

## A BOUTADE of Tall Building

*“Boutade” – a sudden outburst or outbreak, from the French word “bouter” - to thrust*

And thrusting they are - higher and higher. All over the city we are seeing new proposals for tall buildings. Here are some we know about:

- 1 **Preston Barracks:** an 18 storey student tower block surrounded by seven student accommodation blocks of 9 storeys, two of 10 storeys, and others of 11 - 15 storeys. There are also residential blocks up to 10 storeys high with 369 flats.
- 2 **Circus Street:** a 14 storey student accommodation tower and a 10 storey residential tower in a major central development where other private and student residential buildings vary between 6–8 storeys.
- 3 **Anston House:** this has three towers of 13, 14 and 15 storeys.
- 4 **Longley Industrial Estate:** New England Road - 18 storeys.
- 5 **Vantage Point,** next to the Longley Industrial Estate - 16 storeys.
- 6 **Brewer’s site,** New England Street: We expect another tall building, very close to the two towers mentioned in 4 and 5 above.

These 3 schemes (4-6) will result in a tight conglomeration of tall buildings on higher land to the north of St Peter’s and St Bartholomew’s churches, vying with both for visual prominence.

- 7 **Peacock Industrial Estate:** 10 storey block north of the Montefiore Hospital, part of a major residential development including other blocks from 5 – 7 storeys.
- 8 **Newtown Road, Hove:** 16 storey building on the site of the KAP Peugeot dealership.
- 9 **Sackville Trading Estate, Hove:** Initial proposals were for residential blocks varying between 11 - 16 storeys. Following comments after public consultation (including ones from us), we understand that the height of the 16 storey tower is being reviewed, but whether this will result in any significant reduction in the wall of tall buildings along the southern end of the site remains to be seen.

In addition is the **40-storey** tower at the Marina granted planning approval some years ago, where work has started. We understand there are further proposals for the Marina, to be announced soon. And lurking in the background is the threat of even taller buildings on the King Alfred site than the **18-storey** tower already proposed.



*Longley Industrial Estate, 18 storeys*

Tall buildings have lots of drawbacks. Gradually they disguise the character of the city’s landscape by intruding high above the skylines, formed by Brighton’s hills and valleys, which define its character and neighbourhoods. And their sheer height and bulk have a detrimental effect on Brighton’s listed buildings and 34 Conservation Areas, most of which are in the central city.

Tall buildings block views. For example, the Newtown Road and Sackville Trading Estate proposals will block the last remaining views of the sea from Hove Park. And there are many other areas where important views will be badly affected including those from the South Downs and higher areas around the city.

There is a myth that high rise buildings are needed to meet City Plan targets. The truth is they don’t add a lot to the housing stock – and it’s not the type of housing required.

A typical tall building would have three flats per floor. So if 20 fifteen storey buildings planned to be built between now and 2030 (the end of the

City Plan period) were only ten storeys high instead, it would result in 300 fewer flats. This is a drop in the ocean compared with the 13,200 new dwellings required – only about 2.3% of the total. Increasing the building density from 50 dwellings per hectare (dpu) to 55 dpu elsewhere on the city's fringe sites would provide far more housing of the type actually required rather than a relatively small number of expensive flats on the upper floors of tall buildings.

Virtually half of the city's requirement is for houses of 3 bedrooms or more. Concentration on high rise developments does little to help families - but can help wealthy overseas investors, second home owners and landlords charging high rents for wealthy tenants.

The traditional pattern of development in central Brighton and Hove is for high density, relatively low rise, terrace type housing exemplified by its Regency terraces at one end of the spectrum and the tightly packed streets of Hanover at the other. Both can create very high densities which would, if replicated in new developments, easily provide the numbers of extra dwellings required by the City Plan.

Let's make an effort to preserve that tradition. Tall buildings are bad news, creating isolation. Simon Jenkins in *The Guardian* recently described tower blocks as: "enemies of social vitality. They are silent stakes driven through a city's sense of community".

Yet again we emphasise that high densities don't have to mean high rise. Will our city planners ever learn that lesson? JM ♦

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### Your new committee

The AGM took place on 11 July at the Friends Centre, Ivory Place. The following were elected to the committee: Corinne Attwood, Valerie Bolton, Sandy Crowhurst, Malcolm Dawes, Robert Edwards, Allan Grainger, Delia Ives, Lyn Lynch-White, Jeremy Mustoe and Ninka Willcock. Selma Montford continues as our President for life.

After the conclusion of the business of the meeting, Malcolm Dawes showed a selection of his photographs of sites around the City, creating as always an interesting and relevant discussion.

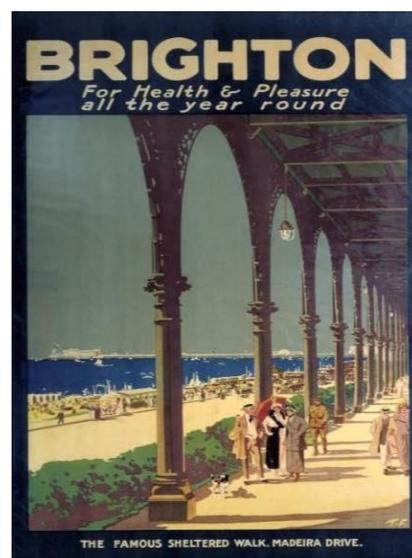
At the first meeting of the new committee, Jeremy Mustoe was elected as Chairman, Valerie Bolton as Secretary and Lyn Lynch-White as Treasurer. Corinne Attwood continues to represent the Clifton & Montpelier Society, Sandy Crowhurst the North Laine Community Association and Robert Edwards the Kingscliffe Society. VB ♦

### Marine Parade "People's Promenade"

The proposal for a "People's Promenade", a retail and leisure development along the Madeira Terrace, has inspired much publicity. However, hopes of restoring the terrace by this means are unrealistic.

The terrace is in poor condition, with areas of the decking too weak to support pedestrian usage. Restored, it can withstand pedestrian loads and, as formerly, be a viewing area for events in Madeira Drive. What it will not uphold are two-storey office and hotel buildings, let alone a public park on Marine Parade. These would necessitate at the terrace level a steel or concrete support structure effectively burying the existing listed and loved structure – hardly a scenario to appeal to Historic England or Lottery Funding.

The notion of moving the terrace forward by five metres makes matters worse. This would involve complete dismantling of the terrace, at vast cost and damage to the structure. Any restoration of the terrace requires retention of the massive cast iron trusses fixed into the Madeira Wall and currently only five of the 133 trusses have been shown to have any significant problems.



A further concern is damage to the retaining wall, constructed in 1830. Cutting into it to accommodate the new buildings, plus a park on top, risks disturbing and destabilising it. And then there are the implications for the main coastal road. Wide cracks appeared in Marine Parade in the 1990s following excavation adjacent to the wall towards the western end.

As much as possible of the original structure has to be preserved, for the sake of its historic and special character and to merit its listed status, and to fulfil its capacity to attract funding. The "People's Promenade" scheme is a developer's dream but is certainly not the dream solution to restoring Madeira Terrace. MD and RE ♦

## All that remains for us will be concrete and tyres – Whitehawk Hill

On 4 November 2008 the author and environmental campaigner Dave Bangs said that Brighton and Hove City Council's urban biosphere proposal would be used as a fig leaf to cover up the reality of an appalling record of the management of its wildlife resources. Mr Bangs challenged the Council by suggesting that there had been decades of neglect of this land. However, the Green Council's literature regarding their wildlife resources set out how they were conserving their heritage of ancient chalk grassland. Mr Bangs suggested that the Council's neglect meant that Whitehawk Hill, for example, was in a worse condition than when declared a Local Nature Reserve in 1996.

So, where are we today? Mr Bangs considers Whitehawk Hill to be the single most important landscape feature in the city, being Brighton's most important (and most neglected) downland-landscape, its oldest park, a 200 year old recreational common for the people of Brighton in perpetuity and a local wildlife site. It has a Scheduled Ancient Monument on it (the first designated in Sussex), yet Brighton and Hove City Council and the Hyde Housing Group plan to build 217 "affordable" homes that according to Mr Bangs will have a huge impact on this Nature Reserve, virtually cutting it in half.

The Council's argument, as expressed by Anne Meadows, chairwoman of the housing committee, is: "With the supply of housing not keeping pace with demand in the city, building new low cost homes for local people is a key priority for us". It would seem, Ms. Meadows, that the cost to our natural environment is not a priority. The Council should be acting as custodians of our natural environment; however, they are finding it difficult to fulfil that role with the economic pressures placed upon them from central government and the need to house people. The citizens of Brighton and Hove need therefore to be active and demand that their Council acts responsibly.

Brighton is a victim of its own success. Like it or not humans expand to fill the space provided. What we need is a creative vision for the planned environment, not the usual prosaic 'let's build it at whatever cost to environment'. Philip Larkin wrote in his poem *Going, Going* – "..... but all that remains for us will be concrete and tyres."

Let this not be the legacy for our grandchildren.

Search for "Hyde Housing Whitehawk" to see details of the proposal on line.

AG ♦

## New Conservation Area Character Statements

We were represented on the Steering Committee overseeing the recent preparation of Conservation Area (CA) Character Statements for the Old Town and Queen's Park CAs, both of which were on Historic England's "at risk" register.

The Old Town Character Statement was supplemented by a Conservation Area Management Plan – the first in the City. The Statements and Plan were prepared by Eddie Booth of the Conservation Studio, completed by Eimear Murphy of Murphy Associates after Eddie's death in March this year.

The documents have set comprehensive new standards to which any future Character Statements or updates for the other 32 CAs in the city should aspire. They are by far the best yet produced.

It is vitally important that parameters and criteria for proposals which affect CAs are clearly set out in character statements, so that planning applications can be properly assessed and the suitability of design proposals evaluated.



Queen's Park gateway

They will assist developers, the general public, local community groups and the Council itself in ensuring the best possible outcomes for the city's CAs. The Conservation Advisory Group finds them invaluable in discussions on the planning applications which come before them.

The Old Town CA Character Statement was approved by the Council on 9 March 2017 and the final draft Management Plan will be considered by the Council on 22 November. The Queen's Park Character Statement was approved on 27 September.

The Character Statements can be viewed on the Council website at: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/heritage>

JM ♦

## Blue Plaques update

The Brighton Society has been represented on the city's Commemorative Plaque Panel since its inception in 2006. Over this period the Panel has been involved in the appraisal and installation of some 30 blue plaques, and expects to continue unveiling them at the rate of about two a year.

2018 has seen the installation of plaques to 2nd Lt. Ernest Beal V.C. at 148 Lewes Road and Prince Kropotkin at 8 Chesham Street.



The Panel is now considering plaques for three suffragettes or suffragists with strong Brighton connections, the first of which, to Minnie Turner at 13 Victoria Road, is expected to be unveiled on November 18th. Also projected is an informative plaque to mark the offices of the Women's Political & Social Union opposite the Clock Tower. Outside London this was one of the more active centres for the suffrage movement in the period 1909 to 1914. DI ♦

## Our Comments on Draft City Plan Part 2

The Society submitted detailed comments on those sections of the Plan of most concern to our work. It is of crucial importance as unless a City Plan is in place, planning procedures are prejudiced and vital criteria for new developments are not in place. Major points raised on the Housing section are summarised below; we also commented at length on Heritage aspects.

### Housing Quality, Choice and Mix

Families' needs change as they grow. Almost 50% of the city's housing requirement is for homes of 3-4 bedrooms or more: do new housing developments approved recently meet this requirement? Targets should be regularly monitored against projected needs.

### Retaining Housing and residential accommodation

Unfortunately, much damage has been done to areas of the city due to the proliferation of HMOs (houses in multiple occupation), resulting in

demographic changes which have affected for example, primary school numbers. Some areas are becoming ghettos, and residents have gradually moved away.

The amount of private rented properties in Brighton & Hove is 21% - twice as high as the national average, with a very high number of HMOs. Many more properties are private rentals such as holiday flats and houses, AirBnB, etc. A significant change of use such as to a holiday let or AirBnB should be made subject to planning controls. Second home ownership and holiday lets should be actively discouraged.

Given the 41% increase in the number of older people anticipated, the housing of the elderly is a critical requirement. Are there enough incentives to make it attractive to developers to provide housing for older persons?

### Build to Rent Housing

We support the build to rent sector and suggest further measures to ensure that the provision of private renting is regulated to ensure good quality housing for longer term occupancy.

As much "affordable housing" as possible should be provided by developers, but recent developments have been allowed to drop from the 40% target set out in the Plan to 15% or less. The whole process is flawed and needs a re-think.

### Open Space

This is important. As the density of housing within the city increases, the demands on public open space become even more critical. Existing parks are under severe pressure, yet funds for essential maintenance have been cut to the bone. More funding from Section 106 agreements and/or Community Infrastructure Levy funds is desperately required, and should be an aim in the City Plan.

A summary of our Heritage section comments will be included in the next Newsletter.

### *Robert Gregory 1922 - 2018*

*With sadness, we announce the death of Robert Gregory, one of the earliest Brighton Society committee campaigners and our Chairman for 22 years. An enthusiastic member of the Society for the rest of his life, his interest in the built environment of Brighton and Hove never waned.*

*As Robert's passing occurred shortly before this Newsletter went to press, a fuller tribute will be published in the next issue.*