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The waterfront: no news could be bad news

The Council is proposing to embark on a major project which could have serious repercussions. Yet local people and amenity groups have heard little and have not been consulted. We are worried that a major deal is about to be struck which could make huge changes to our city.

The Council's partner in this venture is Standard Life Investments (owners of Churchill Square). Their plan is to demolish the Brighton Centre and possibly the Kingswest building in order to expand the Churchill Square shopping centre and link it through from Western Road to the seafront. Apparently the plan is that borrowing against increased business rates from the enlarged shopping centre alongside the funding raised from the sale of the Brighton Centre will pay for the construction of a new conference and events centre at Black Rock. Anticipated income from the conference and events centre will also fund the borrowing. All this was decided a year ago, but as yet there have been no announcements of progress on this far reaching proposal nor any details of public consultations about it.

We're concerned, especially since we fear a deal will be signed with Standard Life Investments before we have an opportunity to comment. The implications could be huge: here are just some of the issues we are worried about:

- What impact will the new enlarged shopping centre have on the rest of the centre of Brighton? We are aware that this element is included in the City Plan, on which the Council has consulted. However, we would not want to see the lively heart of the city in Western Road, North Street and Queens Road threatened by a large, monolithic shopping centre likely only attract the large chain stores who can afford the high rents. Brighton's centre has grown over decades to be an individual and special place - we want it to stay that way.
- How will an enlarged shopping centre be serviced? How will access for increased numbers of shoppers be achieved? Is an enlarged shopping centre really feasible in a city which has only half a hinterland, is cut off to the north by the Downs and already suffers from a congested traffic system?
- Black Rock would be a major challenge for public transport for events of up to 10,000 people. Would it not be better to be closer to the city centre so those attending events can walk easily to city centre hotels?
- What impact will the new building at Black Rock have on the Kemp Town conservation area with its Grade I listed seafront squares and terraces?

These and other issues could have huge implications. We are disappointed that so little effort is being made to consult with interest groups and local people to ensure we share the Council's vision. We can see how such a scheme might be financially advantageous for the Council, but we are much less sure that it will benefit our city.

We call on the Council to reveal much more about their plans and give local people the opportunity to have a say as soon as possible, certainly before any deal is finalised with Standard Life Investments.

Notes for editors:

The Regency Society is Brighton and Hove's largest civic society and is a registered charity. It aims to promote the protection and improvement of the city's built environment and to educate and inform people about it.

Its trustees include experienced professionals in the fields of architecture, property management and town planning.

For further information contact the chair, Roger Hinton, tel. 01273 321794; email hinton@clara.net.