Development Control - TrustNews Sept 2004

The first scheme for the **Royal Observer Corps HQ, Abbotts Road**, has been refused, while the developments at **Osborne School, Andover Road**, and behind **3-9 Park Road** have been granted.

The panels had a busy time at the beginning of August, with no less than four major developments appearing on the same list! One was a revised scheme for 22 units at the **ROC HQ, Abbotts Road**, with a layout respecting the Listed Building's diagonal siting (an improvement) and a quasi-Georgian style for the new buildings, to which we objected, feeling it was inappropriate for the area. Another was a new scheme for **Enniskerry, Sleepers Hill**, which has been sold on with planning permission to build 14 units, and although there are now only to be 12 units, with four storeys instead of three the buildings seemed more massive and bulkier, so we objected to this scheme, feeling the one with permission was preferable. At **St Cross Lodge, St Cross Road** we opposed a plan to build a block of 14 flats, which had pretentious detailing and a somewhat institutional flavour. (Stop press: proposal refused) The fourth scheme was on **chilbolton avenue**, where it is proposed **Nos 41 & 43** should be replaced by a mixed development of 15 units. Architecturally this seemed alright, but with all the other proposals that are currently under consideration for the road, we did wonder how the area was going to be able to cope with yet another 43 possible residents.

It might be worth taking stock of what is going on along this beleaguered road. At present there are only two sites on the townside of the road that are likely to be developed: at **46 Chilbolton Avenue** the scheme to demolish two 1960-70s houses for a ponderous block of 14 flats has just been refused but it seems certain that Banner Homes will eventually get permission for something there, and the same is true of the land behind **8-22 Chilbolton Avenue**, where Linden Homes has a second scheme for 50 units going through the planning system while they go to appeal on their first one for 54 units. On the other side of the road two schemes include the conversion of the existing dwellings: for 8 units at **11 Chilbolton Avenue**, now virtually completed, and for 12 units at **15 Chilbolton Avenue**, where the application has just been refused.

All the rest involve the demolition of the existing house, of whatever character or period. The first was **19 Chilbolton Avenue**, which was replaced by four houses - granted in 1998, before the demands of PPG3 so we are lucky it was not worse. Colten Developments want to build 13 units instead of **55 Chilbolton Avenue** (on which they are going to appeal, having been refused permission), and another 14 unit in place of **Pipers Field, 67 Chilboiton Avenue**, a scheme that has been withdrawn - although no doubt only pro tem.

The latest proposal is to demolish **Lang House, 27 Chilbolton Avenue**, to make way for a contemporary development of 13 units. The existing house is a typical example of the original flavour of the road, an Arts & Crafts style house set, in common with some other houses on this side of the road, slightly at a slant with the road boundary, which is something that helps to give the road its informal feeling. The somewhat institutional block proposed to replace it would straighten the frontage, which the Trust feels would be detrimental to the character of the

neighbourhood, although a courtyard development behind would be acceptable. We are objecting to this scheme, urging that unless it is impossible to convert the house to residential use, it should be retained - it is at present being used as a guest house, so presumably is structurally sound.

These nine developments are virtually bound to happen, in some form or other. They would not only totally change the visual character of the road (and it is stressed in the guidelines that the implementation of PPG3 should respect the local environment), but they would add about another 140 dwellings and their 360 or so residents, and their cars, to the local infrastructure - and this is not including the 41 units and possible 96 residents of Chilbolton Court, the development nearing completion at the junction with Romsey Road.

It is worrying that these developments - and those on other similar roads - are happening in such a haphazard way, without the guidance of a considered overall planning brief for future development in the suburbs. It is stated in PPG3 that studies should be made and local residents consulted about its implementation in their neighbourhood, and the Trust is urging the Local Authorities to fulfil this requirement, which would surely be welcomed by both residents and developers alike.

Shione Carden

Why we need a Vision for Winchester - TrustNews Sept 04

Readers will recall that the Trust published a policy discussion paper in January 2001 called The Future of Winchester, a Strategic Vision. Since then events have moved on and in particular we have been grappling with PPG3. While our original document is still relevant in that it sets out the principles that we wanted to pursue in the more urban environment that we foresaw, the Trust's Policy Group has been considering how best to direct its future activity as circumstances evolve.

Desmond Clarke of the Trust's Policy Group explains our views on the importance of having a vision for Winchester:

A vision for a city like Winchester should describe its future purpose, form and character in the light of changing economic, social, political, cultural and environmental influences. Some of these influences are outside the control of its residents; others can be shaped by local control and pressure.

Winchester was the ancient capital of England and its character over the centuries has been shaped by its role as an administrative, legal, ecclesiastical and military centre. It is often described today as an important historical city and is widely regarded as a 'nice place to live', encouraged by its unique environment and the architecture of many of its buildings, notably the cathedral, its good schools, lively high street, pleasant suburbs and incomparable setting. However, its environment has also been scarred by a few inappropriate or unattractive developments.

Winchester, like all cities and towns, is rapidly changing as many of its traditional roles diminish and improved rail and motorway links are introduced. In particular, there has been an enormous demand for new housing. As a result Winchester's unique character is increasingly under threat and there is a real danger that the City is rapidly drifting towards becoming just another dormitory town.

we cannot halt the pressures for change

While we cannot halt the pressures for change, Winchester's residents, through their elected representatives, local associations and media, can influence the evolving shape, design and character of the City. In particular, we need to ensure that major developments are truly integrated into the character, culture and life of the City, and that smaller developments enhance and reflect their local environment. To achieve this we need a vision for a future Winchester that builds on its unique character and design, and creates an exciting and attractive environment for future generations. We need to describe a future Winchester where we want to live and work and have a master plan within which developers, architects and planners can operate. Without such an over riding plan, the rapid enlargement of Winchester will be confused, unimaginative and destructive.

Cities can adopt very different visions: the 'historic' city model where development may be tightly controlled; the garden dormitory towns; the European model based on a vibrant centre; and the regenerated cities in the North. 'Good Cities' were created because their leaders had a vision and affected their development.

The Trust believes that there is a real need for a vision for the future of Winchester and there should be a genuine debate about what that vision should be for our City.

Time for further Building Conservation Legislation? - TrustNews Sept 2004

Background

The following dates give a very brief summary of the hesitant, step-by-step introduction of legislation to protect the built heritage of this country.

1873 John Lubbock (1st Lord Avebury) attempted to introduce a Bill to prevent the destruction of ancient monuments. These were confined to standing stones, barrows and the like. Repeated attempts were largely thwarted for the next forty years on the grounds of the superior importance of property rights.

[1877 SPAB founded to lobby for the protection of mediaeval buildings against the ruthless remodelling of the preceding century.]

1882 Bill passed permitting the State to purchase and care for historic monuments (but only with the owner's agreement); this power was extended to County Councils in 1900.

1913 Bill passed introducing the first element of compulsion.

1932 Town and Country Planning Act for the first time included the listing of inhabited buildings; also provision for tree preservation orders.

[1937 Breakaway Georgian Group founded by members frustrated by SPAB's lack of concern for the destruction of Georgian buildings.]

1944 Wartime damage prompted the first comprehensive listing of historic buildings of all kinds.

1953 Continued loss of great houses for economic reasons resulted in an Act introducing grants and tax relief.

1967 Civic Amenities Act passed, introducing Conservation Area legislation following the destruction of large areas of historic character during the period of post-war redevelopment and urban road building. This was a very significant step recognising the importance of whole areas rather than individual buildings (similar to the French zones protégés).

Conclusions

From this over-simplified summary, it can be seen that after a very protracted struggle to get the process started, major steps forward in legislation seem to have been taken each decade. And that for the most part these steps have been prompted by events, which showed the need for further protective measures; it is indeed very unfortunate that the measures were not taken until after much loss and damage had occurred.

There have, of course, been several further refinements in the law since the end of the sixties but not, we suggest, any step comparable in importance with those of the preceding decades. This is probably because the creation of conservation areas and a growing awareness of the value of our heritage have together served to prevent damage on the scale of previous years.

New threats

However, in our view and that of many others, there is now a new threat of damage on a very large scale. Just as it was realised that heritage areas needed careful handling, we now believe that small heritage towns need similar care during the implementation of current Government policies. And in the same way, as well-intentioned policies, crudely applied in the 50s and 60s, resulted in widespread damage to nationally important inner-city areas (see Aidous: Goodbye Britain), crude implementation of PPG3 and the Government's housing growth policies are now beginning to damage small but nationally important towns and cities, especially in the south east.

Increases in density and the construction of new areas of housing are not intrinsically the problem. Nor, especially in the case of PPG3, have the guidelines from the ODPM been wrongly conceived. The problem is almost entirely to do with their implementation at local level. The Government must, however, accept that it has responsibility for the outcome of what it hands down. The sudden imposition

(ruthlessly policed by GOSE) of density increases and housing targets, has meant that ill-resourced local planning authorities have neither the time nor the skills to manage the introduction of these swinging changes properly.

The results are unpopular everywhere, but the built heritage is reasonably well protected in inner-city areas and villages by their conservation area status. It is in the leafy suburbs and around the fringes of our small heritage towns and cities, many with vitally important country settings, that the damage is being done, and will be done on an increasing scale and at an increasing rate until, as in the 60s, we look back at the destruction and say, how did we let this happen?

Proposal

The example provided by the wording of the Conservation Area legislation and its subsequent success show, in our opinion, the means of legislating for the **"Heritage Town Status"** that we now propose.

Conservation area status was not meant to, nor has it prevented change, and it is not our wish to prevent Winchester or the many other comparable small towns and cities from continuing to change as they always have done in the past. The object would be to ensure that change must be handled in such a way as to "maintain and enhance their historic and architectural character" (including their setting). These are the words used in the Act, and they could be used again to apply to towns designated as having heritage status. In the same way that local authorities were helped to draw up their conservation area policies, we hope that each heritage town would be assisted in appointing an expert master planner.

Two further points about the legislation need to be emphasised. There was some dispute at the time over whether the writing of specific policies for the conservation areas or the designation of the areas should come first; it has been universally recognised that the decision to designate first was correct. Secondly, one serious mistake has been admitted by those who drafted the legislation: it required the use of planning powers to "maintain and enhance....", but omitted to require the use of highway and transport powers to the same end.

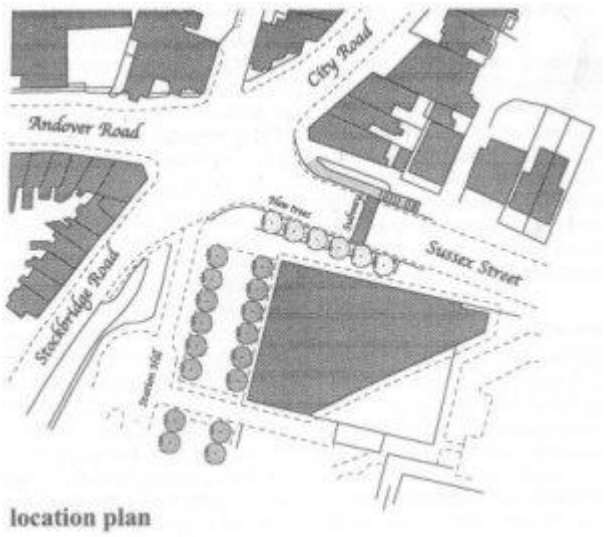
The way forward

New legislation of this sort is not achieved quickly, and events are moving fast - Mr Prescott is in a hurry. So if the damage described above is to be limited before too much of our heritage is lost once again, we must also move fast. It is a question of gaining support for the idea and finding a leader of greater stature than the City of Winchester Trust.

The introduction of the ground-breaking Conservation Area legislation, which was of such huge national importance, was promoted by the Civic Trust when Duncan Sandys was chairman. Could the Civic Trust do it again, or should we look for help elsewhere?

Michael Carden

Lipstick on the Gorilla 3 -TrustNews Sept 04

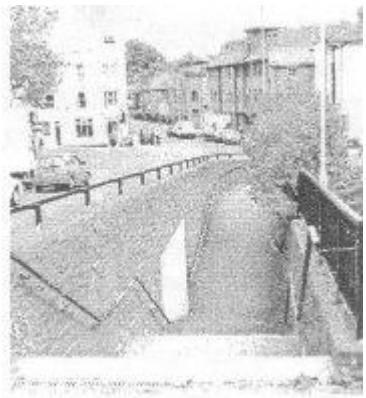


location plan

The underpass on Sussex Street is a foreboding and threatening tunnel which is avoided by the pedestrians it is supposed to serve.


as exists

Could it be abandoned completely?


underpass entrance

The ramp and steps on the side of the archivist building could be filled in, providing a "planter" for new trees. This would soften the rather cold wall of the archivist building and certainly improve the entrance to the city from the Andover Road.



new planting

The other side with its ramp and steps could remain. The tunnel itself could be gated forming a useful store. Perhaps the new bike hire scheme (located at Winchester Railway Station) could use this space for storage of further bikes?

Huw Thomas