Chairman's Miscellany - TrustNews Feb 2005

A recent meeting of the Town Forum addressed the City Council's Draft Air Quality Action Plan and, predictably, the discussion centred on matters of traffic congestion, parking and possible solutions of the problems. Long-time residents experienced a sense of deja vu as they listened to oft-rehearsed possible solutions that have never been implemented. The Trust has responded to the questionnaire and added some suggestions but we wonder if the next decade will see any action.

The Trust welcomed recommendations contained in the draft final report on Signage and Interpretation at Peninsula Barracks. When implemented, they should benefit the residents within the site as well as the wider community and visitors. The sooner this can be done, the better, and we hope that the Military Museums and Local Authorities will fund the project with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund as suggested in the report.

For some time now your Council has been concerned by the failure of the City Council to invest in the necessary design expertise that Winchester deserves. Since the announcement of the departure of Robin Cooper, as Director of Development, we have learned that his post will not be retained and that Planning will be amalgamated with all the other functions of the council except Finance, Legal Services and Housing (Landlord) under one Director. We understand that the job description for the holder of this post will not require any planning or design experience. At the same time the Government is calling for Planning to have a higher profile and for design to have a dominant role in providing sustainable development. Whilst we support efforts to improve efficiency, these should not be at the expense of the quality of our built environment and we are urging the Council to appoint someone with the necessary skills and experience to head the Planning service.

Councillors tend to respond to your views - please help the future of Winchester by writing to them or to Simon Eden, Chief Executive, on this subject. Letters can be addressed to Councillors at the Council Offices, Colebrook Street, Winchester S023 9LJ

Patricia Edwards

The City Council's Vision for Winchester - TrustNews Feb 05

The City Council has sent the Trust a draft of its Vision for Winchester, inviting our comments, to which we have responded.

The Trust endorses the idea that the City should have a vision of where it believes Winchester should be going, so that future decisions can be informed by that sense of direction. The draft contains many very good points, including caring for our heritage, improving traffic and air quality and pursuing the “green agenda", for example. It is, however primarily intended to promote Winchester to investors and tourists, and therefore does not fulfil in all respects what one expects from a Vision document. Nevertheless, it is clearly a big step forward.

Quality of Life

While welcoming the document in general, the Trust has concentrated its criticism on one key area - quality of life - which is such a concern in Winchester and the south-east. We have pointed out that the Vision should recognise clearly the conflict between these quality of life issues, and economic growth and housing development, and show how it will be managed. For example, we believe the document should state that if the major development north of Winchester which might be at Barton Farm should be forced upon us, it will not be developed until critical problems such as infrastructure, traffic congestion, pollution, sustainability and the setting of the city have been solved. There is also a worrying dichotomy between the fine aspirations of the Vision concerning the overriding importance of good design, and the absence in other documents of how better design is to be achieved.

Antony Proudman

Planning Appraisal Group - TrustNews Feb 05

Since January we have written in support of the Local Authorities for appeals against refusal of three proposals, two of which were for major developments: at**1 Westley Close**, where a second reduced scheme (to demolish only No 3 and build five flats and six houses) was also refused, and at **27 Chilbolton Avenue**, where it is proposed to demolish **Lang House** and build a 3-storey block and three 3-bedroom detached dwellings.

This part of Winchester is under further assault from large developments. It is proposed **1-7 Chilbolton Avenue** should be replaced by 49 dwellings, ranging from 4-bedroom houses to 1-bedroom flats, which could accommodate 118 new residents. The Trust found the approach and style of architecture acceptable, and welcomed the underground parking included in the scheme. This was not our reaction to the other scheme, an outline proposal to demolish **2-4 Chilbolton Avenue** and **West Hayes Lodge, Sarum Road**, and replace them with 40 apartments in blocks, with a 6-storey circular tower facing onto the Romsey Road roundabout. Large blocks of flats to achieve high densities in suburban areas may be characteristic of places like Bournemouth, but the Trust feels most strongly that they should not become part of the Winchester scene, especially on important routes into the City such as this is. We were very concerned about the additional demands on the local infrastructure made by schemes of this size, and therefore objected to both schemes as premature until the completion of the long overdue study of the area that has been commissioned by the local authorities.

An outline application for **land adjacent to Little Orchard, St Cross Road**, proposes the demolition of four houses overlooking the water meadows near the Bushfield roundabout to make way for a large development of houses and flats that would have a density of over 55 dwellings per hectare (dph). Not only would an unacceptable amount of traffic be added to an already overloaded road, but this is also a very sensitive site on an important route into Winchester which would be

visible from St Catherine's Hill, and the Trust has objected in the strongest possible terms to this application.

The Christchurch Road Conservation Area is also showing signs of pressure for increased development. A block of four dwellings in place of **138 Edgar Road** is under construction, and the demolition of **136 Edgar Road** to build three houses for Winchester College staff has been granted, as has another dwelling in place of the **Old Fives Court Building, Beaufort Road**. Another scheme is to demolish the **Coach House, 88 Christchurch Road**, and build six dwellings in its place. While the existing house is of no great merit and is not visible from the road, this is a very small site, tight up against the railway line, and we felt that this number (and a density of c.55dph) would be overdevelopment.

The setting of **Rosenheim, 42 St Cross Road**, has been given its coup de grace with the granting of a large single storey extension running along the Ranelagh Road boundary. The garden of this unfortunate house has now been almost completely built over, with a garage and flat over on the corner of Ranelagh and Edgar Roads, and a detached house facing onto St Cross Road to its south, both of which were granted on appeal. Not much left of the spacious setting of the Victorian development that was the reason for its being made a Conservation Area some 25 years ago, and a rather depressing indicator of what the future might bring, despite the guidance in PPG3 (much quoted when increased density is mooted) that new development should respect the character of the neighbourhood.

Other applications we've objected to include the demolition of the wall in **Mews Lane** to make way for part of the development adjacent to the Pumping Station, Romsey Road, a new alternative scheme for the block of flats in place of **18 Bereweeke Road**, and a proposal to convert **25 St Thomas Street** to residential use and build three new units at the rear where we felt the information provided was inadequate for a Listed Building in this sensitive position - this application has now been withdrawn.

These are the major schemes we've seen during the few past months. Lack of space prevents details of the many other applications the panels have objected to or commented on, all of which will affect their surroundings and so change the character of the City.

Shione Carden

The Winchester Studies - TrustNews Feb 2005

Many of you will be aware that, under the leadership of Professor Martin Biddle, OBE, FSA, FBA, a series of volumes are being published which will make Winchester the most fully recorded and researched city in North West Europe.

The volumes record the history of the City from the Iron Age through Roman, Saxon, and Norman times until the decline in the later Middle Ages. Since 1971, six volumes in eight parts have already been printed and five more, including an historical atlas of Winchester, are approaching completion. The Winchester Research Unit under

Martin Biddle has collated all the information recorded over the years by thousands of 'diggers' from 25 countries. As you all know opening up a bit of ground in our city will almost certainly show that someone has been on the site before! It requires painstaking work to interpret all the information and then a tremendous amount of crosschecking, often with the countries whose invaders helped to form our nation. Many scholars have given freely of their own time but an office is required to store and sift information. The City of Winchester Trust has contributed financially to the Winchester Studies and, as their representative on the Publications Committee, I commend the enclosed leaflet to you. I hope you may wish to contribute to this unique work.

Chris Webb

Consultation on the Southeast Plan - TrustNews Feb 05

Copies of a document describing proposals for a new South East Regional Plan for the period from 2006 - 2026 have been going out to every household in the region, asking for the views of over 8 million people. The area covers 9 counties and 7 district councils, excluding Greater London. There have been Regional Plans before, but this time it is different in that the document has been prepared at regional level instead of being built upwards from the Structure Plans of the individual counties.

This top down approach is itself a cause for concern. The South East England Regional Assembly ('SEERN) does have 74 county and district councillors - just two thirds of its total membership - but nominated by their own authorities rather than being directly elected. The other 37 mainly represent vested and invested interests with no accountability to the electorate. In practice, it is already clear that SEERA is very much under the control of the Government Office of the South East, based in Guildford, and that reluctance to follow the lines laid down by central Government are likely to lead to it simply being overruled.

Turning to the draft Plan itself, the main attention and controversy concerns the proposals for house building. Three options are being put forward for comment: construction of 510,000 homes or 560,000 or 640,000, over 20 years. The Government has already made it quite clear that it is angry at SEERNs decision not to include options for more than 640,000. This is in effect appreciably below the increase to 720,000 for which John Prescott has been arguing.

As well as variations in the total, there are alternative strategies for how the numbers should be distributed across the region within sub-regions, with inevitable emphasis on land in Hampshire as the numbers increase above the minimum. In general the need for more housing is argued on the grounds not so much of growth of the total population, but of migration into the region, and the continuing decline in household size, so that even the same number of people require more separate households.

This of course raises the question to what extent we should project past trends into the future. Taking household size, from about 2.4 people per dwelling, the ratio is expected to fall to under 2 by 2026. But, at this pace, there would be less than one

person per household by 2066 and, as this seems highly improbable, it might be wise to plan for some slowing down to occur.

I am reminded of a note I passed to the County Planning Officer, at the end of the examination in public of the then South Hampshire Structure Plan, almost 20 years ago:

A trend is a trend is a trend
So why should it alter or bend?
But the wise planner knows
That the further it goes,
The nearer it is to its end.

Apart from the number and distribution of housing, there are two main concerns: firstly whether proper financial arrangements will be made to ensure that the requirements of the so-called 'affordable' sector of the market will be effectively met; and secondly whether the target of 60% of new build can be accommodated on brownfield or previously used land, instead of new greenfield sites.

The 60% figure will of course be harder to hit, according to the total numbers of the various options: 60% of 520,000 is 312,000 but the same proportion of 720,000 is 432,000. At the intended rate of 30 dwellings per hectare, 432,000 would occupy about 14,000 hectares - or, with allowance for necessary infrastructure, an area of about 14 miles square.

A third important concern is that proper and comprehensive infrastructure should be provided for new housing development - roads, schools, hospitals, water supplies and recreation. These must come in advance of the homes, or together with them. Understandable concentration on the house-building aspects of the draft Plan runs the danger of detracting attention from many other important elements in it. It is to be hoped that a series of opinion surveys will ensure that these issues are not neglected.

Surprisingly, although the plan is to run for 20 years, housing needs are expressed as a fixed number in each year of that period. Perhaps it would make more sense for the government to set provisional targets for each decade and then review these periodically in the light of actual housing needs.

It would be useful and interesting if all members of the Trust could keep a copy of their replies to the draft Plan and send them to the Heritage Centre. A summary and analysis of these views would make a valuable contribution to the debate.

Harvey Cole

Design Awards - TrustNews Feb 2005

Winners of the Trust's Awards were announced at a reception hosted by University College Winchester at the West Downs Centre.

Trust Chairman, Mrs Pat Edwards, welcomed the Mayor, Councillor Mrs Cecily Sutton, and guests who included all those who had entered schemes for the 2004 Design Awards, the judges and the organisers of the whole process, Norman and Ann Roberts.

"The Trust's first presentation of Design Awards took place in 1984 and does not take place every year" said Mrs Edwards "but this is the seventh such occasion.". Introducing Vice-President Donald Insall, CBE, she referred to the Trust's good fortune in having such an eminent conservation architect to assist in caring for Winchester.

High Standard of Entries

Donald Insall spoke warmly of Winchester, its heritage and setting, highlighting the recent welcome news that Winchester came second only to York in visitor a popularity poll of British cities. Announcing the Awards, he emphasised the high standard of entries, which had impressed the judges whose criteria had been: 'demonstrations of good practice in civic design. Interiors are taken into account in public buildings only'.

The judges were Robin Haddow - Chairman, Hampshire RIBA, Richard Baker - Architect and Planner, Nick Carey-Thomas, Architect, Shione Carden and Iain Patton both from the Trust.

Full of Inventiveness & Joy

Awards went to: newly built **Osborne School** designed by Architects Daniel Keeler and Nick Yarrow from Hampshire County Architects. It was described as being 'full of inventiveness and joy, particularly the central corridor and ramp which forms the heart of the building'.

Then, **Winchester College Music School**, by NVB architects of Frome at the heart of both the College campus and the City. 'Its scale and form complement the adjacent St. Michael's church and College houses.'

And **West Downs Centre**, converted and extended from a boys' school to conference centre and teaching area, was the work of Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects LLP of Bath. The judges felt that the old school's motto Honest, Brave, Pure summed up the design.

Commendations went to **Loch Fyne Restaurant** where rehabilitation and restoration was the work of Edwards Rogers Associates Ltd., London. The judges ... 'hoped that eating at the restaurant would inspire customers who might be undertaking their own projects'. Then **St Bede C of E Primary School**, returned to life after total flooding, by Hampshire County Architects.

Wessex Court, originally an unlovely modern building turned into flats by Huw Thomas Associates was also commended, as was **Shechem House** by Snug Projects Ltd.

Warm Tribute

Chris Higgins, Director of Estates at University College, Winchester, paid a warm tribute to the architectural skills and engaging personality of Richard Feilden who had recently died in a tree-felling accident in his woodland. His influence had transformed building policy at the College and West Downs Centre and the adjacent student village were fitting monuments to his work.

Addendum. The Trust would like to be associated with this tribute. Members who attended the Design Debate in May last year will remember Richard's lively defence of modern architecture.

Sally Patience