

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of The Portsmouth Society - Spring 2005

WHAT FUTURE FOR SOUTHSEA SHOPPING PRECINCT?



Artist's impression of the revamped shopping precinct in Palmerston Road. Is this distinguished enough for Southsea?

The December 2004 meeting of the West Southsea Neighbourhood Forum invited David Murphy and his colleagues from 'The Retail Group' to deliver a presentation on their recently announced plans for the development of the Southsea Shopping Precinct.

The presentation was largely eclipsed by the uncertainties implicit in the eleventh hour announcement by Portsmouth City Council. One of the two major Department Stores in the Precinct, Knight and Lee, as part of the John Lewis Partnership, has decided or has been persuaded to relocate from Southsea to the new development on the former Tricorn site in the city, to be known as City Centre North.

It was strongly rumoured that the remaining Department Store, Debenhams, is likely to follow suit.

Barbara Thompson the recently appointed Strategic Director for Economy, Culture and Community Safety of Portsmouth City Council introduced this news with considerable enthusiasm and spoke about the economic benefits to the City. Not surprisingly the worthy residents of Southsea shared neither her

enthusiasm nor appreciation for the apparently secretive manner, under the guise of commercial confidence, in which these negotiations had been conducted, in the wake of encouraging The Retail Group to invest in precinct shops formerly owned by the City Council.

The comparatively modest development plans by the Retail Group evoked less interest than fears for the economic future of the precinct and, indeed, of Southsea, without Department Stores. Residents of the maisonettes above the shops naturally expressed concern about disturbance during re-construction.

A hope was voiced by Celia Clark for more impressive architecture, particularly more interesting facades than were planned, though this received less support than the plea to leave the best feature of the precinct - the trees - undisturbed.

There will be an update of these plans at the Next Forum on 21 March (at Dovercourt, Kent Road, 7pm) and we can but hope for better news.

Bob Adderley

In this edition .. How to declutter your streets, Trafalgar 200, Replanning the Tricorn site, Tricorn News & Gossip, Guide to Planning, The Great Portsmouth Gridlock, Defects of the traffic system, Lionel Brett (Viscount Esher) 1913-2004, The Rimmington mural, Forgotten Ports of England, Postcards from Portsmouth, Traffic Signs in Conservation Areas, What's On?

How to declutter your streets



Street clutter on Southsea Seafrost

“**Posts**, signs, bins, guard railings and traffic lights....” They form a visual mist in the foreground, obscuring the buildings and forms that create the unique distinctiveness of a place.” *Civic Focus*, November 2004. How familiar is this scenario to all of us - in our own street, in our city, on holiday elsewhere. The article in *Civic Focus* highlights this problem, summarises the reasons for it and suggests what we can do about it.

The Portsmouth Society is always on the lookout for excellence in streetscape (Isambard Brunel Road?) or problems of clutter such as signing (road signs all

over the city) and attempts to praise, encourage or condemn.

One of the major difficulties is the lack of co-ordination between the different agencies of local government - just think who looks after our streets : - Bus shelters - Highways, Public art - Arts officer, Hanging baskets - Parks department plus a mixture, in some places of District and Town Council authority. No wonder our streetscapes are such a confusing mess.

So, what can we do? *Civic Focus* suggests :

1. Audit a street near you. Record the best and worst.
2. Contact the local press with photos and details of the audit.
3. Get local people (preferably influential) to support the cause.
4. Send photos and comments to council leaders.
5. Try to encourage specialist officers to co-ordinate their schemes.
6. Look out for excellent projects and send photos and comments to all these people and suggest repeats.

From November 2004, all local authorities will have received a copy of English Heritage “Designing Living Streets” manual and we must encourage them to use it and improve our streetscapes. For more information, including downloadable leaflets and street audit forms visit www.english-heritage.org.uk or

Trafalgar 200

We have been involved in the public consultation about the possible relocation of the Nelson statue (at present in an inconspicuous location south of Pembroke Road) and the Victory anchor on Clarence Esplanade. We decided strongly against the statue going to the Cathedral green, which was one suggestion. Nelson had no connection with the cathedral or with religion. We opted for the

suggestion he should go to a site towards the east end of Long Curtain to a spot looking over the moat to the purported site of his last embarkation before Trafalgar. The anchor we thought should go to the other (west) end of Long Curtain together with its plinth and inscriptions. It was reported to us that the statue had been paid for by a councillor Aldous who had difficulty in getting it accepted by the council of the time; and this was the reason for its ending up on

Lionel Brett (Viscount Esher) 1913-2004

Lord Esher, who replanned Portsmouth City centre into its current shape: the Guildhall Square surrounded by the mini ring road, died in 2004. The *Architects' Journal* reported that he worked with Teggin and Taylor on the Civic Offices - as well as reporting on York in 1968, one of the studies of historic towns commissioned by the Ministry of

Housing and Local Government. He was assisted by David Lloyd, our distinguished member and author of *Buildings of Portsmouth and Its Environs* and *Buildings of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* which is currently being revised. The Shambles in York were due for demolition, but at their suggestion they were converted into student accommodation above shops with the help of King's Manor – the architectural

Replanning the Tricorn site

We have been concerned at the lack of any plans for the redevelopment of the Tricorn site and we have written on the subject to Mike Hancock, MP for Portsmouth South. The letter is reproduced here :

“The executive committee of the Society have asked me to write to you to instruct the planning department to ask for and to persuade Centros Miller to commission a master plan, in order to begin the process of public participation on what is to be built on the Tricorn site. As you have said, it is so important for the future of the city centre, that now is the time for open and transparent debate. In the four or five years that Centros Miller have owned it, we have waited and waited for their proposals to be made public, but although we know that there have been designs, they have never been publicly discussed. All we have had so far is that leaflet put out in November 2003.”

“We would like to suggest that now is the appropriate time for detailed public participation into a master plan, followed by a detailed design brief for the Tricorn site - before parties take up entrenched positions, before so much money and time has been committed to a particular scheme - for example before a huge new West-Quay-like or Kingston-like John Lewis has been designed to be plonked on to the site - so that all that is then left to the public is to say Yes or No - and No is too expensive and wasteful to allow improvements. We will write to Centros Miller making the same suggestion. We look forward to your support on this.”

“There are clear precedents, some of them local, for such a public consultation at this stage before there are detailed proposals for the site. In every case the quality of the subsequent scheme was enhanced by incorporating the public's suggestions, and

entrenched opposition was avoided – which is why developers frequently pay for them. The replanning of Portsea, including the John Pounds Centre has benefited greatly from Planning for Real exercises. At Royal Clarence Yard Berkeley Homes paid John Thompson and Partners to organise a community planning event which guided the developers' plans for the site. At Caterham Barracks, at the instigation of a councillor, Linden Homes did the same. At Ashford Barracks a longer – and ultimately more rewarding process, Inquiry by Design - was organised by the Prince's Institute. Paul Grover, director of the new Solent Centre for Architecture and Design (02380 234830) may well be able to organise a Tricorn workshop in which the many interested parties can take part. His previous experience includes many such consultations. John Slater and I are advisors to the centre.”

“When we make these suggestions, we have in mind the recent success of the Winchester Trust over the central Bus Station, which has something in common with the Tricorn site. As you know, there is a pretty awful new shopping centre – the Brooks Centre – in the middle of Winchester, almost universally disliked, and now there is another large redevelopment site near it, the bus station. The Winchester Trust have persuaded the developer to fund a master plan - for which Allies and Morrison were selected from a suggested list. This examined the context and urban grain in great detail, and made recommendations on what should be built. The Winchester Trust are keen to recreate the grain and scale of the city centre as it used to be, before there was the craze for huge central shopping centres. “

“This was in fact just what Paul Newbold was hoping to do in the Northern Quarter of Portsmouth. He said he wanted to avoid megastructures like the Tricorn

Tricorn News and Gossip

From 'News and Gossip' Tom Dyckhoff, Twentieth Century Society Newsletter Winter 2004/5:

“The Possibly Saved From the Abyss Spot: With the Tricorn (yes, by God, I WILL mention it in every issue) suffering death by a thousand JCB nibbles, some sager building owners have been promoting the idea that you might revive rather than viciously flatten 20th century buildings. Denys Lasdun's ziggurat student flats at the University of East Anglia are to be polished up. “

“The lovely Rotunda in Birmingham is being turned, what else, into luxury flats for metrosexuals. And one Glasgow architect, MCM Architects, have the novel idea of dressing a hideous old crone - in this case a 1960s car park - in a new set of clothes - in this case



Detail of the Tricorn Centre

Tricorn News and Gossip (continued)

"PS All those, like me, still moaning on about the Tricorn might like to know that the doughty troopers of the Portsmouth Society are planning a concrete Tricorn monument for the local park, said to consist of the local Tricorn opponent MP Mike Hancock in the

pose of Saint Sebastian (plum job of first archer to be auctioned for charity)."

Note from Celia Clark: This is not QUITE right, though lovers of/in the Tricorn are still very angry when they see that pile of hardcore. With Mark Lewis of Art in the Park, we decided, rather, to persuade developers Centros Miller to commission a suitable memorial on

The Great Portsmouth Gridlock - 25 November 2004

In the 70s when we were fighting the East-West Road, which would have ploughed along Goldsmith Avenue to Langstone Harbour, the great fantasy - as we thought it - was that unless there was a great U-bend down, round and out of the city via Commercial Road and Eastern Road, the whole city would seize up with traffic like blocked sewage.

Thirty years later, it actually happened. A driver crashed at 2.30pm on the northbound M275, but the police found a dead body only in the back seat, and thought the driver had fallen into the harbour. Throughout the afternoon and evening until after 11pm, more and more drivers found themselves locked into immovable streams of heated metal - while the hours slowly passed. There was no warning on Radio Solent, which merely said that there had been an accident, without suggesting what to do - like stay at home, go by train, park and go home...or advice from the police, whose weak excuse was they were still looking for the (non-existent) body and had no time to

help get us moving again. Every main road from the seafront to the north of the city was immoveable.

Deane and I set out at 4pm to go to a Thanksgiving supper cooked by our daughter's American boyfriend. By 6.30 we had just got over Fratton Bridge, where I dashed into the Bridge Centre to have a pee and phone our family in London... The turkey was rested nicely by the time we fetched up in Wimbledon at 8pm... School of Architecture lecturers told us they did not get home till 11.30 that night. What went wrong??

The Guardian ran a piece a month later 'Caught in a jam - A portrait of a nation stuck in traffic' 10.12.04, but what they describe wasn't on anything like the scale of our Great Gridlock. As well as the fear of a tsunami from an earthquake in the Channel near Dover - or just rising ocean levels as Portsmouth is the pivot point downwards for the British Isles - could a metal lock bang us all up again?

Celia Clark

The Rimmington mural

Many members will be aware that what we called 'Portsmouth's hidden jewel' has been preserved in the lower bar of what is now the Trafalgar pub in Edinburgh Road. As a result of the listing of the whole building early in 2004, Wetherspoons were prevented from carrying out their original intention of demolishing the wall on which Eric Rimmington had painted the mural. Wetherspoons subsequently employed him to touch up and repaint small bits of the picture. However the final result is disappointing and in August we wrote to Wetherspoons as follows:

"We are of course very grateful to you for preserving the splendid Rimmington mural in the lower bar of the refurbished Trafalgar. But it is disappointing that the glare and reflection from the protective glass make it almost impossible to see it, certainly impossible to see all of it at once."

"Could you arrange for the glass to be replaced by non-reflective glass and for new lighting designed to illuminate the whole wall? The mural has been for a long time Portsmouth's hidden jewel. We do hope you will ensure that now that, thanks to you, the public have full access, it is given the illumination it deserves."

"Finally may we ask for an interpretation panel, like the one you have installed on the ground floor for the whole building, giving an explanation and history of the mural?"

We have now heard from them that they are trying to improve the lighting and are commissioning an interpretation panel but: "The glass has been specially fitted and we do not feel it worthwhile to replace at the present time - but we do note your comments and should there ever be a need to replace the glass then we will put in non-reflective".

Traffic Signs in Conservation Areas

As part of their Accessible City Strategy, commencing in the spring of 2002, Portsmouth City Engineer employed consultants to erect about 300 very large Traffic and Tourist Direction Signs throughout the City, many of them within Conservation Areas.

The Portsmouth Society supported this strategy in principle but campaigned vigorously for the removal or re-siting of individual signs that were offensive in such terms as:

- Physical obstructions, by multiple supports on pavements and/or cycle tracks
- Signs containing misleading and/or too much information
- Unnecessary duplications of proceeding signs.
- Offending the principles of the Conservation Areas

Our investigations found that The Consultants were unaware of the extent of Conservation Areas and neither they nor the City Engineer had consulted the City Planning Officer. The latter declined to take action when first appraised of the infringements

It took many months of correspondence plus an appeal to the Chief Executive and a threat to refer the matter to the Ombudsman before the City Engineer and the City Planning Officer consulted together and produced an agreement to work together in future and to review the situation. As a result of this review, at the end of 2002, a number of offending signs were removed and/or re-sited. Others remained.

Despite support for us by the City Planning Officer, the City Engineer continually refused to remove one of the largest and most offending signs (listing no less than nine Tourist destinations) that actually obstructed the view of Southsea Common from the window of an 80 year old lady. The situation was reviewed in October 2003 by the BBC Politics Show and the city's MP (Mike Hancock) assured the public



The offending tourist information sign before modification.

that a resolution would be found. As nothing was done, I asked the Local Councillor whether the City was ruled by our elected representatives or by the officers of the City Council? At his instigation the City Engineer belatedly proposed a solution that involved reducing the size of the

sign by half. He promised that it would be done by mid-June - as amended to 13 July. The Contractors spent several hours removing the old sign and replacing it with one that still bore the same nine destinations in large script, appeared to be virtually the same size, but now in a marginally higher position. The view from the window of the elderly lady (temporarily bedridden) was still obstructed.

The City Engineer was reported to have commented words to the effect "We have had another communications problem." As is well known, this is a failing that is endemic in Portsmouth City Council.

Postscript: On 3 August 04 the PCC Contractors reappeared. This time they removed the top half of the sign and lowered the bottom half even more. They retained the hefty great legs, but cut them off level with the top of the now lowered sign. Not the perfect solution but a compromise that we are glad to accept and which has pleased the elderly resident considerably. At last she has regained her uninterrupted view of the Common. - what a pity that it has taken over two years for common sense to

Milan Mandaric statue appeal

The organisers of the Milan Mandaric statue project are appealing for funds. The Pompey Supporters Advisory Panel have commissioned sculptor Philip Jackson to make a nine-foot bronze statue of Mandaric to be placed outside the ground when it is redeveloped to a 32,000 capacity. The cost of the work on the stadium will be around £36m, and the supporters want to repay the American-based businessman with a permanent tribute.

In October we had a letter from them asking us to contribute. We discussed it at our executive committee meeting on 20 October and decided that, not having seen the design, we would not as a society contribute, but that we would publicise the appeal in here to give our members an opportunity to respond individually if they so wished.

RJ

Defects of the traffic system

Members will probably be aware that, under pressure from the Government, Portsmouth's whole road network will be owned and managed by the French-owned contractor Colas under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI). An extensive programme of rebuilding and resurfacing will begin on February 1. We were worried that this might perpetuate rather than remedy the many defects from the point of view of traffic and pedestrian movement, some of them being the result of the defective design of quite recent changes. We recently submitted to the head of traffic, formerly the assistant City Engineer, this list:

1. Mini roundabouts in Isambard Brunel Road

Our concern : almost impossible to drive round.

City Engineer's reply : Roundabout was deliberately designed to oblige motorists to slow as they approach this 20 mph zone. Others have expressed same concerns as us and the matter will be investigated

2. Isambard Brunel Road – crossing from Portsmouth and Southsea station.

Our concern : Visually much improved but confused – no clear priorities either for traffic or pedestrians

City Engineer's reply : Pedestrians do not have priority in crossing here. In order to improve sightlines I intend to seek approval for alternate one-way working for vehicles Vehicular traffic will continue to have priority.

Our response : 1 and 2 are design faults and result from the landscape design improvements not having been co-ordinated from the start with necessary traffic modifications. We would oppose the one-way traffic idea. It is an important bus route. All that is needed is pedestrian priority on a clearly marked crossing point.

3. Velder Avenue/Milton Road junction

Our concern : Lack of north-south pedestrian crossing on the west side of junction – Milton to St Mary's Hospital, for example.

City Engineer's reply : I acknowledge this problem which will be addressed in modifications I hope to bring forward within the next six months.

Our response : This also was a design fault from the start. It was obvious from the start that north-south pedestrian crossings would be needed. Now, two years later, you are proposing modifications.

4. St Georges Road, Old Portsmouth

Our concern : unexplained and dangerous closing of zebra crossing *City Engineer's reply* : I do not agree

that the closure of the crossing is dangerous. While the matter is under review Councillor Bentley has agreed that the balance of advantage lies with the crossing remaining closed

Our response : We know of no reason to think that this well-sited zebra crossing was dangerous. What is dangerous is that there is now no way for pedestrians and those in wheelchairs, wishing to go, for example, from Gunwharf Gate to Gunwharf Quays to cross the fast moving stream of Isle of Wight traffic. The only change there has been since the crossing was instituted at considerable public expense is the arrival of the St Clare ferry which discharges an unbroken stream of 200 vehicles, making a crossing even more needed. The problem, such as it is, would be solved, like No.4. by routing IOW traffic via Park Road (No. 6).

5. Fawcett Road traffic calming & environmental improvements

Our concern : Enormous expenditure, severe interruption of traffic in what used to be classified as a primary distributor road and consequent destruction of a sizeable number of businesses.

City Engineer's reply : You have not understood the object of this scheme which was to improve safety in Fawcett Road outside Priory School. The side roads to the east do fall within in an area on which there is a consultation. This wider area is likely to be made a 20 mph zone.

Our response : To our knowledge this scheme started from a proposal by Charles Burns, of this Society and the Central Southsea Neighbourhood Forum, to get a 20 mph limit imposed in the square bordered by Fawcett Road, Goldsmith Avenue, Jessie Road and Francis Avenue. He was initially told that this could not be done, too expensive etc, although it was in fact done elsewhere. Now what has been done has been enormously more expensive than what he wanted and the 20 mph limits are only being consulted about now, four years later. If the object was safety for Priory School, surely a scheme limited to the northern end of Fawcett Road would have met the bill and without the total disruption of traffic for so long which put several firms out of business.

6. Cambridge Road / St Michael's Road junction

Our concern : Trouble caused by the expectation of each traffic stream that, if it is facing a green light, the other stream will have a red one. We suggest signs on both roads indicating traffic approaching from the left or right as on motorway merges. Of course the whole situation would be improved if, as we have repeatedly suggested, the Isle of Wight

Defects of the traffic system (continued)

City Engineer's reply: Current arrangements minimise delays without leading to accidents. No plans for alteration.

Our response : We still think signs warning each traffic stream that the other also has a green light are necessary. If as we have long advocated Isle of Wight traffic were routed via Park Road then clear priority could be given to traffic from the terraces.

7. Station Road / Commercial Road Junction

Our concern : This is a chronic problem. Ever since it was first designed it has caused needless delays to both pedestrians and traffic. Indeed from the very start

pedestrians have tended to ignore the lights and cross when they are red. ?

City Engineer's reply : I agree with the need to remodel this junction although I do not regard it as the chronic problem you do, Changes would have been made to accommodate the LRT and will still need to await the final decision on this.

Our response : It is chronic in the sense that it has been a problem since it was first thought up by Trevor Head. Its seriousness is exemplified by the fact that pedestrians take the law into their own hands. At any time of day you can see pedestrians crossing Station Street against the red light and in complete safety.

RJ

Postcards from Portsmouth

An event called Postcards from Portsmouth will be held on 11 June at Aspex Gallery, Gunwharf Quays and other venues. A city wide hunt for photographs or drawings that promote Portsmouth will begin in March when residents are invited to send in images and written messages to the gallery.

The Caravan Gallery will make giant postcards of the selected images to be shown through the city for a

month from the end of June, and will then be sent around the world to towns and cities along the Global Challenge Yacht race route, celebrating Portsmouth's past and present, its heritage, the place and its people.

For more information contact the Aspex Gallery on 023 9281 2121, by email at resource@aspex.org.uk, or visit their Web site at www.aspex.org.uk.

Forgotten Ports of England

Portsmouth lay before me, overshadowed by a great cloud of smoke from the dockyards. In the distance lay the famous Whale Island Gunnery School, and even as I looked there came the ominous rattle of heavy machine-gun fire. To the left and much nearer lay narrow Horsea Island, with its forest of

lattice-work wireless masts and its lake where torpedoes and miniature submarines are tested. Away behind me lay the turf-crowned chalky ridge of Portsdown." (*George Goldsmith Carter 1951 - Evans Brothers Limited London Forgotten Ports of England p.139*)

Compare the view now?

TETRA - Transmitting from Fratton Park

A member has asked us to raise the subject of a TETRA transmitter which has been installed on one of the lighting towers at the Fratton Park football ground, home of Portsmouth FC. We understand that the transmitter is currently there on a temporary basis, however it could become permanent from May. Airwave mmo2 has a £3bn contract to install and operate the Tetra system over the next 19 years for use by the MOD, Health Authorities and the Police. There will be 3000 transmitters across the country by the end of this year.

According to an article published in Country Life (27 March 2003), the frequency of the handsets pulse is 17.6 HZ, dangerously close to the frequency that causes changes in the brain. Tetra can interfere with defibrillators and the handsets can emit sparks when they are used at a fire. A test case against Airwave brought by the residents of Stroud failed in the High Court. The alternative system Tetrapol - has long been used on the continent.

Conservation News

We are pleased that the following buildings have recently been granted listed status :

- The former Guardsman pub in Fratton Road - recently under threat of demolition
- The Friary, an early example of social housing in Southsea dating from 1851 by TE Owen (Grade II)
- The Highland Road Cemetery Lodge, chapels and entrance gates, also by Owen and dating from 1850 (Grade II)

The old part of Kingston Cemetery has been included on the National Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest.



Newly listed : The Friary, Southsea (above) and the Dissenters' Chapel, Highland Cemetery (below)



Guide to Planning

The Local Government Information Unit says its new guide: Planning Simplified, will help local councillors get to grips with town planning. The guide is available at their Web site www.lgiu.gov.uk or may be ordered by telephoning 0207 554 2800.

Meetings and Events

Meetings are on the 1st Wednesday of each month (January, August and September excepting) at the **Cathedral Discovery Centre, Edinburgh Road, Portsmouth.**

Free Parking - Near City Centre bus stops - 5 mins to P&S Station - Free Admission - Visitors Welcome!

Wednesday 2nd February 2005	7.30pm	The 2004 Portsmouth Society Design Awards - Illustrated report from the judges of the 2004 competition.
Wednesday 2nd March	7.30pm	Developments at the Dockyard Heritage Area - Peter Goodship, Chairman of the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust..
Wednesday 6th April	7.30pm	Annual General Meeting and Members' talk-back - Annual report, elections and open forum.
Wednesday 4th May	7.30pm	Zenna Atkins either on Portsmouth NHS Trust or on her other public activities.
Wednesday 1st June	7.30pm	Managing Southsea's Seafront - A talk by David Evans - Portsmouth City Council Resort Services Officer.
17 - 26 June		Architecture Week 2005 - We will be running a guided tour - details in the next newsletter. For more info about Arch. Week see www.architectureweek.org.uk

The Portsmouth Society, Registered Charity no. 266116

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