



The Brighton Society was invited to a Zoom meeting on 15 September with Oliver Spratley from the council's Highways Department and Councillor Steve Davis from the council's Environment, Transport and Sustainability (ETS) committee to discuss aspects of the design plans for Valley Gardens Phase 3. The meeting led to some interesting outcomes - one was the relationship between air quality and design. Design has a direct impact on the physical environment and the implementation of a flat or three dimensional plan or model is not without consequences and therefore needs rigorous scrutiny.

With this in mind it was pointed out that the Valley Gardens road layout might increase pollution levels. Already the levels are high due to the number of vehicle journeys that pass through the Aquarium roundabout every year, estimated to be 19 million (some 50,000 a day). A significant number of these journeys travel the north/south route of Valley Gardens. With the rerouting of buses there, this might create bottlenecks and resultant pollution from vehicles stopping and starting. An example of a high pollution area is North Street, next to Valley Gardens, the seventh most polluted road in the country outside London - and in a recent newspaper report this year, the council confirmed that progress to eliminate pollution remains significantly behind target: this does not reassure us that the situation is under control.

The council representatives were asked if there was a current environmental impact assessment document available. They were not forthcoming with an answer, and therefore we can only assume that there isn't one. Cllr Lee Wares, from the ETS committee, is reported to have said that: *"To progress Valley Gardens Phase 3 without a full and up-to-date environmental impact study is a dereliction of duty by councillors and the council."*

In the Valley Gardens Phase 3 document there is a proposal to create additional areas of open space that is expected to benefit air quality; however, without an up-to-date environmental impact study there will be no way of assessing this. Are we therefore just to rely on fatuous statements such as the one by an ex-chair of the

ETS committee that the pollution will be blown out to sea? Any serious plan should consider the science - and empirical evidence. We agree with Cllr Wares: we want to see an up-to-date environmental impact study. AG ♦.

*The results of the Valley Gardens Phase 3 consultation will be reported to the ETS committee on 24 November 2020 together with any proposed changes to the detail of the design. The committee will then make a decision on the final design. Construction could start in Spring 2021 and be completed by Autumn 2022*

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## Commemorative plaque destroyed

In the early morning of Friday 12th June, the day before a Black Lives Matter rally in Brighton, the blue plaque commemorating Admiral Sir Edward Codrington (1770 – 1851) on Codrington Mansions, 140 Western Road, was removed on the instructions of the freeholder of the property and destroyed in the process.



Codrington was honoured with the plaque by the Brighton and Hove Commemorative Plaque Panel for his heroism at the Battle of Navarino. However, as he also had family links with slavery, the plaque had been earmarked by local activists for removal by one means or another.

The Brighton Society supports English Heritage's guidance on contested statues and sites. This is:

*"... not to remove them but to provide thoughtful, long-lasting and powerful reinterpretation, which keeps the*

*structure's physical context but can add new layers of meaning, allowing us all to develop a deeper understanding of our often difficult past."*

As in this case nothing of this nature appears to have been considered, we submitted a Freedom of Information request to establish the exact circumstances involved in the precipitous action. The reply confirmed that the plaque had been removed on the advice of an unelected Council officer. We have no evidence that the alternative of temporary Police protection was even considered.

On 6th September, therefore, we sent the following questions to the council's Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Culture:

*We would be grateful for your explanation as to why safeguarding this heritage feature was not prioritised pending public consultation? And why, instead, an unelected council officer was delegated to convey the barely concealed message that immediate removal of the plaque was the only option for ensuring the safety of both the plaque and Codrington Mansion itself?*

*Crucially, are you able to offer reassurance that, in future, the council will follow due democratic processes when historic features of the city's built environment are contested and, in the meantime, protect them from vandalism and over-hasty removal?*

We still await the answers.

NW and DI ♦

## Thoughts on the Government Planning White Paper Consultation

There has been mounting concern nationally over the Government's radical proposals to shake up the planning system. There is no doubt that it needs radical overhaul; the current system doesn't work well for anyone - whether you're a large developer or a small SME builder, a local authority or an amenity society such as ourselves, let alone the most important group it should be working for - the millions of people, mostly young but some old, who desperately need a decent home they can afford.

The current planning system is broken. When planning permission was first made mandatory by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, it incorporated a provision that land was sold at "existing use" value. This was intended to ensure there would be a sufficient supply of land to enable housebuilders to obtain it at a reasonable price, which would be reflected in a purchase price for new homes and would be affordable for a wide range of the population.

But this admirable policy intent was seriously watered down by subsequent legislation during the 1950s and early 1960s. Just like today with the current planning "reforms", pressures from development interests (the lobby), persuaded the government of the day to water down the principle of "existing use" value. An example was the 1961 Land Compensation Act which ensured that landowners and developers received the full increased land valuation after planning permission was granted.

The result was a system which stoked speculation and restricted the supply of land at enormously inflated prices. So now, despite the increase in overall wealth in society, the proportion of younger people of family age who are able to own their own homes is a fraction of what it was 30 years ago. In 1991, in the 25-34 age group most likely to be young families, 67% owned their own homes; in 2019 it is only about 38%. That is an appalling indictment of past and present government housing policies.



Any reformed planning system would have to include two crucial proposals:

1. *It would have to re-introduce the concept of "existing value" back into the equation. Do the new planning reforms propose that? No. It makes a few gestures in terms of reforming and simplifying the Section 106 and CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) procedures - but that's about all.*
2. *It would also have to propose reversing the 1961 Land Compensation Act - one of the pieces of legislation which undermined the intentions of the 1947 Act. Does it do that? Again the answer is No.*

The White Paper is 84 pages long. You could write pages of critical review about the details of its shortcomings, its omissions, its inadequacies. And you could write a book about how to solve Britain's housing crisis. In fact someone has – **Home Truths** by Liam Halligan – *The UK's chronic Housing Shortage – How it happened, Why it matters and How to solve it.* (Biteback publishing 2019). Well worth a read.

### The local perspective

So moving from the wider perspective to a focus on the local situation - what might be the effect of the proposed planning reforms on Brighton & Hove?

The picture here is probably even worse than nationally. Our situation, restricted as it is into a narrow strip between the sea and the South Downs National Park, in a city with a huge and vitally important urban heritage, is particularly threatened by the algorithmic approach to defining housing need set out in the White Paper. If the claims are correct that the city will have to accommodate 860 more homes annually (i.e. 1,520 total) per annum than the Local Plan currently provides for, then we're in big trouble – particularly as the average delivery over the last three years has only been 392 pa.

Where, you might ask, are these new homes going to go?

But you might also wonder whether in practice it's going to be much worse than the current situation. The council is completely hamstrung by its inability to guarantee a five year housing supply. It turned down the 17-storey scheme in Ellen Street, Hove only to see its decision overturned on appeal. The developers Matsim, (worryingly, now in charge of the Hippodrome), immediately sold it on to another developer, pocketing the profit. (A perfect example of the way developers gain at the expense of the community referred to in the first part of this article.) A revised proposal, optimistically called Hove Gardens, has now been approved.

The council initially turned down the massive Sackville scheme in Hove, only to approve a slightly revised scheme, knowing it would probably lose on appeal if it turned it down a second time.

In the last few days it has failed to stop an appeal being lodged on the huge Marina development - this time by a failure to make a decision within the required timescale.



*More blots on the landscape to come?*

Essentially the council has already lost control of major developments proposed in the city, and the large property vested interests are running the show in their own interests - **not** in the interests of the city. And are these schemes providing the affordable family homes that we need? Of the city's total housing requirement, 47% is for 3-4 bedroom homes, but all these developments consist mainly of 1-2 bedroom flats with no gardens. And the affordable housing component of all of them is negligible.

And as to the question of whether the White Paper will increase community involvement in the planning process... well, that will have to be the subject of a future article. Though you can probably guess the answer. JM ♦

## The trans-Atlantic slave trade: our city, its heritage and its people

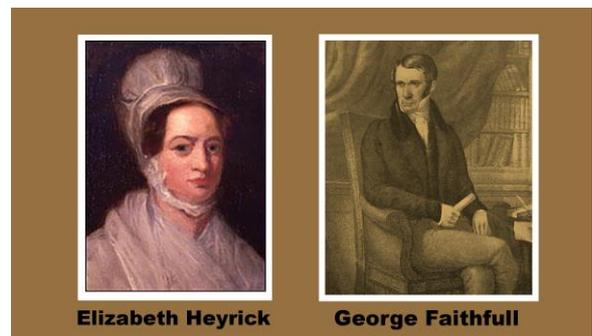
Brighton was an abolition town. Archive copies of the Brighton Gazette and the Brighton Guardian offer a glimpse of the anti-slavery attitudes of its people. In the 1820s and 30s the Old Ship Hotel hosted numerous public meetings on the issue of abolition. A short distance away at the Friends' Meeting House, Quakers hosted similar gatherings. George Faithfull, a non-conformist preacher at the Ship Street Chapel (later re-named Holy Trinity Church), was resolute in his anti-slavery campaigning.

In 1824 a pamphlet called "*Immediate not Gradual Emancipation*" by Elizabeth Heyrick called for a nationwide boycott of West Indian sugar, which saw Brighton grocery stores leading the way.

On Tuesday 16th November 1830, an anti-slavery public meeting took place at the Old Ship tavern. It was agreed that a petition would be submitted to 'the Legislature' resolving slavery "*as repugnant to justice, humanity and sound policy [and] to the principles of the British constitution and to the spirit of the Christian religion*".

These historical snippets feel eerily relevant to the city in 2020. Early in June, council leaders were quoted in the press as suggesting the city was built on the profits of slavery. Some stretched the historical record to imply our Georgian buildings owe their existence to the slave trade.

The integrity of the historical record depends on facts. It is a fact that in 1836 the British government began paying out £20m (about £16bn today) in compensation to 46,000 British slave owners as "recompense" for losing their "property". Many had already grown rich on the profits of the trade and now grew obscenely richer as a consequence of abolition. Of those compensated, a database set up by a University of London research project identifies 19 people - receiving a combined total of £153,422 - as having a Brighton address. Clearly, 19 out of 46,000 British nationals is a tiny number.



*Abolitionists*

As for the wealth that "built" Brighton, there is no consensus among historians on the degree to which profits from the slave trade established towns such as ours. The initial wave of development, which took place between 1790-1820, occurred too early to benefit from the compensation payments. In any case, historians identify a solitary local developer, Mr J.B. Otto, as owning a West Indies plantation. Otto built Kemp Town's Royal Crescent in 1799-1801 and doesn't appear on the UCL database.

Perhaps, in 2020, a more unifying message would be to note that living in a Georgian town (developed courtesy of a range of wealthy investors) were actual, living citizens who contributed heart and soul to the fight against slavery. When they met, they demonstrated the decency of ordinary people.

On 13th December 1832, they elected their own members of Parliament for the first time. The two MPs they elected were radicals; persons known to the town as holders of extremely liberal ideals. They supported, among other things, the abolition of "unmerited pensions and sinecures", the further widening of the right vote and... (you guessed it), *the abolition of slavery*. One was Isaac

Newton Wigney, son of a local banker. The other was the non-conformist preacher of Ship Street, George Faithfull.

In 1832 the right to vote was still highly limited. Nonetheless, those who voted for the anti-slavery, pro-democracy radicals Wigney and Faithfull were just the tip of the iceberg. It was a voter turnout that spearheaded the hunger for social justice and universal suffrage that would soon animate the Chartist period to come. For Brighton's citizenry, the fact that Britain's ruling elite had profited from slavery, had blocked attempts to abolish it and resisted extending the franchise was indeed repugnant.

Reminding ourselves of any links Brighton had with the transatlantic slave trade is no bad thing. But it would be a great shame if this were not accompanied by the stories of everyday citizens who lived and worked here and campaigned tirelessly for abolition. AH ♦

*A fuller version of this article, giving the historical references, can be found on our website*

## Books about Brighton

A selection of books published by Brighton Town Press is available free to members. Titles include:

Conversations with Sarah Rose Cook of Carlton Hill;  
Landscape Book of Brighton Prints  
The Story of Queen's Park Brighton  
Backyard Brighton  
Memories and Photographs of Brighton in the 20s & 30s  
The Vanishing Villas of Preston & Withdean  
Rose Hill to Roundhill: a Brighton Community

See the members' page of our website for full details.

## Thin end of the wedge?

It seems like only yesterday that we were campaigning to save the Brighton History Centre yet here we go again. In 2013, the local history treasures we had been able to access in the centre of Brighton were integrated into the new, purpose-built archive at Falmer. Only seven years later, this state of the art facility is also under threat. Several staff redundancies have already been made and now it is proposed to cut opening hours drastically to make further savings.

	Current public opening hours at The Keep	Proposed public opening hours at The Keep
Monday	Closed	Closed
Tuesday	9.30am – 5pm	10am – 4pm
Wednesday	10am – 5pm	10am – 4pm
Thursday	9.30am – 5pm	10am – 1pm
Friday	9.30am – 5pm	10am – 4pm
Saturday	9.30am – 4pm	10am – 1pm
Sunday	Closed	Closed

Alarm bells are ringing. With fewer staff working fewer hours, less can be offered while researchers travelling to the facility from out of town will be constrained in what they can achieve in a session. Should visitor numbers fall in response to a reduced service, further erosion of this prized resource could well follow.

Have alternative means of achieving the required saving of £125,000 pa been thoroughly investigated - letting of

underused space in the building, for example? This question needs asking and creative solutions found. In addition to the Royal Pavilion & Museums Local History Collections, also accessible at the Keep are the University of Sussex Special Collections, the East Sussex Record Office and the Sussex Family History Group Library.

If you have ever consulted any of these collections and benefited from the expert professional advice of the dedicated staff at the Keep - or if you have not yet visited but have it in mind to do so - please respond to the survey at <https://www.thekeep.info/> or simply type into your search engine "the keep archives". Completed forms can be submitted online. Alternatively, the form can be printed out and either posted or hand delivered to the Keep. The deadline for submission is **October 25th 2020**. NW ♦

## Anti-Graffiti Zoom Meeting 3

Over the last nine months we have hosted anti-graffiti Zoom meetings to bring together residents' associations, journalists and local councillors in order to work together and find solutions to reduce the levels of graffiti in our city. The third meeting was held on 21 September. The agenda focussed on four areas: defining the problem; discussion of the council's graffiti reduction strategy (2018); enforcing the 1971 Criminal Damage Act; and solutions. The agenda items will be published in more detail in a website article.

Amongst the thirteen attending the meeting were: Cllr Tom Druitt - Green Party Regency Ward and Cillrs Gary Wilkinson and Theresa Fowler from the Environment, Transport and Sustainability (ETS) Committee. All three thought the meeting was helpful, Gary in particular saying that he would put some of the points made to the ETS committee. We were particular delighted to have with us Jon Rowles, vice chairman of a local community group in



The Brighton Society contributes to the Argus

Richmond, Surrey, who gave another perspective on how to tackle graffiti, which had resulted in a significant reduction in his town. For our next meeting we will be inviting councillors, business owners and the police.

These meetings, along with our Twitter and Facebook platforms, are creating an interest for those concerned with the level of graffiti in our city. The local press has asked us for comments and we have contributed to press articles and provided relevant photographs.

Coming soon on our website, in the members' page, will be a comments page where you can add suggestions for ways we could reduce graffiti in our city. AG ♦