Chairman's Miscellany - TrustNews June 2006

Members may not be aware that radical changes are in train for the way future planning policies and local plans are to be produced. A fairly complicated hierarchy of documents have to be drafted by the local authority and not all of them are subject to public consultation. However there will be opportunities for local residents and organisations to put forward their ideas and stages that do demand public consultation.

The City Council has recently published a draft Statement of Community Involvement which sets out how they will consult and whom they will involve. There is a worthy aim to include minority groups in an overarching consortium called The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – yet it is worth noting that representation for the built and natural environment of this historic city is NOT included. Parish Councils are represented but not the generality of those who reside in Winchester wards. Consultation with other Civic Societies reveals that they are encouraged to be involved in their LSPs in the realisation that the built and natural environment contribute to the quality of life.

All members of the Trust are encouraged to engage in this planning process, as it will be too late to protest once the plan is approved. Documents can be seen on the City Council website and will supply many hours of reading!

The Trust continues to promote the case for Heritage Town status. Much will depend on support from the Councils and in April a presentation to the City Council Cabinet. It generated considerable interest but we shall have to repeat the presentation to the new Cabinet. Later this month it will be made to the senior officers. Success in promoting Heritage status depends on adopting a vision for Winchester that all can share and then a master plan to guide its implementation. Winchester deserves this carefully considered development policy rather than the piecemeal ‘cram-it-in’ approach favoured by the government.

We were very concerned to learn that the City Council recently withdrew all funding for Historic Building Grants. These are modest grants that are given to fund the difference between using traditional materials in preference to cheap substitutes for repairs to buildings of historic significance. We sent our objection to the Council and will continue to press for reinstatement of this fund in next year’s budget.

The programme of Summer Walks is enclosed with this newsletter. The suggested donation for these walks has been £1 per person for at least 10 years so, this year, we are suggesting an increase to £2.

Apologies - TrustNews Jun 06

Apologies to any members who may have made a fruitless journey to the Heritage Centre on April 29th or 30th to visit the exhibition of plans for Silver Hill. It was unfortunate that Thornfield had to cancel as their plans were not ready for submission and London & Henley had already put their plans on show in the Brooks

that week. We were only able to inform members for whom we have e-mail addresses and put a notice on the Trust website. We should like to be able to contact more members electronically so please send us your e-address if you have not already done so – or if it has changed. We will not disclose this information to a third party.

You will see elsewhere that Thornfield are staging an exhibition of their proposals on June 7th - 9th venue to be announced.

Planning Appraisal Group - TrustNews Jun 06

It seems that, not for the first time, the appeals procedure can be open to abuse.

The Heritage Property Group has gone to appeal for the non-determination of a scheme at **1 & 3 Westley Close** that is only marginally different from two previous schemes, both of which were dismissed on appeal. In both cases, the inspector's ruling was that the block proposed on the boundary with Stockbridge Road would be unduly dominant and detract from the character of this route into the city, and that too much of the site would be given over to hard standing for car parking and manoeuvring to be characteristic of the neighbourhood. These two reasons for dismissal are both integral components of the third application, and it has to be questioned whether this is a valid reason for an appeal by Informal Hearing, with all the costs to our council (and therefore us) this will bring, rather than by the simpler Written Representation process. On the basis of the grounds given for the previous dismissals, it seems clear this third appeal would also be dismissed, which makes it a waste of everybody's time and money.

The application to replace **36 Quarry Road** with a block of 10 flats has been refused on the grounds of insufficient information and because the height and massing of the new building would be out of scale with its surroundings. The applicants have gone to appeal by Written Representation, claiming that because it was an outline application there was no need to provide drawings of the elevations because the design and massing could be illustrated later. We have written in support of the City, agreeing about the lack of information and pointing out that many outline applications provide elevations and plans of the structures proposed.

The pressure caused by PPG3's requirement to increase density makes the extra land on corner sites particularly vulnerable to development. This can be damaging where the layout is an intrinsic part of an estate's success, such as in Harestock and Stanmore. A recent proposal is to attach a 2-storey dwelling to **43 Cromwell Road**. This is a well-designed junction, with the houses in Cromwell Road on either side of the entrance into Stuart Crescent mirror-imaging each other in design and layout. This symmetry would be destroyed by the intrusion of a structure forward of the building line in Stuart Crescent and the Trust has objected to this application.

In December 2004 the Trust had objected, for similar reasons, to a scheme for a semi-detached dwelling to be attached to **97 Taplings Road**, where the symmetrical layout at the entrance into Rowlings Road is equally important. This was refused in

January 2005 and in February the applicant went to appeal against this refusal. The Trust wrote in support of the City, and attended the Informal Hearing of the appeal, which took place in March this year - and gives some indication of the back-log that exists in the inquiry process! Fortunately the Inspector, having toured the neighbourhood, had appreciated the value of its characteristics and layout, and dismissed the appeal. Would that he had been the Inspector for the appeal of the scheme for **46-48 Chilbolton Avenu** (see last November's TrustNews)!

Another addition, on the corner site at **1 St Stephens Road**, seemed undesirable because of the effect it would have on the neighbourhood. This was a resubmitted application for a semi-detached dwelling that had been refused, and the new scheme seemed little better than the previous one: it would be set forward of the building line of St Stephen Road and result in plots too small to be characteristic of the neighbourhood. We feared that permitting it could set an undesirable precedent for the area and objected to the proposal.

An application made in February still awaits a decision. This concerns a plot on a steeply sloping site between **Petersfield Road and Dell Road**, where it is proposed that two houses, **Elbury and Little Green**, should be replaced by a block of 12 flats facing onto Petersfield Road on the higher part of the site, and 4 semi-detached dwellings in two blocks on the lower part that faces onto Dell Road. We had no objection to the proposed demolitions, but felt that while the density proposed (over 125 dwellings per hectare) would be appropriate for the city centre, the high number of car-parking spaces was more suited to a suburban development and resulted in too much hard surfacing being required. We felt the site was being over-developed, and objected.

The major developments at the **Pilgrim's School, 3 The Close**, for a new pre-preparatory school, open-air swimming pool and technology building, have been agreed.

The proposal to demolish **Trelawney, 29 Stoney Lane**, for two 3-bedroom dwellings, has been refused, one of the reasons being that it failed to provide for smaller households within a mixed development. A second application has been submitted, for a similar structure of two dwellings, this time one having three bedrooms and the other two. In terms of units per hectare this was no improvement on the previous proposal, and we again objected because of the mediocre design, repeating our plea that the Local Authorities should take the lead in promoting a study of how this vulnerable area should be developed in a way that satisfies both the requirements of PPG3, and the future of Winchester and its infrastructure. This application has just been withdrawn.

Shione Carden

Silver Hill Renaissance - TrustNews June 2006

In the last issue Huw Thomas explained why he is opposed to the Thornfield proposals. In this issue Keith Leaman, another architect member of the Trust Council, gives his views.

Everyone agrees that this run-down area of the city centre – about two and a half times that of the Brooks Centre – is in need of redevelopment. Besides the quality of the architecture, there are many ingredients which are necessary for a successful outcome: the spaces, the right mix of uses, the way it relates to the rest of the town, and the economics that, by attracting companies to take on the buildings, give the developer the confidence to invest in a quality scheme and not take short cuts to save money.

It is always difficult to be totally confident about a scheme from the drawings alone, even with the benefit of the computer visualisation techniques that are now available, so it can be helpful to ask the following questions when evaluating a project:

1. Is the project likely to produce a sense of place and community
Part of the challenge for the designers is to consider the surrounding characteristics and create a new but related environment by taking these things as their pallet. If the resulting mix is successful a strong sense of community will naturally follow. There is an 'Art of Relationship' just as there is an 'Art of Architecture'. Spaces, squares and streets that make up an urban environment are just as important, if not more so, than the buildings themselves. In this scheme these aspects have been very successfully addressed, the quality of the architecture is also well considered and there is recognition that the spaces between buildings are vital to the health of the whole concept. It remains to be seen whether the project will generate that elusive touch of magic.

2. How does the complex affect the wider community; what does it do for Winchester?
A good development generally has 'spin off' (and this is the avowed intent of this developer), not only by improving the vitality and success of the surrounding area but also, by its high standards, influencing the quality of streetscape (signs, paving, etc) throughout the City. In particular, the proposals for the Broadway and High Street promise a great improvement for Winchester.

3. How does the physical addition fit in?
Those of us familiar with Winchester know well the significance of its setting within the valley, with its roofscape distinctive but softened by trees. The architects have taken full account of these factors by blending in the new roofs and trees. They have also been aware of views into the scheme from the surrounding streets, and it is surprising how well even a scheme of this size can be folded harmlessly into the City. The Cathedral is a good example of this, seen only where streets line up with the tower (views which have been carefully preserved in the scheme).

4. How do the spaces and landscaping set off the buildings?
The links and spaces within an urban environment are of crucial importance, because they need to be attractive places to linger in and to move through, and the buildings should act as a backcloth generating interest in the way they are detailed. As a rule of thumb, strong horizontal lines are generally unsympathetic to the eye while vertical lines give a pleasing effect. The architects appear to have considered this well in the design of both the buildings and the spaces.

5. How does vehicle movement work?
To combat congestion the City has a long-term policy of reducing central area parking. On the other hand our dependence on the car means that shop space will remain unlet if parking is insufficient; residents must also have some parking. The result here is a compromise, which must be judged by the developers and the City Council.

6. How good is the detailing of the buildings and spaces?
Detail humanises buildings by diverting the eye, providing scale and dividing up otherwise boring surfaces. On the other hand it must not be too fussy or trivial. It must give buildings quality, meaning and identity - without detail buildings become meaningless containers and spaces have no attraction. The architects have incorporated a good degree of detail into their proposals, but with all the buildings coming from the same stable, further work is desirable.

7. How well does the scheme address scale,light and connections?
A scheme requires the penetration of daylight to give a sense of well-being. Light falls across the faces of buildings and into spaces; sunlight adds sparkle and shadows provide contrast, scale and depth, accentuating detail. This scheme faces in various directions, providing opportunity for light penetration throughout the day. Height can reduce penetration, but in this case it should prove exciting rather than a detraction provided we could be sure the buildings are not too high. Although Winchester does have tall buildings they are not so concentrated as in the new scheme. However several other towns have a concentration of tall building, which adds excitement and pleasure, as in York, Norwich, Chester and Bath.

Conclusion

In my view there are still important elements to be looked at and evaluated in closer detail, but so far this looks like a very good scheme for Winchester.

Keith Leaman

Cittaslow - TrustNews Jun 06

It is now about 18 months since the City of Winchester Trust took an interest in pressing for our city to become part of the Cittaslow movement. In that time there have been three public presentations and discussions, all of which have demonstrated a groundswell of support for this movement. There have been two visits to Ludlow, which was the first Cittaslow town in UK and is therefore the UK convenor. One visit was by a group from the CWT but included a member of Winchester City's staff. The second visit was by Winchester Town Forum members. There have also been three papers put to Town Forum members meetings and an impressive presentation to those members by the Mayor of Ludlow, Graeme Kidd.

Winchester City Council: disappointing

After all this it is disappointing that Winchester City Council seem fixated on a possible conflict between Cittaslow membership and their "Winchester Community

Strategy” document. This document will remain a paper exercise (like so many) unless there are action points, public support and a steering philosophy linking the many pious aims.

For example, one of the aims is to reduce the use of fossil fuels and CO2 emissions. In this respect Woking Borough Council have shown the way with a good-practice guide for all developers, offering the incentive of more economical running costs to stimulate investment in energy-saving measures. And they have set an example by cutting their own CO2 emissions, already 77% down by 2004 from 1990 levels. Woking has done this by setting up two Combined Heat and Power generation schemes, one of which provides heat and power to their leisure centre (the excess of heat in summer being used for cooling) and exports surplus electricity to other council owned sites, mainly residential. When combined with cooling, as in this case, CHP can achieve an emissions saving of up to 80%.

Helping to save the planet

Apart from helping to save the planet, this is saving the Borough and their tenants a fortune in fuel bills. It has just been announced that average gas prices are set to increase nationally by another 25% on top of the rises seen over the past year and electricity prices will also be affected. British Gas say that rises in wholesale prices are to blame. This is just an early sign of fossil fuel scarcity.

Worthy objectives, however, such as the ones set out in the Community Strategy, remain toothless injunctions in the absence of real planning demands placed on developers.

The Mayor of London is now making such demands, leading with London’s “Climate Change Agency”. And Winchester is just as desirable a location for developers as many of the more prosperous parts of London. The difference at present is that Winchester is reactive, not proactive. Cittaslow embraces environmental, social and economic strategies. It encourages local initiatives in a virtuous circle to maximise self-sufficiency, thereby reducing transportation.

Winchester District seems still to be hooked on the idea that it is in competition with Basingstoke and Southampton to attract investment from multinational corporations. This is exactly the route to the cloned High Street that Cittaslow seeks to resist. If that is the intention of the Community Strategy, there is indeed a conflict. The City should engage with the Citizens to find out which route they would prefer.

Kate Macintosh

Civic Trust - TrustNews Jun 06

It was with regret that the Trust Council decided not to renew its membership of the Civic Trust this year. Over the past 5 years it has become apparent that the Civic Trust was concentrating its efforts on the promotion of Government initiatives, for which it received funding, to the detriment of its support for Civic Societies. During

this time the Government has produced a raft of planning legislation to which civic societies have been left to respond without adequate back-up despite a considerable increase in subscription rates. The Trust has found that CPRE is a far more effective organisation for representing its concerns and providing advice relevant to its needs.