

## Circus Street: 21st century slums?

Over-development, noise, overlooking and a lack of light are among the reasons that we have objected to proposals for the site of the old market in Circus Street.

The plans include 142 flats, 486 student rooms, an office block, a university library, a dance studio, shops, a café and 43 car park spaces. All of this is on a site measuring about 10,000 square metres.

We support the principle of a mixed development of this sort in the city centre – but we oppose this specific plan because it would be serious over-development.

We estimate that the housing density would be 1,100 bed-spaces per hectare. This is much higher than in other parts of the city. It is more than six times the density proposed for Toads Hole Valley, a green-field site earmarked in the City Plan for new housing. The student housing is even denser.

These very high housing densities have been achieved with eight buildings of between six and 14 floors. They are grouped around two relatively small courtyards. Noise will be unavoidable. The flats will receive little or no direct sunlight.

Residents will overlook each other across spaces as narrow as 14 metres. Some students will look out onto blank walls just three metres away. Student rooms will have half their window space fitted with obscured glass to reduce overlooking. Each residential building has only one lift, which will result in serious queuing at busy times and worse problems if a lift breaks down.

Why is it necessary to fit so much into such a small space? One reason is that the new City Plan requires lots of new homes. We recognise this need and have supported the use of Toads Hole Valley for housing. In fact, we believe that the housing density level proposed for Toads Hole Valley is too low.

Our conclusion is that Circus Street needs less housing, while Toads Hole Valley needs more. By considering these two sites together, the planners could achieve their housing targets without such unacceptable overdevelopment.

We also question the need for office space in this location. We have already argued that the now empty Amex building should be refurbished, rather than demolished. At one time, this area was notorious for some of Brighton's worse slums, which were cleared between the two world wars.

It would be far better to re-use a good looking, late 20th century office building rather than build a new one nearby and risk creating early 21st century slums.

- You can download our submission at [www.regencysociety.org](http://www.regencysociety.org).
- See also Viewpoint, page 7



From top: proposed buildings; two new towers would dominate the cityscape; artist's impression of the new development



## A future for the Hippodrome

The problem of finding an appropriate, 21st century use for landmark historic buildings vexes this city more than most – and proposals aired in October to insert eight cinema screens and significant restaurant space into the Brighton Hippodrome are no exception.

The Regency Society's primary concern is that this important and valuable cultural and architectural asset is saved for future generations and that a decaying area at the heart of the old town is given a new lease of life.

The Hippodrome was originally built as an ice rink and operated briefly as a circus, before being converted into a variety theatre by Frank Matcham, one of Britain's most celebrated theatre designers. It was then used as a film studio before becoming a bingo hall, which closed in 2006.

We have been monitoring proposals for its restoration over the past year, attending meetings with representatives of developer Alaska, the Theatres Trust, other amenity groups and those who have campaigned for the building to be restored as a theatre.

*Continued on page 2*

## Annual dinner – booking now open

**When:** Saturday, 1 February 2014

**Where:** St Nicholas Church Brighton, Dyke Road, Brighton BN1 3LJ

**Dress code:** lounge suits

**Entrance by ticket (£35 a head, please use accompanying booking form)**

Share food, drink and the company of good friends in the candlelit surroundings of St Nicholas' Church, the ancient mother church of Brighton, and venue for the return of the Regency Society's annual dinner.

The evening starts at 7.30pm, when you will be greeted with a glass of fizz before sitting down to dinner at 8pm.

### The menu

- Crab and saffron tart
- Lamb cooked in red wine served with wild mushroom and flageolet beans
- Brown sugar parfait and pineapple crisps

### Vegetarian alternative menu

- Wild mushroom pâté with homemade soda bread
- Roasted ratatouille and mozzarella strudel with Provençal sauce
- Brown sugar parfait and pineapple crisps

We round the meal off with platters of cheese and coffee for you to enjoy as you listen to Alexandra Loske and her tales of *George's Giraffe* – the history of the first of these elegant beasts to grace Britain. Wine will be available to buy by the glass and the bottle – and we promise it will be reasonably priced!

Parts of St Nicholas of Myra date back to the 13th century. The Church today is mainly the result of a Victoria restoration carried out under the guidance of the then-Vicar of St Nicholas and Brighton, the Rev Henry Michell Wagner – the photograph from the James Gray collection (*bottom right*) is a rare view of the building pre-restoration.

As the parish church of Brighthelmstone, St Nick's has witnessed the growth of our city from a small fishing village to the great place it is now. Over the years, it has been a place of worship for many names from our history. Arthur Wellesley came as a boy, Dr Johnson attended when he was staying with the Thrales and, of course, Prinny went there – although he never returned after the vicar preached on drunkenness.

While in the church, have a look at the Norman font; the medieval screen (restored in 2008); Victorian wall paintings, also cleaned and restored in 2008 (with a contribution from The Regency Society); a full set of stained glass windows from the Read Kempe Studio; and memorials sculpted by Westmacott.



## A future for the Hippodrome

*From page 1* "Our main worry is that if we oppose the current proposals and they are turned down or withdrawn, there is no guarantee that other financially credible proposals would be forthcoming," says Society chair Roger Hinton.

"If some form of acceptable development does not go ahead in the very near future, the building will continue to deteriorate and will be lost forever. We would support the campaign to restore the Hippodrome to a full proscenium theatre if we believed it was a viable option but we fear that it is not."

The Society applauds the commitment and enthusiasm of the Alaska team and welcomes its proposal to develop the surrounding area, improve its permeability and repair the street frontages of Ship and Middle Street. We also welcome the attempt to conserve a large part of the dome space.

We are not opposed to the insertion of cinema screens but we are concerned that too many are being proposed and that they take up a disproportionate amount of the building's volume. We would rather see a larger performance package, in which the main domed space could be used for a range of different activities, such as concerts, theatre, cabaret, snooker, boxing and conferences – the approach taken by Camden Town Roundhouse. Crucially, we are not yet convinced by the developer's claims that the changes to the interior of the Hippodrome would be easily reversible. In July, we asked for further details but these have not yet been received.

- You can download a full version of our views at our website.



# On the look-out for heritage in danger

*The kiosk on the seafront to the south of the King's Road junction with West Street is part of Brighton and Hove's history as a tourist resort. It also needs some TLC, so we've contacted the council to see what they can do.*

The kiosk is formally known as the Rotunda and was built as a promenade shelter in 1871, according to *The Encyclopædia of Brighton*, as part of a significant development of the seafront. Some believe it was once a bandstand.

It now operates under a lease from the council as a kiosk selling hot drinks and snacks. It lies in the Regency Square conservation area, at its border with the Old Town conservation area, and forms a strong visual focal point at the junction between Kings Road (the seafront) and West Street (the pedestrian route to the seafront from the train station).

It has group value in that it is one of the several improvements to the seafront made between 1883 and 1887, others being the bandstand and ten sheltered promenade seats.

Its former use as a shelter illustrates the social development of Brighton as a place in which to see and be seen. Its original construction and its more recent uses as a tourist information centre and then a snack bar show the changing ways in which its owner, the local authority, has played a role in the tourist economy.

The structure is intact and retains its original shape and design, particularly at roof level, in spite of the changes made below to accommodate more recent uses. The roof is currently in need of repair. Although the council, as landlord, is believed to be in negotiation with the leaseholder over repairs, this damage represents a risk to the integrity of the building.

- We have also written to the council expressing concern about the **Western Pavilion** on Western Terrace. Grade II\* listed, it was the home of the architect Amon Henry Wilds. The exterior is deteriorating badly and is in need of significant attention. We have been told that the council is considering enforcement action if the owner does not restore the building.



## New Lane in £15 million project

Revised plans to create a new Lane on the site of the former Hannington's goods yard and revamp Brighton Square (*below*) have been given the go-ahead.

The late 17th century Puget's Cottage, which was listed earlier this year, will now be worked into the £15 million scheme.

The project centres on Brighton Square and a yard behind the former Hannington's department store in North Street. It includes the revamp of the square and the creation of shops, offices, town houses and a 26-room boutique hotel.



A new lane will also link Meeting House Lane with Brighton Place, behind North Street.

From top: the kiosk in about 1893 from the James Gray Collection; the kiosk today; roof and ironwork in poor condition

## Keep in touch with local history

*The Keep opened to the public in November, bringing together the East Sussex County Records, the local history sections of the Royal Pavilion and the Brighton and Hove Libraries and the special collections of Sussex University. We should all celebrate, says the Society's David Robson.*

The Keep is a shining white building that is a stronghold of knowledge and memories in our city, a beacon that illuminates the past but which also shines towards the future – the result of an enlightened collaboration between East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, Brighton and Hove Museums and the University of Sussex (the University of Brighton declined to be involved), each of which has added their archives and historical records.

The East Sussex Record Office was established in 1949 and was housed in the Lewes Maltings. During the 1990s, the building was recognised as unfit for purpose and plans were set in motion to replace it. These finally came to fruition in 2010, when a two-hectare site was identified in Moulsecomb in what is sometimes referred to as Brighton's Academic Corridor.

The building is on three floors and has an area of 5,400 square metres. It was designed by WS Atkins and built by Kier Southern. Funding shortfalls forced budget cuts and the project was finally brought home for £19 million. Although this seems a huge amount, the new building represents good value for money and shows no signs of scrimping or saving.

The Keep now houses the collections on a total of six miles of shelving. Material is located using a system of bar codes similar to those used in large warehouses.

The building contains generous, well-lit front-of-house public spaces on the ground floor – a large reception hall, meeting rooms, a library and a study area – as well as pleasant and spacious staff areas on an upper level. It can accommodate 35 staff and 270 users. The main archives are housed in three large sealed depots, one on top of the other. These are contained within a massive structure that maintains desired environmental conditions with minimum energy consumption – the building is claimed to be the most energy efficient of its kind in the country.

Such large windowless volumes are hard to handle architecturally but the new building succeeds through judicious landscaping, tree preservation and careful siting. Unashamedly modern, its elegant white forms suggest a place of light and efficiency.

The Keep is located on the northern edge of Moulsecomb close to the junction between Lewes Road and the Brighton By-pass. It is served by the 23 and 25 bus routes and is within walking distance of Falmer Railway Station. Metered parking is available for up to 69 cars.

Members of the public can apply online or in person to register as users. Registration is valid for three years. Catalogues can be accessed online and users can book a study space and pre-order material. The reading room provides equipment for scanning books, documents and microfiches and, for a reasonable fee, users can make electronic copies on memory sticks or with digital cameras or can print paper copies.

### Keep informed

Telephone: 01273 482349

E-mail: [thekeep@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:thekeep@eastsussex.gov.uk)

Web: [thekeep.info](http://thekeep.info)

Address: The Keep, Woollards Way, Brighton BN1 9BP

### Opening hours

Tuesday to Friday: 9.30 am – 5.00 pm

Saturday: 9.30 am – 4.00 pm



From top: The Keep; the open library area; the study area; six miles of shelving; one of the book scanners



# Tracing Constable's Brighton home

*John Constable's Brighton paintings are known and admired around the world. What remained a mystery was where he stayed while creating them – until writer and Regency Society member Shan Lancaster worked with current resident, artist Peter Harrap, to disentangle the clues, earning 11 Sillwood Road a blue plaque that was unveiled in July 2013.*

He was invited to Paris but instead, in 1824, the 48-year-old John Constable chose to stay with his young family in Brighton, where he worked energetically and stayed in a cottage on the half-built outskirts of the resort.

From letters written to his friend Archdeacon Fisher, scholars knew that his address was 9 Mrs Sober's Gardens, where a "painting room" was readied for canvases brought down from London – but they could not pinpoint the location in the modern city. And it was not his only visit.

More than 200 of his works are directly related to his visits to Brighton between 1824 and 1828, most of which can be attributed firmly to periods when he stayed at the house, which was hailed by guests, according to his wife Maria, as "Hampstead with the addition of the sea".



Perhaps the key piece of evidence that 11 Sillwood Road was once Constable's base comes in a letter he wrote to Fisher on 29 August 1824, in which he names his neighbour as a Mr Masquerier, a well-known portrait painter of the period.

The first entry in the deeds for 10 Sillwood Road – records Masquerier's purchase of the property from Mrs Sober in March 1824. Masquerier was listed at the address in the census of 1841 and in every directory of Brighton between 1840 and his death in 1855. The name of the street was changed Sillwood Road in 1871-72.

But there is a final twist in the tale: Masquerier's house was not originally number 10. It appears as number 8 in directories of the 1830s and in the 1837 register of electors, then as number 10 thereafter. This shift, when the number of every house in the road increased by two at the end of the 1830s, is mirrored in the deeds of neighbouring properties.

So 9 became 11, and Sober's Gardens became Sillwood Road – the place where Constable's painting developed significantly and where he wrote to his friend Fisher, "I am looking for a month's quiet here and I have brought with me several works to complete. What a blessing it is thus to be able to carry one's profession with me."



Today, that house has been identified as 11 Sillwood Road. It was altered externally in 1885 but the interior spaces are still essentially those occupied by the Constables. The house is on the easternmost boundary of a garden, which, in 1824, was owned by a Mrs Sober. Constable wrote to Fisher on 29 August 1824 that the address was "so called from Mrs Sober, the Lady of the Manor – & rich in estates here – which are more so now by their new buildings".

Ann Sober, née Kemp, was the sister of Thomas Read Kemp and in 1817 she built a house called Western Lodge (*top right, painted by Constable and the later addition, Priory Lodge, photographed in the late 19th century, bottom right*) on land now occupied by Sillwood Terrace.

The gardens extended south, covering the area now known as Sillwood Road and, on their easternmost boundary, she built a row of smaller houses. The earliest date for the start of this development seems to be 1822, when the *Brighton Gleaner* of 6 May reported that the garden of Mrs Sober on the West Cliff was "intended to be built upon".

At first, the development did not have a formal name and is variously called Sober's Gardens and Western Cottages until the mid-1830s, when directories began to refer routinely to the street as Western Cottages.



## The White Lodge – a little bit of Lutyens

*The Regency Society has proposed that the White Lodge on the Cliff is included on the Brighton and Hove Local List.*



The White Lodge on the Cliff was originally built in 1903 as an isolated villa on south-sloping land above the cliffs to the east of Brighton.

Its architect was Brighton-born John W Simpson, son of Thomas Simpson, the prolific school-builder. John W designed the nearby Roedean School and went on to serve as president of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

The house was later bought by Lady Sackville, otherwise known as Victoria Sackville-West. Lady Sackville's main home was Knole and she was a prominent member of Edwardian society. Her daughter was Vita Sackville-West, an associate of the Bloomsbury Group who, with her husband Harold Nicholson, created the celebrated gardens at Sissinghurst.

Lady Sackville was a close friend and sometime lover of Edwin Lutyens, who is now acknowledged as having been the pre-eminent British architect of his day.

He called her MacSack, while he was her MacNed and they conducted a long and often childish correspondence, which he peppered with architectural sketches.

At one time, Lady Sackville owned numbers 39, 40 and 40a Sussex Square and Lutyens converted these into one dwelling for her. Then in 1923 she sold her Sussex Square home, bought the White Lodge and persuaded him to remodel it for her.

Lutyens produced a number of ambitious designs for villas with loggias before adding balancing wings to the east and west of the original villa, transforming it into a miniature country house.

He also added a new entrance hall and a garage block to the north-facing street frontage and created a sunken rose garden to the south. The eastern wing contained an open loggia on its ground floor, adorned with murals by William Nicholson.

The garden survives to this day and, with its patterned slate-on-edge paving, is particularly noteworthy, having inspired a similar garden at Sissinghurst.

The house was later converted to flats and many of the original windows were replaced with upvc frames. In 2000, an attempt was made to get it listed, partly with a view to preventing the ruination of the east wing.

The proposal failed, mainly because of the state of the windows, and a local builder proceeded to replace the original roof of the east wing with garish blue-green tiles and to hide the loggia behind an ugly brick extension.

We have proposed that the White Lodge of the Cliff is included on the City's local list. We believe that the recent changes are reversible and that a work from the hand of such a significant architect should be protected from further depredations.



*From top: White Lodge today; White Lodge in 2000; Lutyens' original plan for the South elevation; the sunken garden*



# Just how dense is too dense?

*Build up, build out – Brighton's need for new housing must have rational answers, writes David Robson.*

We live in the most densely populated country in Europe – our towns and cities already cover around 15 per cent of our land. In the face of an unexpected surge in population and a shortage of affordable housing, we have to find ways to build within existing conurbations and we have to build to higher densities if we are to protect our shrinking countryside.

Nowhere is this more true than in Brighton, a city hemmed in by the Downs and the sea, where little land is available for building and where the council is under pressure from government to commit to ambitious housing totals in its new City Plan. But all of this begs a question: what densities are feasible, what densities are compatible with healthy and happy living? How dense is too dense?



We can measure density in terms of dwellings per hectare but it's more meaningful to consider bedspaces – the number of dwellings multiplied by the number of theoretical bedspaces that they contain, which gives a more accurate indication of the potential number of occupants. We can also measure density in terms of floor-area-ratio or FAR, which measures the area of a building against the area of the site on which it sits.

One of the problems with the failed King Alfred development in Hove was that the city, which owned the land, failed adequately to assess its capacity in terms of either bedspace density or FAR and issued an unrealistic planning brief which was little more than a shopping list. As a result, the developers were encouraged to put more on the site than it could reasonably accommodate.

Brighton exhibits densities that range from as little as 40 bedspaces per hectare in outer suburbs such as Westdene to 500 bedspaces per hectare in the tight grid of Southover. High-rise flats built between the wars, such as seven-storey Furze Croft in Hove, achieved densities of around 600 bedspaces per hectare, densities that have rarely been exceeded since. This range of densities implies huge inequalities in terms of amenity and environment.

Of course, increasing the density saves land and reduces the cost of infrastructure and services but studies have shown that once densities exceed 400 bedspaces per hectare, a law of diminishing returns sets in. A given population still needs access to open space, schools, shops and other facilities, while increases in residential

density produce diminishing overall savings in land. A reasonable hypothesis suggests that densities in excess of 600 bedspaces per hectare are undesirable in terms of social and physical wellbeing and achieve only marginal savings in land.

As density increases, other factors take on a heightened significance. An increase in the number of dwellings produces a corresponding increase in the number of parked cars, prams, wheelchairs and bicycles as well as quantities of waste. It is salutary to note that 100 parked cars need an area of about 2,500 square metres.

More people put additional pressure on a diminishing area of open space and include more children who need play space and more old people who need a seat in the sun. And high-density living leads one to reconsider space standards within the dwelling and the need to provide adequate storage and useable balcony space.



Then there is the question of height. Should we build tall and thin or short and fat? A development with a footprint of 50 per cent and a FAR of four will require an average height of eight floors; increase the height to 16 floors and you reduce the footprint to 25 per cent, freeing more of the site for landscape and increasing the space between buildings. People objected to the first Gehry scheme for King Alfred on the grounds of its excessive height but the second scheme, although lower, was far bulkier, more obtrusive and less attractive.

In considering recent proposals for the Anston House site and Circus Street, the Regency Society has concluded that there is a need for a city-wide debate about development parameters. What floor-area-ratios are appropriate for different sites? What height restrictions should be imposed? What bedspace

densities are feasible? What dwelling mixes and space standards should be adopted?

When a major planning proposal fails, this should not be a cause for rejoicing. Each proposal involves a huge investment in time and resources and failure means that valuable land remains fallow. The fact that so many schemes have failed during recent years suggests that it is time for the council to review its planning strategies in order to ensure that targets are realistic.



*From top left, clockwise: early Gehry King Alfred concept; later idea; Anston House*

## Lectures and events for the 2013-2014 season

**Elizabeth Darling** will be giving our lecture on 15 January on *Wells Coates: Modernism in Brighton and beyond*. **Jonathan Meades** (right) will give the keynote **Antony Dale** lecture. The season ends with the John Small lecture, after the AGM.

15 January 2014

*Wells Coates: Modernism in Brighton and beyond*

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



Elizabeth lectured in the History of Architecture at the University of Brighton and was a trustee of the Regency Society until she transferred to Oxford Brookes University.

Her special subject is British 20th Century

Modernism and, appropriately, she still lives in Park Gate, Brighton's only example of a design by Eric Lyons. She has recently published a book on maverick architect and designer Wells Coates and her talk will focus on his design for Embassy Court.

1 February 2014

*Annual dinner* – St Nicholas Church. See page 2.

5 February 2014

*Royal Pavilion Estate: past, present and future* – Royal Pavilion Music Room

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

**See below. Ticket only – see accompanying booking form.**

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. See accompanying booking form.**

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.



**Windsor Castle and Stanley Spencer Museum day trip**

27 April 2014

After the success of Jennifer Scott's lecture on Regency portrait painter Thomas Lawrence, we are organising a coach trip to Windsor Castle, where we'll see the famous Waterloo Chamber, and the Stanley Spencer Museum in Cookham. Tickets will cost approximately £40.

If you would like to reserve a place, e-mail Kate Ormond on kawo68@gmail.com or write, enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope, to Kate at 17 Sheffield Court, Brighton BN1 4HA.

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.



### The future of the Royal Pavilion Estate

The Royal Pavilion Estate – the Pavilion, Museum and Art Gallery, Garden, Dome, Corn Exchange and Studio theatre – is working to create a plan that will secure its future and you can find out more at our discussion forum on 5 February. The venues attract around 1.2 million people a year, with hundreds of thousands more visiting the gardens, but this international treasure is in need of some restoration and upgrading.

Speakers will include Janita Bagshawe, director of the Royal Pavilion, and Andrew Comben, CEO of Brighton Dome and Festival. They will tell us about the history of the estate and the problems they face in running it. They will also share some of the options they are looking at to solve those problems. They want to hear what others think, so a good part of the evening will be devoted to questions and comments from the audience.

The Royal Pavilion and Museums teams and Brighton Dome and Festival have engaged design firm Filelden Clegg Bradley to carry out a design feasibility study, interpreting the challenges, needs and ambitions of the Estate. This forms the backbone of a first stage funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) that was submitted at the end of November. If successful, this money will help with the development of a master plan. Arts Council England has already ring-fenced £5.8 million for the project.

Consultation with key groups and individuals – including the Regency Society – is already under way and almost 100,000 local residents and tourists have taken part in research. When initial ideas are put together, they will be made public, with an invitation to give feedback. The consultation process will continue until firm plans have been developed for a stage two submission for funding, which will go to the HLF at some point before the end of 2016.

• *The Royal Pavilion Estate: past, present and future* takes place in the Music Room of the Pavilion at 7pm on Wednesday 5 February. Admission is free but by ticket only. Apply using the accompanying booking form.