

Portsmouth Society News

The Newsletter of The Portsmouth Society - May 2003

Further development at Gunwharf Quays



Donegal Lodge, Gunwharf - under threat of demolition once more.

Last October two further planning applications were published for buildings on Gunwharf Quays to occupy the undeveloped south eastern quarter of the site. There were to be two large buildings mainly of flats containing a total of 465 dwellings, each with a tower, and involving the demolition of Donegal Lodge, the former commanding officer's residence and the one remaining heritage building.

The applications were named Ariadne (157 flats) and East Side Plaza (308). We and others objected to the design of both buildings. English Heritage and CABE criticised them, E.H. particularly severely: "The

building lacks any strength of modelling, articulation or architectural reference to Gunwharf."

The planning officers negotiated for changes and later designs took the total to 471 flats. The result was that there were two or three versions of the designs and we don't know what E.H. thought of the amended version; but the local Architects Panel said "there is no significant improvement on the originally submitted scheme". While there may be no objection to tall buildings in this location, all current government advice is that new buildings must be of the highest quality, which this application signally fails to achieve.

Criticisms

Another serious criticism is that the application does not respond to the recommendation by a recent conference on housing in South East Hampshire that because of the area's serious housing shortage there should be 40% of affordable housing. This scheme provides 25% of its 471; but there are none at all in the hundreds already built or under construction on the Gunwharf site. If it could have been shown that these two proposals would make a significant contribution towards Portsmouth's housing shortage, we might have looked on them in a more kindly way. We are also concerned about the likely wind effects caused by so many tall buildings, especially on the children's playground and pedestrians at ground level.

Hurry to develop

Clearly in something of a hurry, the Ariadne application only was brought to the Development Control committee on April 23 with a report from the City Planning Officer written before the receipt of the latest consultations. It detailed many of the severe criticisms made by the consulting bodies, did not include a single plus point, but went on regardless to recommend conditional permission.

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The hurry was to secure a government use of the office accommodation which would secure 200 to 300 jobs. Councillors complained about being pressurised by Berkeleys.

Key Worker housing

Ariadne, in the worst location near the elevated railway line, is to contain 120 flats for 'key workers' as well as 44 others. We had suggested a car-sharing arrangement for some of the flats in both blocks. It might suit, in particular, elderly well-to-do residents and those who would take the train to London twice a week from the adjacent harbour station. But the actual proposal stands our idea on its head, with the key workers being the only residents in the whole 30-acre development who are not to be allocated a car-parking space.

One of the changes since Ariadne was first proposed was to introduce a few floors of offices. Previously those floors had been allocated as a double-height conference facility/exhibition space. This function room has been deleted - and there is also no sign of a condition which we know was proposed by the planning officers that, as part of a Section 106 agreement, public use might be made of the Vulcan Building, an ancient monument and Grade II listed building, formerly the Grand Storehouse of 1814. This fine building is one of the few historic buildings surviving in the redevelopment. As members know we have been trying hard for a year or more to get a worthy public use for it, so that the public can see its splendid interior. Recently Berkeleys applied for permission to convert it for residential use. The Development Control Committee, against officers' advice, firmly rejected this application which would have closed the building to public view for ever.

Deputations

At the meeting to consider the revised design for Ariadne, Celia Clark, for the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust and Roger James, for the Society, spoke as deputations against the application to the D.C. Committee. The meeting started in some confusion with Councillor Jacqui Hancock being excluded from it for the crime of having allegedly made up her mind against the proposal in advance. In the end that was the decision the committee came to without her. Deferment was on the basis that councillors would prefer a less dense scheme. Presumably the application will then be considered at the same time as East Side Plaza, as we and many others said it should have been in the first place. But East Plaza is a much more controversial proposition, containing as it does the 30-storey tower.

Design champion needed

The most depressing thing was that there was no one at the committee meeting capable of explaining what distinguishes a good building from a bad one; we clearly need a design champion to replace the role once played by the City Architect.

Roger James

The University's Milton Campus

The university are likely to put their Milton Campus up for sale, as the business school, the largest user is being re-housed in the big new building in Portsea. Meanwhile the planning department have put out a planning brief which is very much for consultation.

On the subject of demolition or re-use of existing buildings, the brief states "The City Council does not have a specific preference to either of these options". This uncertainty hangs on the future of the special schools. If they are to be rebuilt on a new site rather than kept where they are, this appears to be about the only possible site. We are in favour of retaining the Foster Building and the Dymond Building and retaining the walled garden - as part of the open space required in the case of a residential option. For the Foster Building, which is said to be difficult to adapt, we think that facading would be an acceptable alternative to complete retention. We think also that the Dymond Building should be considered as a replacement for the Reginald Road Arts Centre which is threatened with closure.

We are very much against the idea of using part of Milton Park as a substitute for open space within the site. The main purpose of open space within a residential development is to serve small children. Milton Park can be reached from the site only by crossing Milton Road and this is surely out of the question.

Roger James

The future of Church Buildings

From time to time, questions are asked concerning the future of church buildings. The Anglican Diocese of Portsmouth, for instance, recently set up a commission to enquire into such matters as the future numbers of the clergy, likely available finance and the numbers, whereabouts and usage of church buildings. In Portsmouth, the Methodists are currently discussing the future of Trinity Methodist Church in Albert Road which is a listed building.

There are a number of issues which are giving rise to these debates. Generally speaking, in recent times, there has been a decline in church going in Britain and the age profile of many congregations is high, with some churches having few or no young members. The cost of maintaining church buildings continues to rise. These problems are being felt most keenly in rural and inner urban areas.

In the main, it falls to the local congregation to raise the funds. In the Church of England, the central funds of the Church Commissioners are taken up with providing pensions for the retired clergy, supporting to some extent the Cathedrals and financing the central organisation of the Church. Many local congregations have to struggle to survive.



*Trinity Methodist Church, Albert Road, Southsea
- too large for its' current congregation?*

Another factor which is affecting church buildings is the decline in the sense of local community. The 'parish' concept was based on the idea of a static community. Today, people are involved in all different sorts of communities and it is sometimes said that for many people nowadays the 'work' community - where a person goes to work and often at some distance from home - is stronger than the 'local' community.

It is easier for listed buildings and historic buildings to attract grants from other organisations such as English Heritage. However, there is not a bottomless pit, and the problems seem to be growing. Some argue that these sorts of buildings, including the great Cathedrals are part of our English Culture and as such they should receive government funding. Even if this proved to be possible, not all church-goers would agree. They would argue that this would give the State too much control over church affairs.

Some solutions which have been successfully tried have involved a partial or even complete change of use of buildings. St. Cuthberts, in Copnor, for instance is to rehouse a local doctors' centre and to provide community use as well as retaining a worship area. Drop-in centres, information centres, arts centres and restaurants have already figured in some imaginative schemes throughout the country. Clearly, each situation needs to be taken 'on its merits', and flexibility needs to be paramount in considerations. It is impossible to have a single 'fit-all' solution.

Terry Carter

Exhibition of work by Eric Rimmington

Eric Rimmington designed and painted the mural in Trafalgar House, Edinburgh Road, which was saved from destruction by the Portsmouth Society. The mural, painted in 1949, depicts people in wartime Portsmouth standing on Portsmouth and Southsea station, unconsciously taking in their position in history.

An exhibition of his work, entitled, Eric Rimmington - Drawing a Line North Paintings and drawings - 1985 - 2000 takes place from 6-25 May at The Millinery Works, 87 Southgate Road, Islington, London N1 3JS. See www.millineryworks.co.uk or telephone 020 7359 2019 for details.

City of Portsmouth Preserved Passenger Depot

The Society have been concerned for some time about the future of the Bus museum in Broad Street. Their premises are leased from the City Council. The building is in a very bad state, with a threat of imminent collapse. Schemes have been proposed to take the buses right out of the city. As a result of our deputation to the Council's Executive in February it was decided that, if practicable, a new building to house them would be put up on Town Quay, close to their present site. The money for this could come from the sale for housing of the valuable site they now occupy. A snag could be that MAFF might reclaim some if not all of the money they spent on the sheet-piling of the Camber.

Under threat of eviction the Bus Trust had leased a barn in the country; and this is where the buses have now gone, pending other arrangements. We very much hope that a new building will be provided, as the old buses are a very popular visitor attraction in Old Portsmouth and there is nowhere else where they can be seen as they were seen there. We understand that the city architect is working on a design. A second best possibility which is being considered by the Council is for them to be housed in Fort Cumberland. This would have the advantage of helping to open the fort to the public and at the same time allowing the buses to run their seafront service. However Fort Cumberland belongs to English Heritage and is partly used by them as a research laboratory. Negotiations with them would be needed.

Roger James

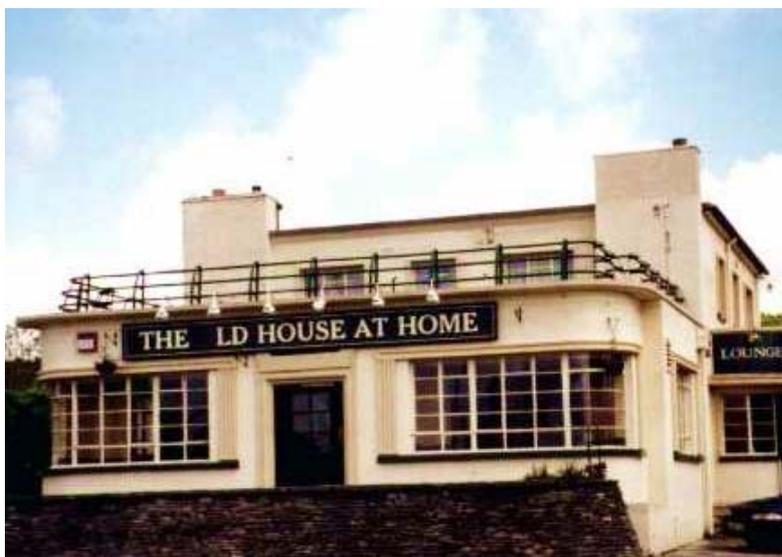
West Southsea residents' Parking - Update

As reported in the last Newsletter, taking note of the large number of deputations who attended the Executive Meeting of PCC, on 4 December 2002, Councillor Phil Shaddock, the Executive Member for Traffic And Transportation declined to accept the City Engineer's recommendations and referred the matter to the newly constituted Scrutiny Panel. This Scrutiny Panel subsequently attended both the West Southsea and the East Southsea Neighbourhood Forums to listen to the respective audiences when they commented upon the proposals as presented by the PCC Parking Manager.

A specially convened meeting of the Scrutiny Panel in the Civic Offices on 4 March 2003, received the views of more than 20 deputations. It is premature to speculate upon the outcome. However, if the expressed opinions are heeded, there may be some substantial changes and possibly reductions to the unwanted spread of restrictions. These merely cause displaced congestion. Hopefully the democratic voice of the neighbourhood will prevail.

It is now understood that the Scrutiny Panel intend to visit other location(s) where similar parking regulations have been introduced and that because of the Council elections a decision is not expected until late May or June.

Bob Adderley



The Old House at Home, Paulsgrove

Councillor Jim Patey has asked the Society to try and save the 1930s pub in Allaway Avenue, the Old House At Home, which may have been built to serve the Paulsgrove racecourse.

There are several Modernist houses nearby. Does anyone know who the architect and builder were?

Answers, please, to Roger James.

Highland Road Cemetery

The Friends of Highland Road Cemetery are campaigning to protect and restore this key part of Eastney's history. Thomas Ellis Owen designed and laid it out in 1854.

On a walk along its paths, you'll make all sorts of interesting discoveries. The brewers, the Duprees have a mock Egyptian temple. Mrs. George Fox, awarded the Royal Red Cross for members of the nursing service for gallantry in the field, the first chairman of the Portsmouth School Board, builders, soldiers, seamen, churchmen, landladies, Charles Dickens' mistress, children.. all are buried there. It's a crowded guide to Portsmouth's history from the mid nineteenth century to the present.



Superintendent's Lodge, Highland Road Cemetery.

The Society became interested in the future of the Superintendent's Lodge, which is empty and boarded up, prior to sale. We and the Friends believe it should remain as a house for someone whose job is to look after this precious and historic area of open space. Young people gather here, and some are seriously damaging the memorials. Roger James persuaded the Property Service to repair the leaking downpipe which was damaging a wall of the house, but we have not yet reversed the decision to sell.

The Friends are planning to arrange guided tours of the cemetery for Heritage Open Days 12-15 September. We are encouraging them to apply for grants to restore the cemetery - for example from the Onyx Trust under the Landfill Tax Credit scheme administered by the Portsmouth and South East Area Partnership, which has a category for Maintenance of Parks and Public Amenities and another for Repair, restoration and maintenance of churches and historic buildings. They will need the help of a landscape architect to draw up a restoration plan, as was done for St. James's Hospital. There are also national campaigns such as Save our Sculpture by the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association which has instituted the first survey of public art. The National Recording Project currently carries records online for 70% of Britain. There's also a Green Pennant Award recognising high standards of green spaces managed by local, voluntary and community groups administered by the Civic Trust. We look forward to helping the Friends to achieve their aims.

Celia Clark

Wanted - display boards and stands

We're looking for some display units for use at exhibitions and seminars. Preferably floor standing, lightweight, easy to carry and above all, inexpensive! Can you help? Please call 023 9283 9660 if you can. Thanks!

John Holland

Who are we?

The Portsmouth Society is an independent voluntary body affiliated to the Civic Trust with the purpose of promoting good design in the built environment. We campaign for quality in new buildings and for the preservation of the best of Portsmouth's existing environment of buildings, streets, and open spaces. If you have something you would like the society to investigate or do something about, do contact us. We welcome new members; come along to one of our meetings or contact the Membership Secretary (contact details below).

Architecture Week Seminar - Achieving High Density and High Quality Settlements

The Society invites you to a seminar arranged in conjunction with Portsmouth City Council and the Portsmouth University School of Architecture in the Portland Building, St. James's Street, Portsea on Tuesday 24 June to celebrate Architecture Week, the third in our series promoting good design.

The aim is to raise all participants' expectations of how excellence in design of settlements can be achieved at high densities. It will explore the relationship between design quality and high density, including tall buildings on waterfronts (a thirty storey tower is proposed for Gunwharf). In the morning there will be presentations by designers who have achieved high density schemes of high quality. Those invited are: Roger Zogolovitch, Dinah Roake of the Peabody Trust, Piers Gough, and Bill Dunster of BedZed.

Elected members, planners, architects, surveyors, builders, developers, civic societies, local residents, housing associations, urban designers, regeneration board members, housing tenants, housing developers, development financiers all those interested in raising standards of architectural and urban design are all welcome to take a lively part.

Details from: Roger James, 023 9273 4555, 10 Captains Row, Old Portsmouth PO1 2TT, E-mail Address: roger_james@lineone.net. A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

Celia Clark

Meetings and Events

Our regular meetings on the first Wednesday of each month (January, August and September excepting) at the Norrish Central Library, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth. There is no admission charge and all are welcome.

Wednesday 7th May	Norrish Central Library, 7.30pm	Arundel Street Renewal - Peter Codling will describe his scheme to celebrate the non-maritime heritage of
Wednesday 4th June	Norrish Central Library, 7.30pm	Waterfront Renewal in the Baltic - Celia Clark will describe her recent visits to Helsinki, Turku, Tallin, St Petersburg and Kronstadt; all of them having one thing in common with Portsmouth - their historic waterfronts.
Friday 20th to Sunday 29th June	Locally and Nationwide	Architecture Week 2003 . For details call 020 7973 6469 or visit www.architectureweek.org.uk .
Tuesday 24th June	Portland Building, University of Portsmouth	Architecture Week Seminar - Achieving High Density and High Quality Settlements - An all-day seminar on the by Portsmouth City Council and The Portsmouth Society.
Friday 12th to Monday 15th September	Locally and Nationwide	Heritage Open Days 2003 - promoting historic sites, visitor attractions and other buildings of cultural or architectural interest, which are normally closed to the public or usually fee-charging. See www.heritageopendays.org .
Wednesday 1st October	Norrish Central Library, 7.30pm	October Monthly Meeting

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.