

# Major concerns over City College plan

The need to preserve significant buildings – whether these are hundreds of years old or have only been around for decades – comes together with a concern for sustainability in the Society's response to the major, hybrid planning application covering the buildings of City College and its car park.

In our comments to the council, we welcome the redevelopment of the car park and proposal for a new public space with a pedestrian link between Redcross Street and London Road.

But we question the need to demolish the Pelham Tower, which was designed by Don Tresize in the architects department of the former Brighton Borough Council and is a good example of the department's work.

"In the interest of sustainability, consideration should be given to reconfiguring the building to meet current day educational needs," we write.

We also advocate the retention of existing buildings on the east side of Pelham Street, especially the York Building, designed by architects Simpson and Son, which played a significant role in the history of education in Brighton. We believe these buildings could become student residences.

Approval must be granted for the scheme in its entirety, so it was not possible for the Society to support some elements and ask for others to be rejected. We have therefore asked the planning committee to refuse the application in its present form.

• You can download our submission at [www.regencysociety.org](http://www.regencysociety.org).



## A trick to pull off at Circus Street



for example, student accommodation adjoining creative workspace, which would be next to the dance studio, then the university and then residential accommodation.



Circus Street, with its abandoned market, cries out for redevelopment – but the challenge of combining new university facilities, 400 bed student accommodation, 35,000 square feet of offices, restaurants, cafés, a dance studio and new homes in close proximity should not be underestimated.

The Society has been consulted by developers who are hoping to pull off this trick and has emphasised the need to group compatible uses sympathetically –

We also expressed concern about the bulk and size of the proposed office building and the height of one of the residential blocks, as well as suggesting that the local vernacular and materials should be represented in a contemporary way in the development. A planning application is expected shortly.

• The bottom picture shows the Circus Street site after demolition of the slums that occupied it before the market was built. From the [James Gray Collection](#).

## BHASVIC centenary talk

It's the centenary of the BHASVIC site in Dyke Road, which originally played host to Brighton, Hove & Sussex Grammar School and, to mark the occasion, old boy – and Regency Society vice-president – John Wells-Thorpe is giving a talk about its history on 23 October 2013 at 7pm. A block of tickets has been set aside for Regency Society members.



Entry is free but by ticket only – you can collect from the reception office at BHASVIC but remember to bring your membership card. If you'd rather get tickets by post, write to Mark Gillingham, of the Past & Present Association at 11 Elrington Road, Hove BN3 6LG.

## At risk Hippodrome could become a cinema

It began life in 1897 as an ice rink, was soon converted to a circus, then a variety theatre before a brief stint as a film and tv studio and finally spent 40 years as a bingo hall. Empty since 2007, the Grade II\* listed Brighton Hippodrome now tops the Theatre's Trust's *Theatre Buildings at Risk* register for 2013.

The Trust describes it as "now possibly the finest surviving example of its type in Britain", with onion-domed boxes and a plaster ceiling in the form of a vast tent, as well as a palm court and miniature Bridge of Sighs believed to have been added in the 1930s.

The Trust adds, "It is now in a state of some disrepair, with plasterwork falling from the roof and balconies."

The Hippodrome was originally designed by Lewis Karslake of Karslake and Mortimer and converted to a hippodrome in 1900 by Frank Matcham, who was responsible for the flamboyant decoration (*top right*).

The owner is now in pre-planning discussions, in which the Regency Society has been involved, over plans to convert it into an eight-screen multiplex cinema, although the detail of plans are changing frequently, the artist's impression, *bottom right*, is from an earlier iteration than current proposals. For example, the circus animal ramp, which was to have been demolished, is now to be retained as a feature.

Draft proposals would mean inserting a floor at circle level to provide a restaurant, as well as excavating the stalls and demolishing the fly tower and backstage areas to create the cinema spaces. The changes would theoretically be reversible.

Developers Alaska are planning a public consultation event and are expected to submit a planning application in the coming months. We are pressing for a full public consultation and will comment once the application has been lodged.



## Opinions, opinions: where do they come from?

The Regency Society is nothing if not opinionated. We have views about all kinds of things from how to meet our city's future housing needs to the removal of a central heating flue from a church roof. But where do they come from, these opinions? And how can the Society's members influence them? As with so many things, the answer is: it depends. Two very different examples illustrate the point.

The first is the Local List – the council's list of buildings of interest, which aren't quite interesting enough to have gained a national listing with English Heritage. It's an important list nonetheless because a building's inclusion can be taken into account when a planning decision is made. Recently, the council held a public consultation, inviting suggestions for buildings to be added to the list.

The Society submitted 25 suggestions. Society trustees identified and investigated possible candidates and, through our newsletter, website, Facebook page and Twitter stream, we invited members (and others) to make their own suggestions. We reviewed the candidates at one of our regular trustee meetings and came up with our 25 submissions to the council. We are now waiting to see which are accepted.

The second example relates to number 43 Russell Square in Brighton (*images on the right show Russell Square*). This is a charming Georgian house, part of a listed terrace, which had fallen into disrepair before the death of its previous, elderly owner. In late 2012, the new owner applied for permission to convert it to a house in multiple occupation. The application was referred to the Council's Conservation Advisory Group (CAG). This group meets every three weeks and the Regency Society is represented on it. So, every three weeks, we hold a meeting of our trustees to review the applications that CAG will be looking at a day or so later.

We looked at the Russell Square plans, which showed that many of the proposed rooms would be excessively small, so we decided to object. Our objection was partly the obvious one that the rooms would not provide decent homes but we were also concerned that over-crowding would not be conducive to the proper conservation of this historic building. Other members of CAG agreed and a recommendation was made for refusal. We are glad to report that the planning committee refused the application, in spite of an officer's recommendation to the contrary.

The Society looks at several applications every three weeks in order to guide our CAG representative. The timescale involved means it is not possible to consult the full membership on every application. Where there is more time, in cases such as the local list, we try to consult more widely.



## Is Brighton & Hove ripe for World Heritage status?

*In The Times, Marcus Binney recently urged that the urban legacy of Brighton and Hove was so rich that it should be designated, like Bath, as a world heritage site. But, Sue Berry asks, was Binney overstating his case?*

The unique identity of Brighton and Hove is far more than the usual icon of the Royal Pavilion – and it deserves to be both better known and maintained as a major economic and cultural asset.

Most of the city's character is derived from the outstanding Georgian, Regency and Victorian buildings in its centre, a townscape with a remarkable diversity of style, building materials and layouts, almost all done by small scale builders and developers well before the era of planning legislation.

The uniquely long seafront of Brighton and Hove has a rich mix of buildings dating from the 1760s onwards that sweep around the bay and offers a magnificent prospect viewed from either the Hove front or Kemp Town (*Marine Parade, top right*).

Bedford Square and New Steine and the many delightful streets running off to either side of St James's Street (*Camelford Street, second from top*) were all begun before 1800, mainly as lodging houses for visitors.

These smaller houses, with their rich assortment of styles and building materials, have a delightful variety of heights and widths, which result from the lack of supervision by a surveyor when the streets were being built and make a wonderful contrast with the more severe formality of Brunswick Town, Palmeira and West Brighton in Hove, controlled by surveyors of the estates that owned them.

Brighton has the gift of two natural focal points – the sea and, running inland, the Steine gardens (*third from top*). Between the 1750s and the 1820s, before the seafront promenade road was built, these were a famous, sheltered promenade area, which helps to explain why the Pavilion overlooks them (or what remains of them).

A little imagination is needed here. The Pavilion Gardens (*bottom*), where the aged planting is ready for replacing, also need restoration. Along with the newly restored Level, these areas would make a spectacular green spine for this part of the city.

Hove has a superb legacy of Victorian homes built to attract visitors and retirees – by the 1850s, they were an increasingly important residential sector in resorts.

Hove's lower lying coastal area was ideal for the grander planning that the bigger plots of land made possible. Its more regular and spacious layout is a strong contrast to Brighton's resort area.

What's clear from exploring the success of Bath is that investment in raising the profile of the older parts of our city and making them more attractive to walk in would attract the mature middle class resort market back into Brighton and Hove as investors and as visitors.

But it was not simply designation as a World Heritage Site that made Bath the success story it is now. The commitment of the community to the regeneration of Bath's economy by developing facilities such as the new pedestrian shopping plaza has been key to the spa's recent success.

Until and unless our city confidently seeks to make the best of its unique identity and encourage investment in the historic fabric, it will remain a careworn second to Bath in spite of better access to London and overseas markets.

No international designations, no matter how worthy, will change that. Only a sea-change in culture will.



## Lectures and events for the 2013-2014 season

**Jennifer Scott**, curator for the Royal Collection Trust, will be giving our lecture on 6 November on *Sir Thomas Lawrence, George IV and the Defeat of Napoleon*. Lawrence, who became president of the Royal Academy, was sent abroad to paint portraits of allied leaders for the Waterloo chamber at Windsor Castle by the Prince Regent. The season ends with the John Small lecture, after the AGM on 2 April 2014. **Jonathan Meades** (right) will give the keynote Antony Dale lecture.



**6 November 2013**

*Sir Thomas Lawrence, George IV and the Defeat of Napoleon*

**Jennifer Scott**, curator for the Royal Collection Trust

Jennifer has been associated with a number of exhibitions in the Queen's Gallery. She is currently working on the Waterloo Chamber at Windsor Castle.

**4 December 2013**

*Urbino: the conservation and renewal of an historic city*

**John McKean**

The Society's 2014 study tour includes a visit to Urbino. John will describe how architect Giancarlo De Carlo was responsible for revitalising the city's historic fabric and enhancing it with exemplary new buildings, a story which offers lessons in the care and planning of historic towns.

**15 January 2014**

*Wells Coates: Modernism in Brighton and beyond*

**Elizabeth Darling**, author of a recent monograph on architect Wells Coates

**5 February 2014**

*Pavilion and Dome* – Royal Pavilion Music Room

An open forum to discuss the future of the Royal Pavilion Estate and the Brighton Dome.

**5 March 2014**

*Annual Antony Dale Lecture* – Royal Pavilion Music Room

*Concrete poetry*

**Jonathan Meades**, writer, television presenter, wit and critic

His latest project, still in development: brutalism, its precursors, its denigration, its gradual revival. Followed by drinks in the Royal Kitchen. Entrance: £10, including a glass of wine.

**2 April 2014**

*John Small Lecture* – after the AGM

*Buildings at risk* – Orchestrated by trustee Jamie Wright, a group of members will each make the case for saving one of the City's buildings at risk, proposing a new use. The audience will then be asked to vote on which building should be saved.

Unless otherwise specified, lectures take place on Wednesdays at City College, Pelham Street, Brighton BN1, starting at 7pm. Entrance is free unless otherwise stated – please remember your membership card. You are welcome to provide a donation to defray the considerable costs of the lecture series. City College offers full wheelchair access, good public transport connections and ample parking nearby. We usually meet for a drink after lectures at a nearby bar.

### Your membership fee and Gift Aid

To qualify for Gift Aid – and keep membership fees down – we're no longer charging non-members for admission to lectures, apart from the Antony Dale annual lecture at the Pavilion, when every audience member must buy a ticket so we can cover the cost of hiring the Music Room and Great Kitchen. Instead, anyone who wishes to contribute is free to make a donation.

Gift Aid is a government scheme that allows charities to claim back the tax paid on donations. If we can claim Gift Aid on members' subscriptions, it increases their value to the Society by 20 per cent, at no extra cost to the members. But there's a catch. Gift Aid is only allowed on donations, in other words money given to a charity to pursue its charitable objects. If we charge non-members for admission to lectures, the tax authorities view members' subscriptions not as donations but as payment for the lecture programme. And that means no Gift Aid.

We earn very little from admission charges to non-members – much less than we will earn from Gift Aid on subscriptions. That is the reason for the change. But we have been asked why members should bother renewing if they can hear the lectures free of charge anyway. The Society works hard to achieve its charitable objects and relies on members' subscriptions to cover the majority of the cost of what we do. We believe that most members join the Society to support all its activities and to have a say in how it is run, not simply to go to the lectures.

They also receive updates on our work and items about local conservation and development, free day passes to English Heritage and National Trust properties and notifications of lectures and events of interest in the city and its environs. Members who are 40 per cent taxpayers can also use their self-assessment tax returns to claim back 20 per cent of their subscriptions.

We hope all members will continue to renew subscriptions each year. We will also welcome visitors to our lectures and hope they make a donation – or, better still, become members.

### Save the date – a dinner in 2014

It will likely be cold and wintry on 1 February 2014 but a very warm welcome will await you that Saturday at St Nicholas's Church. We'll be taking it over that evening for a sit-down Regency Society dinner.

There will be a light-hearted and illustrated after-dinner speech and lots more fun. Details and pricing to be announced later in the year.

### Stanmer House visit

Our half-day visit to Stanmer House, due to take place on 11 October, was postponed because of illness.

We hope to set a new date in 2014. Members who were attending have been informed.