Chairman's Miscellany - TrustNews December 2006

Silverhill The last TrustNews went out before our comments on the Silverhill development were prepared for submission to the City Council. They were subsequently circulated to all members for whom we have an e-mail address and also put on our website; paper copies can be obtained from the Heritage Centre. Whilst the Trust Council continues to support the redevelopment of the area, the height and mass of the submitted plans were considered as over-development of the site and we were particularly concerned about the lack of any tree planting at ground level - particularly along the south side of Friarsgate - and the removal of the trees in Middle Brook Street. Recently we have had meetings with Thornfield Properties and the City Council to discuss these concerns which appear to stem from the radical alteration of the original brief for the site.

Bushfield Down In response to a letter from our President, Sir Peter Ramsbotham, Mr Andreas Whittam Smith, the First Church Commissioner, came to Winchester and visited the site with us in order to listen to our concerns and ideas for managing the area. He agreed to consult his fellow Commissioners and we await the result of the consultation.

Vision for Winchester In October a meeting of the Town Forum (councillors representing the six city wards) discussed a document setting out A Vision for Winchester. The Policy Group of the Trust's Council had made comments on the draft of this document and we were pleased that many of our suggestions have been taken into account. As might be expected there are areas of conflict between aspirations that will have to be resolved in due course but, meanwhile, the document is to be published for public consultation.

Town forum It is becoming increasingly clear that Winchester residents suffer from a considerable democratic deficit when compared with residents in the rest of the district where there are Parish or Town Councils to protect and promote their interests. The Town Forum is supposed to fulfil the role of a Parish Council for Winchester but, although it may be better than nothing at all, it fails far short of being an adequate substitute. The Town Forum has none of the statutory powers of Parish or Town Councils and its members, elected to represent district-wide interests, cannot be as focused on our local issues or have the time for this. There is also the issue of City Councillors having to abstain from comments on local planning applications. Winchester residents already pay a 'parish' charge in addition to the District and County charges, so perhaps we should have more influence on how it is raised and spent. It would be interesting to know your views.

I am most grateful to a new member of the Trust, Nicholas Hirst, for volunteering to help with organising our archives. Rosemary KinnairdSmith has kindly agreed to help him get to grips with the system that she looked after for so long.

The book sale in September raised £350 and we are indebted to Jo Gordon-Watson and her team of helpers. Particular thanks are due to Iain Patton for transporting tables for the occasion. We should be glad for more offers to help with this task at the beginning and end of the day. The next book sale will not be until the Spring.

Finally, I would like to thank members for their support and wish you all a very happy Christmas.

Trust 50th Birthday - TrustNews December 06

The Trust began work for Winchester in 1957. It was then called The Winchester Preservation Trust and one of its founding members was Jeffrey Smith who is now one of our Vice Presidents. The anniversary must be marked and the Trust Council is planning a number of events during the coming year. Here is a foretaste:

On March 23 2007 we will publish a history of pubs and breweries in Winchester written by Phil Yates who is known to members for his other publications and for the many summer walks he has led in recent years. The book will be fully illustrated and is the result of many hours of devoted research by Phil who has given his work to the Trust. The book will be launched by Peter White, the well known broadcaster whose family run the Mash Tun in Eastgate Street. More details later.

During the year the Trust will hold another competition for awards to be made for new buildings, restoration and landscaping schemes in the ci ty. It will be organised, as before, by the indefatigable Norman and Ann Roberts.

On a sunny (we hope) summer Sunday we propose a walk and picnic for members and later in the year we hope to celebrate our publication of Andrew Rutter's Study of Winchester's conservation areas at a venue befitting such an occasion,

We would like to do more to involve members and so need to gauge your interest and likely support.

Would you support a celebratory Dinner in some congenial setting?

Some members are willing to open their gardens to members. A Sunday in June is likely. Would other members join in this project? Informality must be the style, not "spit and polish".

So, dear members, PLEASE tell us if you would support these ideas and tell us if you would not.

YOUR ideas will be welcome. Please contact the Secretary at The Heritage Centre as soon as possible phone, letter or e-mail.

Iain Patton

Planning Appraisal Group - TrustNews December 06

Sometimes being involved with planning applications is like being on a merry-go-round, because the same sites keep reappearing, with either slightly altered or

completely different schemes. We only look at those relating to Winchester, which is bad enough, so our greatest sympathy goes to the Planning Officers, who have to cope with development in the whole of Winchester District: this stretches from Wonston and Micheldever in the north to Wickham and Southwick in the south, and from Sparsholt and Otterbourne in the west to a long boundary on the east that stretches from north of the Alresfords down to Denmead.

The site with the longest history on our Winchester whirligig is probably **40 Kings Avenue**, where since 1999 it has been proposed that either an extension or a new dwelling should be built in its garden. It is located on the west side of the southern entrance to the Stanmore recreation area, a central component of the carefully designed and award-winning council estate, and the applicant has gone to appeal on no less than four occasions. Each time the reasons for dismissal have been the same, that the proposal would destroy a "remarkable example of a symmetrical estate layout" and be detrimental to the "local context of the core area of the estate ... of significant planning and architectural merit". These four dismissed appeals were made at no expense to the applicant, but required a considerable input from the Planning Officers, and therefore a demand on our rates. So it was with some alarm that we looked at yet another proposal for this plot, this time made by another applicant for two 2-bedroom flats. We objected to this, and it has been refused. We now wait to see whether yet another appeal for refusal of development on this site will be made.

Other sites also reappear. **43 Cromwell Road**, where a second attempt to get permission for an attached 2-bedroom dwelling on a corner site has been refused, and the County Library, Jewry Street, where the second attempt to amend the existing planning permission and to omit the steps from Staple Gardens, has been granted. At **Ardmhor, 38 Chilbolton Avenue**, we objected to a new scheme for 10 dwellings (instead of the 11 that were refused in May 2005), feeling its density would be too high for the locality, especially as the density was calculated on the gross area, rather than the net area, which excludes the land covered by the many trees on the site. Still to be commented on at the time of going to press is another scheme for **1-3 Westley Close**, where it is proposed 4 dwellings should now be built instead of the 14, 17, then 7 dwellings of the previous applications - on going to appeal the first two were dismissed and the third was withdrawn.

The **Royal Observer Corps HQ, Abbotts Road**, is another site with a long history, which could continue. The most recent scheme is to demolish the existing structure, a Listed Building because of its history but not its beauty, and to build a residential development in its place. Two separate applications relate to the current proposal: 1) to demolish the Listed Building (to which in principle we had no objection because we felt that the retention of this ugly building would compromise future development on the site as its historic contents were scattered throughout the county, although we objected until its replacement had been agreed), and 2) to replace it with 14 dwellings, to which we objected because the layout resulted in too much hard-surfacing and gardens that were too small for the character of the area. The Planning Development Control Committee granted the 14 dwellings, but refused permission for the demolition the Listed Building that would allow the development to take place. While understanding these have to be considered as two separate individual applications, it does seem somewhat illogical to refuse the demolition of a

structure admitted by English Heritage to be in such poor condition, due to concrete decay, that restoration work to make it usable would result in it being no longer worthy of listing, which also seems unlikely to be used as a museum.

We are glad the City has raised no objection to the proposed refurbishment of **Ashburton Court**, which could become a trendsetting example of a really sustainable structure. We very a much hope that Hampshire County Council will support this innovative environmental approach for the continued use of this building.

While the Trust strives to maintain its independent position when making its comments, it does welcome additional information when this is lacking in the application. The proposed three 4-bedroom dwellings at **Melbury Field, Kerrfield**, is a good example of this. Although noting the inadequacy of the site location plans, we welcomed the sustainable approach of the design and materials. It was not until we were alerted by a local resident and were able to identify and walk the site that it was realised how detrimental this development would be, and we changed our comments to an objection. This development has now been refused.

An interesting trend regarding parking policy seems to be emerging. Several schemes, including Hampshire County Council's proposal for 32 new parking spaces at King School, Romsey Road, and a renewal of parking on the tennis court at Highcroft, Sleepers Hill, which has been allowed since April 2003, have been refused because they cannot be reconciled with PPG13's requirement that they reduce reliance on use of the private car. While this might be inconvenient for those hoping to use these facilities, it should be good for the environment, and it is felt this local contribution towards reducing global warming should be supported.

Shione Carden

Southern Comfort - TrustNews December 2006

This informal gathering of Civic Societies was hosted on October 14th by the Portsmouth Society and was a most successful and enjoyable event. Representatives of societies from Weymouth in the West to Lewis and Shoreham in the East as well as those from Surrey, West Sussex and Hampshire assembled in Portsmouth Guildhall where we were welcomed by the Lord Mayor before hearing a fascinating address by Paul Grover, Director of the Solent Architecture Centre. Paul's enthusiasm and innovative approach to furthering good design and its recognition by members of the public gave us all great encouragement. For example he told us about the celebrations for the Titanic anniversary in Southampton that employed interactive mobile phone information points attached to buildings to tell their stories. He suggested many other ideas for encouraging more people, especially the younger members of the community, to take an interest in their environment and its planning.

Michael Carden followed and emphasised how lucky we are to have the benefit of Paul's expertise at the Architecture Centre especially as our educational system gives no encouragement to visual appreciation and our children are weaned off

drawing at an early age whereas children in Italy, for example, are just as likely to be interested in architecture as in football.

Michael referred to the importance of 'planning' to everyone - especially civic societies - which should make planners respected and admired civil servants occupying sought-after jobs. But, he asked "who cares about planners? " They themselves do not value working in the public sector and are draining away to the private sector; the general public, led by the media, call all town hall officials and councillors "planners" and resent them; civic societies regard them as 'nice guys' probably sharing their goals but hampered by excessive pressures; lastly the government do not care for planners. He then pointed out some of the many burdens piled on to the system that were being experienced in Winchester:

- policy changes imposing extra duties such as sustainability and design despite the shortage of staff and skills, and lack of time and money to pay for them
- extensive reorganisation - the department now has a director who is not a professional planner and has many other responsibilities
- the imposition of targets which may sound sensible but which are disastrous in relation to quality - a crude tool unrelated to the variety of tasks and distorting priorities. This has been recognised as unsatisfactory in the NHS and Education but not in planning.
- The introduction of new Information Technology has added to the problems and is generally unsatisfactory due to lack of training, inadequate supervision and confusion with conflicting systems. The use of screens makes it impossible to compare and assess drawings.These, he said were just some of the problems but the result is that targets cannot be met, design suffers and morale is eroded leading to an increase in staff turnover and a loss of public respect.

Winchester believes in preconsultation, but applicants report long delays and changing advice leading to growing frustration and the lack of positive response without appropriate design input.

He commented that the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation had resigned because he found the level of service unacceptable and no motivation to improve this situation.

In conclusion he suggested that the blame for this unhappy situation lies mostly with central government. Unfortunately the Civic Trust, the body that should be confronting the government on our behalf, is no longer a campaigning organisation, so what are we to do?

Perhaps this should be a subject for study over the coming months and be addressed at the next meeting of Southern Comfort.

In the questions session that followed, planning problems and concerns over the provision of the necessary infrastructure to support major development dominated.

In the afternoon members were offered a choice of visiting the new development at Gun wharf Quays or a tour of the Dockyard area to round off a very stimulating 23rd conference.

Recent Issues in Conservation - Silver Hill and Northington Grange - TrustNews Dec 06

Report on a talk given by David Brock of English Heritage following the September AGM

The forthcoming white paper on conservation is likely to focus on the extent to which the government can exert control over environmental matters, with the aim of clarifying issues affecting planning for historic environments. Current confusion includes, for example, the fact that power exists to require the repair of listed buildings but not of ancient monuments.

In the course of his career David had seen a change from an attitude of saying "No" to one of offering advice rather than compulsion. He explained that understanding is the key to what conservation is about. When a complicated site is considered for conservation, more than one form of value and significance come into play.

If as he suggested the concept of a 'historic environment' must embrace the whole environment around us, then the decision has to be made as to what should or should not be done to this environment. Some parts will be more critical than others. Change is inevitable and we have to justify any defence of the historic environment.

Looking at Northington Grange, he outlined the complicated history of this Greek revival style building of the 17th century, re clad in cement render in the 19th century. In the 1980s one façade of the 17th century building was restored while buildings next to the main part of the house which had been demolished were not restored. The ruins remain to record the architecutral history but a cementrendered wall without windows was built to reunite the house with its conservatory.

Turning to Silverhill he said that some people regarded this part of the city as not being part of the historic town despite being within the old city walls. He asked what part of this area the people of Winchester wanted to retain and questioned the assumption that the area is worthy of having the old grid street pattern extended into it - in a sense re-Romanising it.

He thought the sheer bulk of the proposed scheme seemed to be the main issue, some of the buildings being six stories high in a seemingly unbroken mass. But the view from St. Giles' Hill already includes car parks and high-rise buildings of a similar height. The development would be a step change in the bulk of Winchester but not such a leviathan as some considered it to be. He said that this might be due to people's conception of what Winchester is - a city or a country town. Finally he asked whether, in interpreting the terms of their brief, the architect and developers might have gone too far. He felt that these were all questions to be answered by the local community.

Proceeding to wider conservation principles covering

- the historic environment as a shared resource
- the need to understand and sustain what is valuable
- managing places to sustain their significance

David stressed the need to judge how valuable and how vulnerable things are to particular types of change and to reconcile the significance of conflicting pressures for change. Decisions prompted by change must be reasonable and transparent. The weight of any decision should be proportionate to the significance of its value to society. For example, in Silverhill, the decision on car parking needs to be transparent.

David Brock

Thoughts from a new Trustee - TrustNews December 06

I have been involved with the Trust since I first came to Winchester in 1974 as an engineer with the City Council. Among my first jobs was paving the new High Street precinct. Of course the Trust had strong views on that. I also found myself drawing up designs for a dual carriageway along North Walls. The Trust had even stronger views about that! The High Street paving has survived 32 years but is now looking a bit ragged. (We gave it a design life of 25 years). The ring road proposals did not survive long and we must all be grateful to the Trust and many other objectors who killed that scheme. I spent a large part of my career fighting what often seemed a losing battle defending Winchester from the interminable growth of traffic. This brought me into frequent contact with the Trust and whilst we did not always agree we always had the same objective - to seek to protect and conserve the character of Winchester.

When I retired as City Engineer at the end of 2002 I immediately joined the Trust and was invited to advise on traffic and transport. My professional and local knowledge was soon in demand to help with comments on the South East Plan and the Silverhill development. Then this summer I was invited to stand for election to the Trust's Council.

The Trust has nearly 600 members, all of whom have the conservation of Winchester at heart. The trustees work extremely hard on your behalf and carry out the bulk of the work of the Trust. However you don't need to be a trustee to participate - all trust members are urged to contribute in any way they can and many do. At my first Trust meetings I have been impressed by the knowledge and professionalism of the trustees and somewhat daunted by the amount of time many of them spend on the work of the Trust. Its not all plain sailing either. The trustees are all strong minded people with individual opinions and points of view. Arriving at a consensus sometimes is no easier than it was in my days with the City Council. Nevertheless the Trust has a strong voice in Winchester. It is extremely well informed, well connected and well respected. The future of Winchester will be

shaped by many factors but those in the driving seat will always do well to heed the views expressed in the City of Winchester Trust.

David Marklew