying heights up to 20+ storeys was approved by the Development Control Committee on July 28. We objected to both on design grounds.

What is proposed is not a new stadium but a rearrangement, turning the ground through ninety degrees with the building of three new stands. The result is not visually pleasing and not nearly as good as the same architects designed for the stadium that was proposed but never built at Farlington.

In order to help pay for the stadium the club are to build a village of blocks of flats, totalling 530 apartments, also inferior in quality of architecture to those designed by the same architects at Gunwharf, which will partly hide the stadium.

Design Panel's view

We asked the new Regional Design Panel sponsored by the South East England Development Agency to look at the designs. Their report was quite severe. "In summary the planning application should be achieving far better standards. The structure of the masterplan is flawed, the scale of the blocks is alien and uncomfortable which, coupled with the lack of quality in the architecture, will be damaging to the long term success of this development. The massing one can only suspect is being influenced by the need to finance the adjacent stadium, not by good urban design. . . . It is an exercise in maximising short term values, not delivering something of enduring quality that will be sustainable and cherished".

As part of our deputation we showed the committee, as an example of what could be done, the designs for the Heritage Car Park in Queen Street, a development of a similar size shown in this newsletter.

An asset to the City ..

In refusing to finance improvements to Fratton Station, the planning gain we had suggested, the Club took the view that they were providing an asset to the city. They could not be expected to pay extra for the privilege. If the city wanted first class football they couldn't expect improvements to the infrastructure without paying for it. This was the view taken presumably the committee. For the achievement of this great goal one had to overlook little matters of architecture and urban design.

RJ

PFI for Roads Rebuilding and Maintenance

We have known for more than a year of the proposal urged on the Council by the Government for a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) whereby a contractor, in this case a Special Purpose Vehicle company branded Ensign Highways Limited owned jointly by Colas Limited and Colas S.A., the French parent company, contracts to rebuild, repair and maintain the entire road network of the city. It is a 'fence to fence' responsibility which means that the contractors will be responsible for street cleaning, gully emptying, grounds maintenance, tree works, traffic signal maintenance and on-site traffic management. After much discussion behind closed doors, the scheme was brought to the Council on July 27 and approved. Quite apart from the question of whether this was good value for money, we were worried from the start about the loss of accountability and control implied in the scheme.

PFI Exposed

A BBC Radio 4 programme File on Four on July 6 gave details of PFI schemes for hospitals, schools etc. around the country which were proving immensely profitable for contractors and of doubtful benefit to the public. PFI contracts were being sold on with the profit usually accruing to the private sector financiers. We wrote a letter expressing our concerns which was delivered to all councillors before the meeting. Part of the briefing given to the councillors was in 'exempt' documents which the public were not allowed to see and our representatives were excluded from the Council meeting and from that of the Executive which preceded it.

The alternatives

What we were never able to establish was whether the case was ever argued for what was perceived to be the advantage of the PFI over the obvious alternative of borrowing piecemeal as the need arose: if a particular road needed to be rebuilt, then borrow whatever its cost would be. In our letter to councillors, we said that in our research we had ascertained from the Treasury that the Local Government Act 2003 had relaxed the restrictions on councils' borrowing by enabling them to raise finance from the Public Works Loan Board. Councils can in fact borrow much more cheaply than private sector contractors can.

What disconcerts us is that the PFI arrangement puts the management of the road system largely outside the control of the city engineer and so out of the control of the council - for twenty five years! However the briefing document says that it has been possible to preserve some degree of influence for Members and officers over the programming of

works and the allocation of funds "but the direct influence on day to day programmes is not as great as previously.

In recent years the council has been allocated £800,000 per year for roads maintenance through the Local Transport Plan. In fact the money has not been spent for that but allocated to what have been seen as claims of higher priority, mainly in the province of Social Services and Education.

RJ

A Portsmouth Treasure - dimly revealed

Eric Rimmington's 1940s mural is a now (very dimly) visible in the right hand side lower bar of the new Lloyd's No.1 Bar in Trafalgar House, Edinburgh Road. It is the reason why the former naval and later polytechnic hostel was listed.

We are writing to Wetherspoon's to ask them to replace the shiny glass with a non-reflective cover - and to light the mural better.

The super-pub, with its giant window onto Edinburgh Road opened in the last week in July. It is already full of customers. To our surprise, photos of the building and historical notes on display don't mention the mural:

"The name of this Wetherspoon Bar recalls Lord Horatio Nelson's epic victory off the Cape of Trafalgar on the south coast of Spain in 1805. It also recalls the former use of this building, when it was Trafalgar House, known to generations as the 'Traf'. It first opened in 1906, to provide "a community centre and Christian fellowship", which was so popular that it was soon extended in 1949, renamed the Trafalgar Club, and underwent major reconstruction. When it closed in the 1970s more than 4.5 million servicemen had used it. The building then became a hall of residence for Portsmouth Polytechnic and its successor, the University of Portsmouth".

Wetherspoons have apparently abandoned their idea of a hotel upstairs - except for staff accommodation. This is a bad idea, if you consider the deteriorating state of the upper floors of Wetherspoon's Brunel pub in the Guildhall Square in the former Gas Offices.

Couldn't Wetherspoons get together with a housing association or co-operative to provide flats in the upper floors of both buildings? City centre living is supposed to be returning. We will suggest this to PHA.

Celia Clark

Determination of Planning Applications

For some years local authorities have been under pressure to speed up the planning process and as a help in so doing to have as many planning applications as possible determined by officers rather than by committee. We have been concerned about this as the committee can sometimes refuse permission on design grounds when they have been recommended by the officers. There was one notable case where the committee refused twice with the result that the design was twice revised - and improved - before finally being approved. On another occasion the university's £7million business school was approved without going to committee.

The city planning officer has told us that there are no absolute criteria for referral to committee other than a deputation being requested. "Considerable public interest" indicated by the number of representations also has an influence on the decision to refer. We have urged that size should be made to count, e.g. more than £5 million and also that public interest should have a figure put on it, e.g. more than thirty letters received.

These are, after all, political decisions and we think they should be made by politicians.

RJ

Kate Crowley's Fund

Kate Crowley, our long-standing member and committee member, supported a great number of organisations campaigning for peace and social justice. In her later years, she quietly paid the costs of unemployed youngsters who could not otherwise afford to travel to demonstrations and meetings.

Kate was an exceptional activist, who believed dissent and campaigning were an essential part of our democracy; her memorial Fund hopes to continue this support.

Kate's Fund is being set up as an unregistered charity, administered by five trustees meeting quarterly to collect and distribute the Fund. Applications would be made by officers of organisations Kate supported, on behalf of individuals, for up to two travel seats, attendance costs at conferences, or, for local groups, some costs such as room hire or leaflets.

Full administrative details from Judith Smyth, Secretary of Kate's Fund, 99 Victoria Road South, Southsea PO5 2BU. [Donations](#), by standing order or cheque, to the Treasurer, Carolyn Lowndes, 40 Knowsley Road, Portsmouth, PO6 2PF.

The Mainline they Shouldn't Ignore



The Society responded to a consultative document by the Rail Passengers' Council (RPC) on the Portsmouth to Bristol and South Wales rail route. The reason for the consultation is that the franchise for Wessex Trains (the current operators) is drawing to a close and the process of re-franchising is about to start. The RPC wanted to ensure that the views of as many people and organisations are heard so that improvements to the service can be incorporated into the new contract with whichever operator the Strategic Rail Authority chooses.

Locally, the service receives little public attention as the principal operator in the city is South West Trains, however the Portsmouth to Cardiff route offers an important and reliable link between the cities of Portsmouth, Southampton, Salisbury, Bath, Bristol, Newport and Cardiff running hourly, seven days a week.

The Society commented that the current pattern of services is acceptable but that there is overcrowding at peak times. We asked that the new franchisee should increase the number of carriages to all services (the standard length of train is two carriages). We also mentioned that facilities at stations are generally poor (waiting areas, toilets, accessibility, ticket machines) and that bus links to the Continental Ferry Port are poor and badly advertised. Finally, we restated the need for platform 2 at Fareham station to be restored for through running to allow trains to pass and facilitate cross-platform interchange.

The RPC's report was published in April and its major recommendation is the appointment of a Route Czar to represent the rail interest in the wider transport debate. With the route spanning two English regions, the Regional Assembly for Wales, numerous other planning authorities not to mention the plethora of rail transport bodies, the Czar would champion the needs of joined-up public transport along the length of the route. Other recommendations include a package of eleven

improvements, of which reinstating the Fareham station platform loop is one.

The full report and its appendix is available at www.railpassengers.org.uk/site/Western/News or from RPC Western England, 10th Floor, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN.

On a final note, there were many comments from Fareham Borough Council, a few from Southampton City Council and lots from the other authorities between the South Coast and Wales, but there was one notable exception - Portsmouth City Council. Does anyone in the City have an interest or responsibility for rail transport planning? We think there should be.

JH

Thomas Ellis Owen 1805-1862 2004 Celebratory Festival 1-4 July 2004



Thomas Ellis Owen, creator of Southsea's 'garden suburb' from 1830-1862 was justly celebrated in the very enjoyable festival in early July. An English Heritage plaque on Dovercourt, his house in Kent Road, was unveiled by his great great grandson, watched by junior girls from Portsmouth High School. An evening soiree drawing on programmes held in Owen's house with modern equivalents was held in St. Jude's Church. Brian Kidd judged a nineteenth century style flower show; there were art and sculpture trails; children's activities and puppet shows; street

theatre: Jacob, Thomas Ellis and Catherine Owen discussing their developments; and, best of all in a lot of people's view, a splendid play: 'The Ouses in Between', a debate on the Owen's achievement based by Dominic Symonds, Stuart Olesker and John Stanton on music hall songs for three nights in the Norrish Central Library. It took the form of a debate between a dockyard worker, whose family suffered deaths from cholera which Owen tried so hard to remediate by activating the Public Health Act in Portsmouth, and an engineer discussing Owen's work with Louisa, Owen's daughter. His skill as a capitalist and entrepreneur was well brought out. The play was witty, amusing and exuberant – with sly references to the present day, via slides of the Millennium Tower, Tricorn etc.!

Building on the Society's celebration of Owen ten years ago, two mornings of lectures added much to our knowledge of Owen. David Lloyd discussed whether Owen met John Nash, architect and developer of the processional way from Regents Park to Pall Mall and Park Villages West and East which he believes inspired Owen's designs for Southsea. These were completed between 1824 and 1840 by James Pennethorne, when Owen was in London as a pupil of James White Higgins, whose daughter he married. Repton the landscape designer worked in Nash's office, and Nash died at East Cowes Castle. Henry Phythian Adams, Owen's great great grandson presented the complex family tree of the Owens, Underhills and Higgins, and showed portraits of many of them. Owen was mayor of Portsmouth Corporation when the Steam Basin in Portsmouth was opened.

The Illustrated London News of 1848 shows Owen presenting an address to Queen Victoria. He quoted newspaper accounts of Owen, the 'power of Southsea', from fields, a lonely farmhouse [still there at the eastern end of Marmion Road], where 'streets and villas sprang up as if by magic'.

Freddie O'Dwyer described Jacob Owen's work as Principal Architect for the Irish Board of Works, and John Pike the current conservation of Owen's Southsea. Deane and I will review the rediscovery of Owen and conservation of the area since the early 1970s in our lecture to the Fareham Society in October.

Owen's special design skill was the landscape and gardens, into which his villas were set. These are minutely detailed on the Ordnance Survey plans – which he and his father Jacob Owen drew up. Each villa and terrace is set in gardens, some of them communal still, with trees including sweet and horse chestnuts, walnuts and others.

The trees are now very large, and some of the landscape features have disappeared, such as the flowerbed at Dovercourt, his house in Kent Road, where many of the events last week took place. Portsmouth High School junior department who now occupy Dovercourt, were immensely helpful, but they currently have the whole very large space in front of the house concreted as a carpark. They recently made a lovely garden/sitting area for the senior girls behind Owen's first house, Swiss Cottage, on the corner of Kent Road and Sussex Road.

It seems to the Society that a landscape survey which would provide guidelines for the restoration of Owen features, and replanting plans as Owen's trees get older would be a fitting way to mark what was a very successful celebration of a fine piece of early Victorian design

Celia Clark

Southern Comfort Meeting

16 July 2004

The City of Winchester Trust hosted the Southern Comfort group of civic societies in Hampshire, Berkshire, West Sussex, Wiltshire and Surrey to discuss development pressures, planning issues and society matters at the Gurkha Museum in Peninsula Barracks. Our South East region is so large that it makes sense to develop interactive networks at sub regional level, especially since the regional spatial guidance will also be subdivided into more local areas.

The skill and expertise of societies in this sub region and the many aspects of their work and commitment to improving our villages, towns and cities was very evident.

The effects of PPG3

A key discussion to the whole day was the effect of PPG3 - the Government Office of the South East's (GOSE) pressure on local authorities to allow more and more housing - in historic environments. PPG3 and CABE's design guidance 'Better Places to Live' aim to prevent low density housing being built across the countryside, but local authorities have given an absolute priority to numbers. If they do not fulfil their quotas, they do not receive the planning grant necessary to fulfil their planning functions. The balance needs to be redressed in favour of design, sustainability and infrastructure issues in a shared vision.

In Southampton there is a strategic planning policy to preserve the character of the old town, and when the many semi-derelict areas are redeveloped a priority is a genuine sense of community and Section 106 agreements to improve the public realm.

In Portsmouth the result is mega-schemes such as the city centre student hostel, the ugly Pompey Village plans, and the exciting scheme by the Naval Base Property Trust and developers Crest Nicholson.

The Alresford population has increased exponentially in thirty years, but there is a lack of overall thinking on traffic, schools and impact on surrounding properties. It is difficult to identify which body to lobby; what is needed is a proper town plan and design statement. Local industries need to be regenerated if commuting and its disadvantages are to be reduced.

Planning applications in many places are dealt with piecemeal. The planning process is in process of fundamental change, with the government now seeking more community involvement, which presents societies with a brilliant opportunity.

We would also like the Civic Trust to try and put pressure on government to accept that there should be different policies for building on private gardens and for derelict factory sites. The PPG's design document gave examples of increased density, but not of smaller sites.

Heritage Towns

The Winchester Trust have proposed a new level of protection for special towns: 'Heritage Town Status', to strengthen existing conservation area legislation to include highway and transport matters. Greatly increased pressure had made it impossible for local authorities to resist undesirable changes in these towns, which had value for the nation as a whole.

Car Parking

Car parks could be excitingly and sustainably designed - to generate electricity as in Prague airport - or buried and the air cleaned by a fountain - as in Nantes. Old photographs of Gosport show a car-free society, but increased housing density need sustainable transport strategies, rather than the overloaded A32. One-way systems such as those in Farnham were hamstrung by the large amount of commercial off- street parking, much more extensive than public car parks. Portsmouth has had proposals for park and ride but no action; in Romsey the question is being looked at; and in Gosport parking is free, which means it fills up with people driving down to cross to Gunwharf!

There are two ways of reducing car use: compulsion - developments with no parking - and allowing streets to clog up, so that people demand action. Public transport encourages social interaction, but it costs money in subsidies.

Centralisation

Centralisation of so many facilities onto fewer sites is having an enormous effect, and not only on traffic: post offices, schools in rural areas, benefits offices are closed, while local government is intensely centralised. These decisions are taken on purely financial grounds; their social or environmental consequences are rarely taken into account. Consolidation into 'super hospitals' such as Queen Alexandra in Portsmouth had serious access problems which were not being addressed. In contrast, Farnham, served by Frimley Park and the Royal Surrey County Hospital in Guildford, local pressure had resulted in a community health hospital, three GP's practices and a pharmacy and outpatients. In Alresford, centralisation not only of watercress but prepared salads for all over the UK, has resulted in heavy HGV traffic out of keeping with the local road system. Disputes between Oxfordshire and Berkshire over control of HGVs meant Reading was still full of them. Services should be taken to the people, instead of compelling

more and more visits to highly trafficked cities and towns.

Trees

Attempts to breach tree preservation orders in conflict with CCTV and street furniture in Gosport High Street were successfully resisted by petitions. Publicly owned trees were more difficult to protect: small pines were planted in May/June in between the mighty Hunting don Elms on Southsea Common with no public consultation. Public undertakings and developers chop down trees at weekends when the arboricultural officer is not available. Roots of very large trees such as the limes in Alresford raise pavements so older people in electric buggies have to share the road with HGVs and buses!

Street Signs

Signs - legal and illegal - proliferate, but local authorities do have power to take action for their removal. Our problems, however, are nothing compared with those in Prague, where whole buildings in historic areas are covered with huge adverts!

Referral of schemes to planning committees

We asked societies about the criteria for when planning applications are referred to committee and others determined by officers. There was wide variation: in some areas any applications subject to a deputation request go to committee automatically, as well as those of significant public interest, or where there is a volume of representations, or where the application is in conflict with policy advice (see earlier article).

Training for councillors

Planning Committees now have the power to refuse applications on design ground, which means that it has become very important that councillors have the skills and confidence to do so. Training them and planners in good design could be an important new function of the **Solent Centre for Architecture and Design** now based in Southampton Environment Centre. They and the Southern Design Panel based in Chatham Dockyard can play a very useful role in negotiation with developers for better designed schemes - as shown in their cogent criticism of the current Fratton Park application

It was difficult to engage with politicians, who rarely gave any political direction to planners, or to lobby other undertakings such as hospitals which caused major transport problems. MOD sites disposals were not anticipated and future land uses discussed in advance of closure. The whole issue was being discussed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association and local MPs. In many people's view, the current Treasury-led system, with Defence Estates as the disposal agency seeking the highest bidder at maximum planning value needed reform in favour of local benefit and decision-making

and government objectives such as sustainability and protection of the environment.

Organisation

Southern Comfort, instigated twenty years ago with a loose organisation and no bureaucracy has offered comfort, networking, learning and action. It would now be a model of networking to strengthen the Civic Trust South East.

The Civic Trust used to be a campaigning organisation - for example the ground breaking legislation that introduced conservation areas. While societies were pleased with the Design Awards and Heritage Open Days, its role as a ginger group initiating planning legislation has diminished. It was unanimously agreed that what was required was a campaigning, rather than an enabling organisation. A strong Civic Trust movement is needed, which is thinking ahead, identifying sustainable innovation, with people in positions of power to instigate change in directions identified by societies. This message and the many points made during the day would be offered to the Civic Trust South East and to the chairman of trustees - for positive responses on how they might be implemented.

The history and recent redevelopment of Peninsula Barracks were enjoyably explained and demonstrated in architect Huw Thomas's lively tour of the site.

Celia Clark, Vice-chair, Civic Trust South East

Civic Trust Awards

The closing date for entries to this year's Civic Trust Awards is 17th September. The Trust would welcome any nominations you have for buildings or developments that you think might merit an Award. This year it is schemes in the country towns and countryside areas of Britain (i.e. not the Metropolitan Areas or Unitary Authorities.) Further information is available from Vivienne Newlands vnewlands@civictrust.org.uk

Consultation

There are two important government publications in circulation. The DCMS issued 'The Review of Heritage Protection: The Way Forward' on 28th June. This sets out a series of far-reaching measures effecting the historic environment and the listing of buildings, which the government intends to implement. It may be read on the Internet at: www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2004/

The DCMS has also issued a consultation document: 'Culture at the Heart of Regeneration'. This is on the DCMS website at: www.culture.gov.uk/global/consultations/2004+current+consultations/

Responses are required by 15th October. Please send your comments to Michael Hammerson mhammerson@civictrust.org.uk



Trimmers Court is the name of the proposed development on the site of the former Bus Museum in Broad Street. We like the design, size and detailing which complement the neighbouring apartments.

Tricorn Fest

The Tricorn has its first celebration on Saturday 14 August as part of the Party in the Park: Victoria Park, Portsmouth 12 - 8pm.

The Tricorn in print media, photography, and moving image will be complimented by opportunities for people to have their say about the Tricorn and record their memories.

We are negotiating with the demolition contractors, developers and Portsmouth City Council to install a commemorative column in the park - as a memorial.

Celia Clark, Roger James, Chris Collier

New Venue for Monthly Meetings

After many years of meeting at the Central Library, we are moving to a new venue - the Cathedral Discovery Centre in Edinburgh Road. We are sad to be leaving the library, but the ever increasing costs of room hire have made this an expensive place to meet.

The Discovery Centre is in the City Centre, close to the Commercial Road (South) bus stops and a 5 minute walk from Portsmouth and Southsea station. The centre has a car park which is accessed from Edinburgh Road immediately after the old railway crossing gates. There is also parking on Edinburgh Road itself.

Meetings and Events

Our meetings are on the first Wednesday of each month (January, August and September excepting) at **Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, Portsmouth**. There is no admission charge and all are welcome.

Sunday 14th August	Victoria Park, Edinburgh Road, 12 - 8pm	Tricorn Fest at Art in the Park - We will show some of the many films, videos and flythroughs the Tricorn has inspired, and photographs, drawings and plans.
Friday 10th to Monday 13th September	Throughout England	Up to 2,500 buildings in England will open to the public free of charge during Heritage Open Days .
Wednesday 6th October 2004	Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, 7.30pm	Portsmouth Social Services - Rob Hutchinson of Portsmouth City Council will speak on the city's award-winning Social Services.
Wednesday 3rd November	Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, 7.30pm	Arboriculture in Portsmouth - A talk from the City's Arboricultural Officer.
Wednesday 1st December	Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, 7.30pm	Christmas Meeting - Mince pies and a talk from our Chairman
Wednesday 2nd February 2005	Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, 7.30pm	February Meeting - Speaker to be confirmed..
Wednesday 2nd March	Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, 7.30pm	March Meeting - Speaker to be confirmed.

The Portsmouth Society, Registered Charity no. 266116

Chair: Celia Clark, 8 Florence Road, Southsea, Hants, PO5 2NE, Tel 023 9273 2912

Secretary: Roger James, 10 Captains Row, Old Portsmouth, PO1 2TT, Tel 023 9273 4555

Treasurer: Jean Thompson, 6 Livingstone Road, Southsea, Hants, PO5 1RT. Tel 023 9282 1667

Email: mailbox@portsmouthsociety.org.uk Internet: www.portsmouthsociety.org.uk

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