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Regency Review

CONSIDERING THE PAST...FRAMING THE FUTURE

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE REGENCY SOCIETY

Major City Developments and a small triumph over a Major Supermarket

Updates on the major development of the King Alfred site, Brunswick Developments proposals for the Marina and Beetham's proposals for a very tall tower on the north-east side of Brighton station are included overleaf. There does seem to be a fever of expectation in these recent planning applications and we assume that it results from the publication of the city council's policy guidance for tall buildings. We are sure that this document was not intended to open the flood-gates to inappropriate, overlarge buildings but rather to proscribe areas where tall buildings would not be appropriate.

The policy guidance generally preferred tall buildings to be limited to valley floors rather than being placed on higher ground where their prominence would be greater. The Marina was specifically recognised as a position where tall buildings might be appropriate, even though this seems to go against previous policies restricting new buildings to a height below the top of the adjacent cliffs. Hence our guarded approval to the tower at the Marina, which is almost as far away from the cliff as the site will allow, looks as if it will be a very elegant building and seems appropriate in this position because of its lighthouse-like appearance. However we specifically do not consider that the closely packed, massive blocks of lower buildings (still between nine to fifteen storeys high and therefore 'tall buildings') are in any way

appropriate here. Planning policy has emphasised that the design of new tall buildings should be of 'high quality' but high quality buildings in the wrong place can be a complete disaster.

The other problem with the acceptance of some tall buildings is knowing when enough is enough. The contrast between tall and short buildings can be exciting (many city churches and cathedrals demonstrate this) but a plethora of tall buildings may soon become visually over-replete. We recommend proceeding with great caution. After all, we already have a number of existing tall buildings which we would be happy to see disappear.



Tesco - ground floor take-away...

The saga of the applications for planning approval and listed building consent for alterations by Tesco Limited to Palmeira House, at the junction between Western Road and Holland Road in Hove, seems to have been resolved, at last. Its proposed alterations to the elegant ground floor elevations of the former Palmeira Stores (and later antique furniture showrooms) were inept and crude and in the event were not carried out in

accordance with the drawings accompanying the applications. The work was completed and the Tesco Express all hours local food supermarket opened. The city council took enforcement action against Tesco and an inquiry date was set. Meanwhile Tesco made some alterations to their drawings and their revised applications were considered. A decision was deferred for more negotiation and, at the eleventh hour, further concessions were made by Tesco. Finally approval was granted, but the compromise scheme will be less attractive than it could have been.

The former finely moulded bronze window frames will be replaced by bulkier rectangular sections of bronze coloured aluminium. The low suspended ceilings will be raised and details of the stall-risers, plinths and sub-fascia have to be approved. The main fascia signs will now be limited to two and will be in bronze coloured metal.

We are pleased to report a limited success by the planners over a company which has certainly demonstrated its ability to show that it knows how to put the 'gross' into 'grocer'.

Great Expectations at St. Andrew's, Waterloo Street, Hove

St. Andrew's Church has been chosen to be part of a new promotion by The Churches Conservation Trust – *Great Expectations*: 50 Trust Churches that offer an especially fine experience to the visitor. This is due in no small part to the enthusiasm and effort of guardian (and Society member) Mike Robins. Congratulations!



Brighton's Jubilee Library opens

Let's face it - the Jubilee Street Library site has been a crime scene for more than 30 years: the demolition of the Central School building occurred in questionable circumstances, with Jubilee Mews mostly following into oblivion. The empty site had remained as witness to indecision, unloved by all save those with a mandate to park their cars there. At the same time, the provision of library services for a city that aspired to be the focus of culture were a joke.

Now, however all is forgiven with the opening of the Jubilee Library. Architects Bennetts Associates, London and Lomax, Cassidy & Edwards, Brighton, have presented us with a scheme that surpasses all reasonable expectation with its creation of internal space and promises to do the same with its external surroundings. The seemingly massive interior is simply a most enjoyable place to be, and will probably do more for local enjoyment of the written word (as well as computer suites, rare books, music CDs and films) than a dozen government initiatives.

The only off-note is the provision of graceless bookshelves: surely in a library these are of central importance, although perhaps in a lesser building they would not be so noticeable.

View from glazed wall

That it is a PFI scheme, something that is not universally loved with its labyrinthine complexities, makes the outcome even more surprising. The architectural grammar, glass and glazed tiling - a passing reference to the mathematical tiling of Royal Crescent - wraps around this discrete low building and emphasizes the truism that quality does not need to shout, while the apparently simple interior masks a complex system that reduces energy needs to about a third of conventional expectancy. One can only hope that the Librarian is able to maintain the pristine quality of the interior and avoids its usual desecration under a blizzard of ill-judged stickers and blue-tacked leaflets.

Brighton has been largely untouched by architecture in the last hundred or so years (much building - little quality) and so it is especially pleasing to welcome this new departure. When the square has been completed we shall have a cultural centre worthy of the city, and one which promises to revitalize all of us. For this we offer sincere thanks and congratulations to everybody who has made a dream reality.

Perhaps others who are proposing major changes to the fabric of the city could take note of this success, and see another way to achieve their goals.



Insignificant bookshelves?



Southern elevation to new Square

Light Wells



Yet another skyscraper for Brighton ?



The Brighton and Hove Council approval, under two years ago, for the New England Quarter Masterplan for the area between the Brighton Station rail-track, London Road, New England Road and Cheapside, appeared to have ended decades of controversy. The site had been the subject of frequently bitter and acrimonious debate, extending back for at least forty years, into the era of the notorious Wilson Plan which envisaged most of the area as the route of a grand dual-carriageway road, bringing London traffic straight into the heart of Brighton. It would also have entailed the destruction of much of the North Laine area, which had already been marked out for demolition in anticipation of just such a scheme. Fortunately saner attitudes prevailed and the idea was abandoned. Since then the residential area to the south and south-east of the station has become a vibrant and justly celebrated centre of urban living.

The northern quarter of the site, however, remained neglected, much of it derelict or used for surface carparking, until a masterplan eventually emerged. The merits of this plan have been much debated, with the active participation of the Regency Society and other conservation societies, together with council officers and committees, culminating in the full council giving its approval in September 2003. It was therefore with considerable surprise and shock at the end of last year, to discover that new proposals, put forward by the Beetham Organisation for an integral part of the Masterplan site, completely undermined the already agreed scheme by proposing to incorporate a tower block of 42 storeys (roughly double the height of Sussex Heights) at the southern end of the site. The already approved Masterplan had stipulated that no part of the development should be over eight stories in order

to preserve the dominance of St. Bartholomew's Church and the station canopies, both listed buildings. The visual damage to both the immediate neighbourhood, the North Laine conservation area, and the more distant views of the City, will be very considerable, if the proposal is approved.

The Regency Society has therefore written to the council expressing its strong objection to the tower block proposal, although not to the original plan for an eight storey hotel and a neighbouring residential block. In the letter we state that:

"The Society believes that no case can be made for the merits of this tower either from an aesthetic or environmental view, and considers that, if built, it would do immeasurable harm to the architectural integrity of Brighton and Hove."

(The full text of the letter is posted on the Society's website)

Gehry moves on King Alfred

But he moves in mysterious ways!

Having flown in from California to meet CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), the government's design 'watchdog', Frank Gehry came to Brighton recently to report to the city council's advisory consultation panel and to update it on the current outline proposals for the development of the King Alfred. Gehry used an architectural model of the site and a wide surrounding area to show the presently proposed layout of the development.

(Although the Panel was reminded that the meeting and discussion were confidential the following day a local press interview with Gehry illustrated the model quite clearly. We therefore feel justified in providing the following information – which reports the situation as we recorded it.)

The format of the model was by simple blocks of wood representing the volume and height of the proposed new buildings. Almost at once, following the presentation, Councillor Peltzer- Dunn questioned the accuracy of the scaled representation of the

surrounding buildings. Frank Gehry and his partner Jim Glymph responded by saying that the model was indeed 'to scale' and was based on information that the city council had provided.

Since then the Advisory Consultation Panel has met again, on 28 February, and learned that the exact positions, volume and height of the new buildings are still uncertain and 'further and better' information will be provided soon. Furthermore, the accuracy of the representation of existing nearby buildings has still not been clarified, as far as we were told.

We are well aware of Frank Gehry's working methods and we respect his reputation for providing

outstanding solutions to difficult architectural and urban design problems but the outcome of this meeting was, from the panel's viewpoint, that little progress had been made.

Working with a design team in California must present logistical problems to the developer but time is running on and the forecast date for a full planning application is fast approaching.

For the above reasons we feel unable to provide a meaningful update on the progress of this major project

... and we hope that Gehry, in due course, **'his wonders will perform!'** Watch this space!

Marina Towers over City

990 flats in eleven blocks

are proposed for the south-west corner of the Marina. A forty-storey tower would be complemented by six north-south blocks ranging in height from nine to fifteen storeys with link buildings containing some retail space. 171 parking spaces would serve the development. The Committee had a full presentation from the architects, Wilkinson Eyre, and the developer. It was enthusiastic about the positioning and design of the tower which will add spectacular elements to lateral views along the sea front, giving almost a light house effect. A western bridge would greatly improve the convenience and appearance of the pedestrian approach to the Marina. A beautiful eastern bridge would enable better pedestrian circulation around the Marina. Worries about the traffic impact and the lack of car parking were met by the comments made by Brunswick Developments.

But we expressed concerns that should be met before the scheme should be approved. The tower is set well forward of the north-south blocks and the cliff line so that it can be read clearly as a tower but we felt that this objective would be achieved better if the lower blocks were reduced in height allowing the full elegance of the tower and the dramatic changes of height between the tower and the north-south blocks to be appreciated. This would also reduce the impact of the scheme on the Marine Gate area and further afield. The Committee also has very major reservations about the Arena proposals at Black Rock and their impact on the area and wonders how the Wilkinson Eyre project can be judged adequately without knowing that scheme's final content and that of the ASDA redevelopment.

The Committee has been criticised for not

The present application is for a very small area of the Marina (shown shaded in this photo). Further planning applications are expected for the Arena at Black Rock and for the ASDA site, making a dramatic increase in new construction.



considering of the Town Estate. it studied the report as well topography and has striven criticism respecting the of the

sufficiently the impact development on the Kemp But in forming its view developer's urban design as the existing design, axes, and planting of the Estate to introduce a positive of the proposals while overwhelming importance Estate.



Sixtieth Anniversary Dinner

To mark the 60th. anniversary of the Society's foundation there is to be a dinner at the Royal Pavilion on December 10 2005. Organized by Audrey Simpson and full details in due course (but make a diary date), there will be seating for 90, so a prompt response will be needed. The all-inclusive cost will be £60 each.



April 1 at 7.30pm – A Regency Concert at St. Andrew's Church, Waterloo Street.

Lucy Tanat-Jones, soprano

...and make a note for June 18 when we shall hold the Summer Secret Garden Party – booking details shortly.

Falmer Inquiry

Hearings under the Section 77 Call-in Planning Inquiry about the Brighton & Hove Albion's proposals for a community stadium at Village Way North at Falmer resumed in February and are due to continue into April. The Society appointed Hazel McKay to give evidence to the inspector on its behalf and she did so very effectively for more than four hours on 17 February.

The objects of this stage of the re-opened inquiry are to provide evidence concerning the availability, or otherwise, of alternative sites to Falmer. If any members wish to read Hazel McKay's forty-four page proof of evidence we shall be pleased to send them a copy.

The inspector's report is not expected to be completed before May and it has been suggested that the Secretary of State is unlikely to make a decision before the General Election has taken place.