

The Portsmouth Society Executive summary 2018-2019

It has been a busy year during which the Newsletter and Website continue to be developed, and a number of public consultations were discussed and responded to. But, the serious illness and subsequent passing of the Planning Officer, John Holland, left us facing difficulties in fulfilling our remit to the full. John was an experienced and long-standing member of the Society whose wide ranging abilities enabled the group to move forwards with technology and communication. In early 2019 Portsmouth City Council presented John with a Civic Award, of which he was very proud. This will be formally announced at 2019 Mayor Making Ceremony, with other recipients of the 2019 Awards. John will be greatly missed by all.

The Executive continued to meet on a monthly basis, and joined the planning team at several meetings to discuss consultation documents for the Sea Defences, Seafront Masterplan and the Tipner Strategic Development, all of which will continue to receive our attention and effort during the coming year. David Surr is the Society's representative on the 'Southsea Coastal Scheme Community Stakeholder Advisory Group' and he provides regular updates to the Executive, who determine any input on aspects under consideration.

The executive considers the membership of Civic Voice an important aspect of the Portsmouth Society as the national body which provides support, training and advice, in addition to discounted insurance.

We enjoyed a wide variety of talks on subjects from Pevsner Architectural Guides to the Historic Dockyard and a visit to the World War One Museum. The Society celebrated Civic Day by a guided walk with Ben Cracknell (Conservation Officer, PCC) through the Civic Centre discussing the buildings and into Victoria Park. We were delighted when our Design Awards Administrator, David Baynes, received one of the City's 2018 Civic Awards.

The Planning Team

We started the year off by, we think, doing some good at **105C Commercial Road**. This seemed a simple enough change of use application for an empty property, formerly a Santander bank, to become a restaurant/cafe. We were pleased that the property would be used again. However we objected to the proposed 'out of hours' all metal security shutters which we felt would set a precedent for 'un-warranted and un-wanted - 'no-go' type city-centre frontage. The applicant re-applied without the shutters and gained permission. However the premises are still not let, so who knows ...?

The development at **St James Hospital** has been under discussion for some time and it was back in April 2018 that we objected to the demolition of Fair Oak House and The Beeches. We felt these were perfectly good buildings by the important Portsmouth architect AE Cogswell. We suggested they could be incorporated in the development together with information signage detailing their link to the hospital and their place in progressive mental health treatment and recuperation.

Many objections to the development were raised and the Milton Neighbourhood Planning Group have done sterling work with their objections on over-development and pollution grounds.

The Council tried to buy the site from the NHS which we hoped, if successful, they would have been more sympathetic to the objections but we understand an un-named developer has bought the site and the outcome is unknown as we write this in early March 2019.

During the year you may have seen a number of **InLink** installations springing up all over town! No we didn't know what they were either, but they're essentially a public telephone and WiFi point with the attraction for the applicant that they can be installed using Prior Approval Status as 'Permitted Development'. Basically an easy way to put electronic advertising where there will be a heavy footfall and lots of readers of their adverts.

We objected to just three of the many applications due to their locations and PCC agreed and refused the applications:

- In the **Palmerston Road** precinct: less than 100 yards from another payphone
- By **South Parade Pier** and outside **The Pyramids** - Both poorly sited for wheel-chair and push-chair users. Unfortunately a number of the refusals have gone to appeal which seems to happen more frequently and often resulting in the application being passed. We wait and see.

Not all was negative however and more recently we supported two applications for establishments that were approved and where we hope to frequent in 2019 and leave refreshed:

1) the changes to **The Briny** (formerly Rocksby) with more extensive use of its sea views and which should be an improvement over the other 'cabins' which have been allowed along the sea-front.

2) **The Guardhouse at Gunwharf Quays** (Grade II listed) which is to have sensitive restoration work undertaken to this interesting late 18th c. building including render removal to expose original brickwork.



Finally the Planning Team could not let this year pass without mentioning **John Holland** who sadly died from cancer, aged only 64. He chaired the group with an informal but professional guiding hand and the team punched above their weight with John in charge. We miss him.

As he would have wanted to lighten the moment, this quote from Stan Laurel was read at John's graveside. "If there are any long faces at my funeral - I'll never speak to them again".

Terry Halloran

Portsmouth and Southsea Tree Wardens continue to make progress with a wide variety of schemes from commemorative and other tree planting, maintaining previous plantings, leading guided tree appreciation walks, giving talks and working with a variety of other local like-minded organisations. We also liaise closely with the Tree Council, the Portsmouth City Council arboriculturalist and view and comment on tree related planning applications on behalf of the Portsmouth Society.

Since 2018 we have been much involved in the Charles Dickens Orchard Trail, planting fruit trees and edible hedges across the City in the grounds of Community and Youth Centres and other available green spaces. This is an initiative driven by Helen Bergin, PCC Landscape Architect and the Cornwallis Crescent Community Orchard team. Continuing into the 2019 planting seasons we are celebrating women's suffrage with the Stephen Morgan MP inspired project "Vote 100 Plant 100" which includes International Women's Day on 8 March.

Pauline Powell and her team do much to raise awareness of the importance of trees and the benefits they provide in the City's dense urban environment.

The Design Awards held a prestigious Oscar-style award ceremony at the Royal Maritime Club that attracted a high attendance, particularly from the professionals and owners of the nominated projects. This event raises the profile of the Society, which we hope to maintain over coming years. Thanks are due to the Administrator, **David Baynes** who organises the smooth-running of the whole event, Chair of Judges **Dr Celia Clark**, and this year's judges – Ruth Butler, Peter Stephens and Martin Critchley. We were delighted that Deputy Lord Mayor of Portsmouth, Councillor David Fuller, gave the welcome address and also presented blue plaques and certificates at the end of the evening. Members are encouraged to be the Society's eyes to alert David to developments, whatever the size, which might be considered for the Design Award.

We are grateful that **Colin Kidby** has continued to look after membership which remains stable at approximately 120 at the end of the Society's year. As a registered Charity we are able to claim Gift Aid donations, so please continue to support this worthwhile benefit if you are a UK registered taxpayer.

We would encourage members to introduce friends to the Society and publicise our meetings where possible. Finally, thank you to the members who demonstrate your interest and knowledge on a wide range of subjects, through the questions and discussion at all the Portsmouth Society events. We hope to continue the range of activities and topics that appeal to you, and encourage your participation.