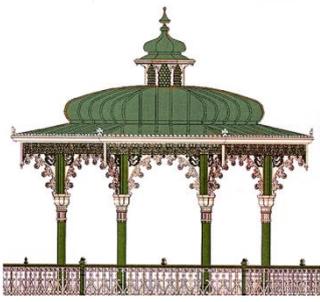


Brighton Society



newsletter February 2018

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what's in the pipeline?

JOIN US TO PROTECT YOUR CITY

Edward Street Quarter Proposals



The Amex Site redeveloped

First Base have made public their first proposals for the "Edward Street Quarter" on the site of the former Amex building on Edward Street. In the plan above, "commercial street" is John Street, "main road" is Edward Street and "residential street" is White Street.

Commercial buildings of between 8-10 storeys are proposed on the west side of a new pedestrian open space ("new street") running north-south from Mighell Street, on the east side of the new Amex building (top right in the plan), down to Edward Street not quite opposite Dorset Gardens. East of it are residential buildings varying between 3-9 storeys fronting Edward Street, separated from the terrace houses on White Street by a garden space for residents' use.

A new public square is to be formed between the westernmost commercial building (coloured green) fronting onto John Street and the commercial building (coloured yellow) in the centre of the site. This square will be linked at its northern end to an east-west link along the southern side of the new Amex building, and connected to the new Mighell Street pedestrian route at its southern end. This could form part of a new attractive pedestrian route linking the site to the west with John Street or even through to Valley Gardens.

Our primary concerns relate to the quality of the new spaces, as the buildings are high enough to overshadow them for much of the day, leading to the dark

canyons which we criticised in the nearby Circus Street proposals. The new square could be particularly vulnerable to any future development on the corner of Edward and John Streets (outside the scope of this proposal), which will inevitably be higher than the existing buildings. This, together with the high buildings to the south and west in this scheme, could overshadow the square completely for much of the year.

First Base have assured us that overshadowing diagrams will be prepared to show the effects at key times during the year. We think they should be made public now before the heights of the buildings become firmly established.

We also consider that the buildings, as well as probably being too high, are very boxy. This is particularly so when they are considered in relation to key potential viewpoints such as from the Royal Pavilion and from surrounding high points. It is the upper floors which tend to be most prominent, so a more graceful profile where floors are stepped back as they get higher and are treated in a finer, more transparent style, would not only reduce the apparent height and mass of the buildings but would also make them look more attractive.

We would also like to see the landscaping proposed for the new north-south route extended to include the upper part of Mighell Street and Mighell farmhouse.

That said, there is much that could be positive about this scheme. New public spaces are always welcome and it will help provide much needed commercial, retail and residential floor space in the city centre. It just needs to be done more sensitively and it must get the balance right between new buildings and attractive public spaces. At the moment that balance is tilted in favour of buildings that are too high and bulky in relation to the public spaces they enclose.

You can view the plans on 24 February, 5.00-8.00 pm, at Millwood Community Centre, Nelson Row. JM ♦

Peacock Industrial Estate, Hove

We met with Savills acting for Crest Nicholson (the developer who won the King Alfred project), to discuss their preliminary proposals for this development off Davigdor Road, to the east of the Wickes store.

It proposes 180 apartments and some commercial space in five buildings between 5-9 storeys. The latter is located at the eastern end adjacent to Montefiore Road; a five storey block of affordable housing runs east-west next to the railway line, and three mostly six storey blocks on a north/south axis enclose three courtyards of varying size. The ground floor level is taken up mostly by undercroft car parking.

In principle it's not a bad proposal. But we had a few reservations which are:

Height and massing

The natural form of the landscape slopes from a high point in the north east to a low point in the south west. We think the buildings should reflect this, stepping down from the north east corner to the lowest block in the south west – which should be lower than the six storeys proposed to allow more afternoon sun into the courtyard spaces.

Car and cycle parking

A notoriously difficult topic but, as a general comment, we would prefer to see less car parking rather than more because we think that, for inner city high density developments, car clubs, car sharing, electric and self-drive cars are likely to reduce the demand for car parking well within the lifetime of this building.

Reducing the car parking could also allow more housing, with possibly some larger units (3-4 bedroom) with small patio gardens facing west, which could also improve the appearance of the building as one approaches it from the entrance. An area for the Council's "Boris bike" scheme should be included.

Tree planting

New planting along the railway line would screen the new development from Lyndhurst Road and help cut down the noise between the new residential units and the railway line.

Balconies and setbacks

As a general principle we think that flats should be provided with some private open space such as

balconies or roof gardens where possible. This adds to the quality of individual flats and creates visual interest to the elevations of large buildings, breaking up what might otherwise be large areas of external wall into smaller elements. Setting back upper floors can be used to create external spaces, and this can also successfully reduce the apparent height of the buildings from the ground.

A planning application is expected early in 2018. JM ♦

Feibusch update

Discussions are moving – albeit slowly – with Hyde Housing on the proposal to open up the former St. Wilfrid's Church in Elm Grove (now flats for the elderly), so that the large mural paintings by Hans Feibusch within a former chapel of the church can be made available for public view (see article in last October's newsletter).

Hyde, as a Housing Trust, can use their funds for housing purposes only, so they propose to start a crowd-funding campaign to raise money to carry out the necessary building work. The campaign will be run by Spacehive, involved in the recent successful crowd-funding campaign for Madeira Terrace.



Feibusch at St Wilfrid's

The likely cost of the work will be in the order of £75,000. It will involve creating a separate entrance to the former church off Whippingham Road into a basement area directly underneath the murals. Part of this area will be adapted to form a small information centre with a staircase rising up to the room through a new opening to be formed in the floor of the former chapel which contains the murals.

We are in discussions with Hyde to see how the Brighton Society can best assist them in the crowd-funding campaign. JM ♦

Brighton Square – another public space in the Old Town at risk

As if the disastrous Moshimo restaurant approval in Bartholomew Square was not enough, an application has now been lodged to construct a freestanding restaurant in Brighton Square. There are only three

significant open spaces in the Old Town Conservation Area – Bartholomew Square, Brighton Square and the square on the west side of East Street. The former will be ruined by the overhead Moshimo Skylight restaurant, and Brighton Square will be lost completely as an open space if a building is constructed within it.

It is time to say No. Use of public spaces for private, commercial purposes on a permanent basis should not be permitted within the city as a matter of principle.

We are not against the provision of loose external seating and tables associated with adjacent café/restaurants. This has proved to be popular. We agree that Brighton Square is in need of improved facilities and appearance to make it more attractive to local residents, workers and visitors and we would welcome that.

But this is not the way to do it. A permanent building is not a suitable solution for this restricted site. There are many café/restaurants in the city and in the Old Town CA which have external seating but do not permanently take over, enclose and dominate the public domain.



Brighton Square proposal

This proposal will be detrimental to a development which received a Civic Trust Award in 1967 – exactly 50 years ago. The Heritage Statement which accompanies the planning application states: “As a major public open space in the Lanes, Brighton Square is a unique urban space in the Old Town Conservation Area. The buildings are part of a grouping that all share a common architectural language and pallet (sic) of materials which read as a cohesive redevelopment wrapped around the square.”

That says it all. An enclosed structure, mainly composed of curved translucent polycarbonate panels, will not contribute at all to the cohesive character of the Square, and would virtually conceal the fountain from public view and enjoyment.

We have objected strongly to the proposal. Whether the Council will listen shouldn't really be a concern – a Council committed to ensuring that a Conservation Area on Historic England's “at risk” register should be protected would throw out a proposal such as this. But after Moshimo, we aren't holding our breath. JM ♦

The Brighton Society is a registered charity, registration number 271138

Design South-East – Brighton & Hove City Charrette

The term 'charrette' is derived from the French word for 'little cart' and refers to the intense work of architects before a deadline. At the nineteenth century Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, as carts circulated to collect final drawings, students would jump on the 'charrette' to put the final touches on their presentations. It has come to mean an intense period of design or planning activity. Design South-East held one on 11 December at Hove Town Hall to discuss “**Building at density: What does good look like?**”

Nick Hibberd, the Council's Executive Director of Economy, Environment & Culture, set out the problems we face in Brighton & Hove such as affordability, high costs and low wages. There are constraints on development such as heritage assets, problems caused by HMOs, and stresses on the housing market because demand outstrips supply. The potential solutions of taller buildings and new developments on the urban fringe create their own problems.

Chris Bearman, from Allies and Morrison Architects, talked about a few of their very large schemes in London. He emphasised the importance of the interaction at ground level; integration with existing street patterns; issues of overshadowing and ways of reducing this with stepped building profiles; and the importance of detail in resolving problems of fitting large buildings into the existing urban fabric.

Claire Bennie, an architect and housing developer and until recently Development Director at Peabody Estates, gave an extremely interesting talk advocating a popular model drawn from 1930s developments. She showed examples of mid-rise flats, a type of building she felt was acceptable in suburban situations (see examples on londondecoflats.co.uk). They can accommodate a wide variety of housing needs including families. Shared amenities can be included such as laundries and community spaces and, most importantly, shared garden areas providing for a wide range of users, young and old. Balconies are a key requirement. The architecture should be simple and well-detailed. Intense management was vital.

Densities could range from 100-400 dwellings per hectare (dph), heights from 4-12 storeys. She instanced Dolphin Square in Pimlico where a density of 430 dph was achieved with buildings of no more than 8-10 storeys around an 18m wide square.



Dolphin Square, Pimlico

Richard Wilson, a planner with Camden Council which has one of the largest housing programmes in the country, talked about Camden's achievements in the 1960s showing the Alexandra Road development as a good example of a high density low rise solution in a central city environment.



Alexandra Road, Camden

Currently plans are under way for huge developments around Euston and Kings Cross. Only disabled parking is allowed. Heritage issues are taken into account. There are no Tall Building zones, but policy is determined by checklists for individual sites; mixed use such as residential over supermarkets is encouraged; there is close interaction between the planning authority and developers; there has been comprehensive public consultation on planning issues and proposed developments which have resulted in better quality outcomes.

Participants then broke up into groups to discuss particular issues such as conservation, tall buildings, the seafront, hubs and corridors etc. On the whole, it was a very useful debate and one which should become a regular event.

JM ♦

Madeira Terrace

Welcome news is that the crowdfunding target was achieved on 29 November, but tragically on the same day, Brian Morton, an expert on the restoration of historic cast iron buildings, suddenly died. We had been working with Brian and The Victorian Society over the last two years towards having a meeting with the Council on how to handle the restoration. Brian was the founder of a firm of consultants specialising in the restoration of historic buildings (including the Albert Memorial). The Council showed no interest and it was even difficult to arrange for Brian to have access to view the Terrace. When access was arranged, the only Council employee present unfortunately informed Brian and his colleague Cedric Proffit that "you can't repair cast iron". I say unfortunately as Cedric is a contractor who has spent his life repairing cast iron.

Recently Nick Tyson (of the Regency Town house in Brunswick Square) has used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain all the consultants' reports issued since 2008 including four reports produced by Amey and the latest report from Mott MacDonald. These are large firms working mainly on new infrastructure

projects such as bridges and highways. There is a huge amount of detail in these reports, but a lack of interpretation of how critical the problems are in terms of the condition of the structure. And as the Council has little in-house expertise in the restoration of historic buildings, there is a pattern of successive reports being issued but no decisions being made. The appointment of consultants whose experience is concentrated on new infrastructure projects is not ideal if you need expertise in the very specialist area of the restoration of historic buildings. The one certainty is that large international consultants tend to charge large fees.

Miraculously, Nick managed to arrange a meeting with the Council in October. Representatives of the Regency Society and us, with Brian Morton and Cedric Proffit, met Council representatives to discuss ways forward, assuming the crowdfunding would be successful. Brian and Cedric were able to explain the advantages of appointing experts in the repair of cast iron – both in terms of the quality of the finished work and also in major savings in the organisation of the project. The fees for smaller organisations would also be far more moderate.

It was a positive meeting but our initial hopes that Brian and Cedric could at least work with the Council on preparing a possible specification were not realised, and we gather that the Council wants to go out to tender to find a suitable consultant. The only specific piece of information was that the crowdfunding money would be used to restore three of the bays, the idea being that this would provide sufficient information to cost the restoration of the whole Terrace realistically.



Madeira Terrace floodlit

We await further news, but it has been a wasted opportunity for such an expert as Brian Morton not to have been allowed to provide free advice to the Council for such a critical restoration.

MD ♦

Membership

£10 per household, £15 per organisation
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