

Brighton Marina Outer Harbour Development

With representatives from the Regency Society, we were invited to a consultation on the preliminary proposals for a massive new development at the western end of the Marina, projecting into the sea along the line of the western breakwater at the tip of which is proposed a 28-storey tower block. A series of blocks of flats, varying from 6-17 storeys, continues eastwards towards the existing tall Orion and Sirius blocks. In total 970 new flats are proposed, together with a relatively small amount of office and retail accommodation.



Plan of the scheme

Although it is impossible to tell exactly from the information provided by the developers, we estimate that the heights of the buildings are as follows:

Two long blocks of **8 or 9-storeys** with curved facades facing south;
a **12-storey** block is at the western end of these;
a **16-storey** tower is immediately to the south of that;
an even higher tower of **28-storeys** is immediately south of that. This is 4 storeys higher than Sussex Heights – currently Brighton's tallest building.

Behind these, in front of the existing buildings, are:

a U-shaped **10-storey** block;
2 blocks of **12-13 storeys**;
a **16 or 17-storey** block and
a lower **6-storey** block.

That's **10** tall and bulky blocks of flats on a tightly congested site, virtually all considerably taller than the top of the chalk cliffs behind though, as no site sections have been provided, it is impossible to tell how much higher. Will this make the Marina, already a disastrously ugly and unpleasant development, an attraction which Brighton could be proud of? Some hope.

We have the following criticisms:

1 The sheer enormity of this proposal

This will be in visual terms by far the most massive housing development Brighton has ever seen. Besides containing the highest building in Brighton (apart from the i360), and nine other tall bulky blocks of flats, all densely packed on to a tight site reclaimed from the sea, its enormity, its height and its massing will have a severely detrimental effect on Brighton's seascape and landscape, as well as the irreparable loss of important views of the sea, the Sussex coastline and cliffs from the east, west and north, as well as from the sea itself.

2 Impenetrable design

Is this a suitable design for a marina development? We think it could hardly be worse. Look at the image below viewed from Black Rock which shows an impenetrable wall of buildings. At our meeting the architect used the term 'playful' to describe the design !!!



View from Black Rock – and from the new conference centre?

It has not been recognised that the development is part of a marine landscape, where words like transparency, open-ness, lightness of touch, and yes, playful, would be appropriate aims that any designs should aim to achieve. Does this design do that?

What do you think?

3 Loss of important views

One of the most regrettable features of the existing Orion & Sirius buildings was the way that they blocked views of the chalk cliffs from the west. This proposal will block even more views.

How bad it will be was confirmed during the presentations, when the architect said that, when viewed from the cliff top, the height of the blocks will block any view south up to the level of the horizon. ***The development will be so bulky that it will remove any view of the sea for anyone walking along the cliff top.*** This is a very significant and detrimental change, and a severe loss to the amenity of the city, its residents and visitors.

3 Effect on Brighton's heritage and landscape

When huge buildings dominate the landscape and block important views, we lose vital aspects of our city's heritage, defined by the character and scale of our coastline, the sea, the hills and valleys, the Downs - all the natural topographical features which give our city its unique character and are part of its attraction.

These proposals are driven not by respect for our existing land and seascapes, but by a commercial decision to cram as much building as possible onto a cramped and extremely prominent site.



The view west

4 Our conclusions

We are unable to support this proposal – in fact we strongly oppose it. The design dominates the landscape, and it blocks views. Its urban character is the opposite to what a marina-based, edge of sea concept should be - which is open and transparent, creating views and vistas of the sea from the land behind it.

It is a blatant attempt to maximise development potential at the expense of the public realm. Furthermore, given the example of the housing blocks already built at the Marina, which have an enormous proportion of foreign owners, this scheme is unlikely to help Brighton's over-riding need for low-cost and affordable housing.

It has been suggested that this is Croydon come to Brighton seafront. Actually that's unfair on Croydon - much of Croydon is much better than this. JM ♦

Robert Gregory, 3 January 1922 – 7 October 2018

I first met Robert at one of his local history lectures shortly after I moved to Brighton in 1986. He instantly brought to life for me the churches, pubs, shops and so on that had once flourished so close to my new home. He was a natural educator, with skills honed in the Army's Education Corps towards the end of WWII.

Robert knew Brighton - and much of Hove - like the back of his hand. He'd started early, after all, bunking off games as a pupil at Brighton Grammar School to investigate its streets – that's when not taking in a film at one of the many local cinemas of the time!

Fast forwarding to his 97th year, although unable to walk around the city any more, he positively *whizzed* around it on his iPad street view app. In a jiffy, he'd make his way to a particular site or building we were curious about. Much discussion would ensue as we compared its present with a past or proposed future manifestation.

Robert joined the Brighton Society in its earliest days and did a 22 year stint as Chairman. We relished his local history walks for members around some of the once seedier parts of Brighton, and his knowledge of the city was encyclopaedic, a great asset to us.

Last year, Robert gave us an invaluable personal insight into the listed St Wilfrid's Church, close to his childhood home. He'd not only watched the church being built but also created a beautiful watercolour of it. Although it has now been converted to sheltered accommodation, Hans Feibusch's impressive mural, *The Magi* (1940), is still there. The 18 year old Robert modelled for Feibusch and is duly encapsulated as one of the shepherds.

Having trained as an architect at the Brighton School of Art, Robert turned his hand to projects ranging from bank alterations to a bespoke lavatory designed to optimise the comfort of a female client, to an internal steel frame supporting Rottingdean windmill against the prevailing sea winds. Astoundingly, just a few days before he died at the Royal Sussex, he was still taking an interest in the built environment. He was, he told me, 'fascinated' by the elaborate system of overhead vertical and horizontal rails supporting the patients' privacy curtains.

Robert remained a stalwart supporter and friend of the Society to the end. He will be greatly missed. NW ♦

Valley Gardens Phase 3

In late January, the city council's funding bid for the southernmost phase of the Valley Gardens improvement scheme succeeded in obtaining £6m. The remaining 15% will come from the local transport plan budget and other local contributions. The funding must be spent by March 2021. Current project plans are due to be reported to the council's environment and transport committee on 7 February.

The most recent modifications include a reconfiguration of the Old Steine gardens' paths into a diagonal form, from south-east to north-west and from south-west to north-east instead of the existing north-south and east-west pattern. Other revisions involve the introduction of a cycle route around the south and west of Old Steine alongside widened bus lanes there; also, an extension of bus stop areas near the war memorial.

The council's project team is preparing for a design brief for detailed landscaping and planting, expected in the next few months. Meanwhile the Brighton Society committee has had a productive and wide-ranging discussion with the council's highways department in which our concerns and ideas were positively received.

We welcome the apparent increase in consideration given to the design of the pedestrianised areas, and we hope due attention can be paid to the quality of materials. In the current plans large areas of pavement appear quite featureless, with the exception of the listed bus shelters, whose handling will be significant. We will also be interested to view proposals for future planting, both within and beyond the central garden space. RE♦

Draft City Plan Part 2 Design & Heritage

In the last Newsletter we summarised our comments on the Housing section of the Draft. Below is a much abbreviated summary of our comments on the Design & Heritage section. See our website for the full version.

High standard of design

The emphasis on the relationship between proposed development and existing location is welcome. However, these priorities, which ought to be paramount, are threatened by factors not mentioned in the draft:

- The impact of tall buildings, which could harm the city's heritage and landscape with excessive height and the blocking of key views.
- The lack of policy on tall buildings in general – e.g. the lack of proper Urban Design Frameworks. We question the need for tall buildings – density is the important issue, and in many cases can be increased by high-density row-rise buildings.
- The impact of competing objectives in the national planning policy framework (NPPF), the legal weight of which is unclear and duration indeterminate.

We are concerned that design advice has been sub-contracted to Design South East, rather than being based on local knowledge and appreciation of the existing urban context, and appreciation of the historical importance of much of the central area.

Scale and shape of buildings

Developments completed in the last five years or about to be started, e.g. Circus Street, Preston Barracks and Edward Street, give little hope that terms such as "sense of place", "visual quality", or "attractive buildings and city" are anything more than empty words. Anston

House and the Preston Barracks development are two examples where existing guidelines have been completely disregarded. City Plan Part 1 guidance on tall buildings is also being ignored, with the proposed 18-storey Legal & General development in New England Road making a mockery of it.



Canyon lands – Circus Street rises

The new draft needs to be re-written to provide more comprehensive guidance as it will inevitably be quoted by designers as justification for their designs, and used by planning officers and councillors as criteria for making important judgements on design matters.

Artistic element

The draft should make clear the difference between "art" and "graffiti". Graffiti is unacceptable and promotes vandalism. Art does precisely the opposite. For graffiti not to be mentioned at all in this section is negligent. (There are several more references to graffiti in our comments.)

Public Consultation

When applicants for significant developments present plans for "public consultation", the results should reflect accurately the strength of opinion voiced. The public consultation by First Base on the Edward Street development was a travesty. The way this policy is expressed must ensure it never happens again.

Confirmation of consultation with neighbours should accompany all planning applications and the outcome of those consultations should be a requirement accompanying **any** planning application.

Overshadowing, Sunlight and Daylight

Fine words are included, but the approval given to the First Base development on the former Amex site shows them to have no teeth, so they are meaningless.

Landscape Design and Trees

Many trees in urban spaces are not native, but are well known and established and add greatly to the quality of our green spaces. They should not be excluded.

Green spaces which are essentially grass should not be overexploited by temporary events and structures. "Temporary" should mean not more than 6 weeks.

Conservation Areas (CAs)

We included many comments intended to clarify and tighten up procedures for considering planning applications in CAs to prevent harm to their character. Consideration of paving, kerbing, landscape elements and lamp posts should be included. A Heritage Statement should be submitted with all planning applications in CAs together with information to show how the existing streetscape is affected.

Listed Buildings

The wording should be clarified to ensure that any changes must ensure that existing historical and architectural features are preserved. VB ♦

The problem is: How do you define graffiti?

One aspect of the council's proposed graffiti reduction strategy states that removing graffiti swiftly would help deter vandals. This is problematic, and I will return to it in a later article. What the strategy does make clear is that the council is not targeting "proper art" that is commissioned or given permission by the property's owners. But what do they mean by "proper art"? Are murals, wildstyle, throw-ups or pieces "proper art"? Some wildstyle or throw-ups, for example, overlap in style with what might be thought of as a mural. Are we to consider wildstyle and throw-ups, which are blighting the city as much as tags, a form of art? What criteria is the council applying to differentiate art from graffiti?



Wildstyle

Before you can enforce removal, the public and property owners need clarification as to what types of graffiti the council is asking to be removed, as some would argue that wildstyle is art and therefore should not be removed. There are many images on our website showing that there are different styles on the same area of vandalised wall, making it difficult to erase one without erasing the other.

With the council having to pay £75,000 pa to remove graffiti from its own buildings and property, one would think that they must have some idea of what is art and what is graffiti to enable them to decide what to remove and what to leave, yet there is no information on their website to help them or the public.



Throw-up

The Brighton Society welcomes that the graffiti issue is finally being taken seriously; sadly some of the proposed preventative methods cannot be taken seriously. For example, one councillor suggested buildings should be painted with anti-graffiti paint; so to help him understand the scale of the problem, our website will soon feature a graffiti map that highlights all the streets in the city that have graffiti. AG ♦

Please email us with the names of streets where you have seen graffiti.



Piece

Further information on the Council's Graffiti Reduction Strategy:

Proposed enforcement process relating to private and commercial buildings or statutory undertakers: go to link <https://bit.ly/2Tsbk8v>

To hear the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee debate about the Graffiti Reduction Strategy, go to <https://bit.ly/2MJUSy>

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