Development Control - TrustNews Sept 2003

Decisions have been made on several schemes mentioned in previous editions of TrustNews. The reinstatement of the **Charles House facade on the corner of Sussex and Upper High Streets** has been approved, but if the execution of the recently completed Try Homes development on Eastgate Street is anything to go by, the Trust is very concerned that the detailing needed to provide a satisfactory replacement might not be carried out to an adequate standard.

The **King Alfred's College dining room development on Sparkford Road** has been withdrawn, and the block of flats proposed to replace **The Hermitage, Cheriton Road**, has been refused. The applicants of the scheme to demolish **Chestnut Mead, Kingsgate Road**, and replace it with a block of flats have gone to appeal following refusal, and the Trust has written to the Planning Inspectorate supporting the Local Authority's decision. Winchester College has put in another scheme for **Antrim House, St Cross Road**, which retains the existing house as a sanatorium, with a smaller library building linking it to the house master's house on the west elevation, and the new boarding house being added on behind. We welcomed the retention of the existing house and felt the new buildings would be acceptable.

Still to be seen at the time of writing is a new scheme for **The Grange, 140 St Cross Road**, with the density almost halved, (12 units instead of 23), and for a large (about 50 units) back land development in the gardens of several houses on the city side of **Chilbolton Avenue**.

Schemes being built, nearing or having reached completion, are Winchester College's new **Music School, Culver Road**, houses at the end of **Hillside Close**, and two schemes off **Dean Lane**: the **English Courtyard** retirement development, and the **Linden Homes houses**, in what is now called Lupin Gardens.

The past few months have seen a very large number of planning applications going through the system, and if the District applications have arrived in the same abundance as those we have seen for only the Winchester wards, the Planning Department very much deserves our sympathy.

Among the many applications for extensions, dormer windows, conservatories and fascia signs that we've looked at, two proposed conversions were among the most interesting: the post office at **16 Egbert Road** to three 1-bedroomed flats (to which we objected, now withdrawn), and the **Middle Brook Street** premises previously used as a delivery office by the Post Office to a nightclub, to which we also objected.

In view of the requirements of PPG3, it is not surprising that many of the new developments are for residential accommodation, in both central and suburban locations. These schemes range in size from the six units proposed for **13 Cathedral View** and the five units for **8A St Thomas Street**, to the thirty-four proposed for land behind **64 Quarry Road** and the seventy-four units on land on **Staple Gardens** at present occupied by **Northgate House and Documation House**. All of these have been objected to by the Trust.

Most of the other schemes were for between about ten and twenty dwellings and, depending upon their appropriateness in density and design, the Trust has also objected to many of these. It is worrying that each of the applications in this flood of new developments has to be considered individually, without their cumulative effect on Winchester's infrastructure as a whole also being taken into account. On present evidence, it seems more than likely that the semi-rural character of roads such as Salters Lane, Dean Lane and Park Road will be lost and become suburbanised, because it will be found necessary to provide adequate access for the additional dwellings that have been built on these narrow roads. It would be good to know that these changes of character were by design rather than by default.

Shione Carden

Chairman's News - TrustNews Sept 03

The Trust has published its own policy entitled "Applying PPG 3 to Winchester". It addresses what has been happening with the implementation of PPG 3 in the City and, in particular, in the suburbs where so many areas are under threat. Every week brings new applications for the redevelopment of older property, for demolition of existing homes and replacing them with high density development, often of uncertain merit. The working party, led by Antony Proudman, has worked very hard indeed on this project and produced a most valuable critique of what has been happening to Winchester in the past two to three years. These views are supported with examples and suggestions for a better understanding and implementation of government policy as contained in PPG 3. We have distributed the document widely to councillors, and local and national organisations; we shall also be sending copies to other amenity societies. Members can obtain it by sending their request to the Heritage Centre accompanied by a large s.a.e with 60p stamp; alternatively it can be downloaded from the Trust's website.

At the annual general meeting of the Civic Trust South East group in early June, the problems most frequently referred to by societies such as our own emanated from PPG 3.

There has been a strong response to the Trust's document and it may have had some influence on the decision of the City Council to run two seminars in early October to discuss the implications of PPG 3. The Trust has been invited to take part in the proceedings with planners and possibly a representative from the Government Office of the South East.

One very encouraging response to our document came from Jon Rouse who is the chief executive of CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment - successor to the Royal Fine Art Commission).

Of course, the Trust realises that the Planning Department is working under severe pressure and we are grateful to John Hearn for illustrating some of the problems elsewhere in this edition of TrustNews.

Roger Backhouse

Chairman's News - TrustNews Sept 03

The Trust has published its own policy entitled "Applying PPG 3 to Winchester". It addresses what has been happening with the implementation of PPG 3 in the City and, in particular, in the suburbs where so many areas are under threat. Every week brings new applications for the redevelopment of older property, for demolition of existing homes and replacing them with high density development, often of uncertain merit. The working party, led by Antony Proudman, has worked very hard indeed on this project and produced a most valuable critique of what has been happening to Winchester in the past two to three years. These views are supported with examples and suggestions for a better understanding and implementation of government policy as contained in PPG 3. We have distributed the document widely to councillors, and local and national organisations; we shall also be sending copies to other amenity societies. Members can obtain it by sending their request to the Heritage Centre accompanied by a large s.a.e with 60p stamp; alternatively it can be downloaded from the Trust's website.

At the annual general meeting of the Civic Trust South East group in early June, the problems most frequently referred to by societies such as our own emanated from PPG 3.

There has been a strong response to the Trust's document and it may have had some influence on the decision of the City Council to run two seminars in early October to discuss the implications of PPG 3. The Trust has been invited to take part in the proceedings with planners and possibly a representative from the Government Office of the South East.

One very encouraging response to our document came from Jon Rouse who is the chief executive of CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment - successor to the Royal Fine Art Commission).

Of course, the Trust realises that the Planning Department is working under severe pressure and we are grateful to John Hearn for illustrating some of the problems elsewhere in this edition of TrustNews.

Roger Backhouse

Oram's Play Area - TrustNews Sept 03

The Parks and Recreation Department of Winchester City Council have decided that the play area and equipment on Oram's Arbour should be upgraded. A laudable and welcome decision which will be generally welcomed by the parents of the children who use this recreational facility to let off steam and amuse themselves.

However, the alternative schemes recently displayed in St. Paul's Church give rise to concerns about the environmental impact that the adoption of any one of them will have on one of Winchester's principal green and open spaces. The garish colour schemes, including those on the ground covering, and the metal structures are not at all in sympathy with this area that forms an important and historic part of the Winchester Conservation Area.

It would be more in keeping with the surroundings to make a much greater use of timber in the construction of the various items of equipment and to paint them, where necessary, in a dark shade of green or other neutral colour. Oram's Arbour is not a 'theme park' but an informal recreational facility for the use of the citizens of Winchester and their children. The need to fence the area is also questionable. Not only will it serve little practical purpose as the gates may not always be closed by the users of the equipment, but will serve to draw attention to the site. A previous play area here was fenced but some users preferred to climb over it rather than use the more conventional access. This lead to unsightly damage and incurred further expense over and above the normal maintenance costs.

There is another factor that may have escaped the Councils notice. After dark the area is used as a meeting place for older children and young adults. In an attempt to minimise this rubbish generating activity, the equipment installed should be that appropriate for the younger age groups. This might discourage the older ones from congregating there and playing on the more adult equipment. The residents of St. Paul's who live beside the western wall of the former hospital might also favour this approach. Past experience of the previous fenced play area showed that the fence acted as a litter collector and proved difficult to mow right up to the margins. This was a constant source of annoyance to residents facing on to the Arbour.

The Parks and Recreation Department have been written to voicing these concerns. Copies have also been sent to the Chairman of The Planning Committee, the Ward Councillors and the Conservation Officer. If you feel strongly about this issue please let the Parks and Recreation Department have your views in writing.

R.B. Merton

Some Facts of Planning - TrustNews Sept 2003

Work in the planning department has increased significantly over the past years. This is especially the case in development control where there has been an increase in applications and appeals. Obviously this growth impacts on other sections within Development Services who are consulted on proposals and also get involved in pre-application negotiations (i.e. Conservation, Landscape, Forward Planning, Engineers, Building Control and Estates). There has also been a large growth in the number of enforcement enquiries, all of which have to be investigated. The figures show this increase

- Planning application decisions made:
- 1999/00....2153 2001/02...2583

- 2000/01....2423 2002/03...2915
- Planning appeals recieved:
- 1999/00....67 2001/02...108
- 2000/01....143 2002/03...137

The Council has improved its consultation processes. We now carry out extensive neighbour notification and public speaking at Committee is well established and popular. Public awareness has increased and there has been a growth in the number of people making representations on applications and a growth in general planning inquiries. The community expectation is high. As a result there are more subcommittees and working groups.

To manage the increase in work there has been growth in the establishment and investment in the service. There is however some difficulty recruiting and retaining planners given the national shortage.

John Hearn

A Cry Against the Reactionary & Negative - TrustNews Sept 03

I am very pleased that at this time the Trust has been so positive in its justified criticism of the planning system in Winchester. A report such as this is easily used selectively and superficially to support almost any position about Planning leaving the real substance in the shadows so I plead here that it is read carefully and within the framework of the Trust's 'Vision' document and the Government's very brave aim to create an urban renaissance.

There are many positions available for anyone involved in the process of development but I choose to recover the meaning of the word development to be what it should mean, that is 'to change and progress' and in general parlance to improve something.

As an architect, my whole sense of being is derived from a lifetime learning about how and why development can and should make peoples lives and environment better and richer, i.e. to be changed for the better. It is what the Vision document was about - having a vision and managing the process of change for the better.

The rush to defend the barricades, against heathen hordes of Developers sweeping across the City reveals not only the absence of a plan for the City but also the paranoia hiding just below the surface of suburbia, the fear of change. This fear shows a complete lack of faith in any contemporary values [and I mean deep cultural values not just architectural taste], and the dread of anything that smacks of a real urban environment. Even though the urban centre of Winchester is the very essence of the quality of the City the values being defended and the forms of development preferred, even by planners, are suburban. This fundamental contradiction remains unresolved and creates a perfect breeding ground for the very reactionary response to development. The whole situation is a powerful but negative force that only sends us backwards, puts us on the defensive and does nothing to help form what we

desperately need, a clear logical process of planning which will guide Winchester, step by step, towards becoming a better City.

The elected members first took only the crude numbers of PPG 3 as the goal by which to achieve housing targets and officers followed. Now the politicians are retreating to save their seats and the officers lower the value of sites to the point where it becomes uneconomic to develop at all within the City, thus triggering the MDA. i.e Barton Farm? Perhaps this is what many in the administration really want to happen. Barton Farm would certainly be easier politically as there would only be one group of protesters and it would be much more economic to organise and build. And where in all this is the will to make a better City, where is the vision? Lost in the detritus of petty fears. And where is an architect like me in all this? Lost in spiralling costs, loss of income, interminable circular unproductive negotiations, threatened by the angry populace, trying not to give up on the almost lost objective of good architecture and struggling to maintain just a thread of hope in the cultural desert. It is no wonder that I am angry at petty remarks made about modern architecture, about architects, even about developers. The City doesn't deserve and won't get good architecture of any style unless it supports it publicly, plans for it and makes the process workable and creative.

Ray Attfield

Editorial note - This e-mail was received from an exasperated architect member. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Trust but we understand that there are many other equally exasperated planning applicants amongst the professionals who are currently presenting their cases to the City Council.