

NEWSLETTER 112 December 1995



Happy Christmas to all our members

It is good to see the Christmas Tree alight again in Regency Square. We are grateful to the Council for supplying and erecting the tree. Also to committee member Clive Buxton who looks after the lights.



The tree is paid for by the Council. The Society meets the cost of electricity and insurance.

It was suggested that the mayor might be invited to switch on the lights, but it was not possible to find a suitable date and time. However, Christmas will not be entirely uneventful for the Society. The committee will be meeting informally in the Regency Tavern at 7:30 pm on Thursday 28 December. They are hoping that other members will also be able to be there.

Last Chance for the West Pier ?

The new Chairman of the West Pier Trust is Admiral Sir Lindsay Bryson. At the Trust's AGM on 11 December he said that an application had been made for National Lottery money to restore the pier to what it looked like in 1924.

He did not expect the Lottery to provide the full £34 million needed but was optimistic that a significant sum would be made available. A decision is likely before the end of the year.

Provided some lottery money is promised it should then be possible to find a developer who will provide the rest, and then run the Pier on a commercial basis. Nothing specific was said about what sort of commercial activity would be involved but there was an undertaking that it would be nothing like the Palace Pier.

One interesting possibility is that the Council might make part of the lower seafront either side of the Pier available as part of the same development. The Milkmaid Cafe could become a West Pier visitors' centre. Any other buildings erected would not be above the height of the upper promenade. In reply to a specific question Sir Lindsey said that if the paddling pool were to be built on, a new pool would be provided elsewhere.

So, as always, it's a matter of great things just around the corner. But the new chairman was clear about one thing: in his view this bid for lottery money really is the last chance for Brighton's West Pier.

Thanks ...

... to everyone who helped with the meeting on 7 December, especially the Metropole Hotel which provided the room and the sandwiches free of charge.

Thanks also to Mike Hannigan of Standard Life for coming to talk to us about the Churchill Square development. A report on what was said is given overleaf.

Drugs Bust in Clarence Square

The Compass pub at the top of Clarence Gardens has not been the best of neighbours for those living nearby. It has been the subject of several complaints to the Environmental Health Department because of loud music.

Recently however, it was the subject of a different kind of official attention when the police carried out a drugs raid and arrested 21 people.

Did You Hear Anything in Castle Street?

We reported in the last issue that the snooker club in Castle Street has been granted permission to open late for another year. The Director of Environmental services has been asked by the Planning Committee to investigate whether any other residents in the street have been disturbed late at night, apart from those who objected to the application.

Meet Your Committee

The Society Committee will be getting together in the Regency Tavern at 7:30 pm on Thursday 28 December.



They will be pleased to see any members who can also be there.

Late News: £2million promised

About £2 million of Government money has been promised for the re-generation of the area around Regency Square and Preston Street. More details in the next issue.

We've Seen the Future ...

... and it's shopping. A newly re-furbished Churchill Square to be precise.

Well we didn't actually see it. Mike Hannigan from Standard Life, the owners of Churchill Square, came to the Society meeting on 7 December and showed us some plans, most of which have already been on display in the empty shop behind Smiths.

What was more interesting was what he had to say about the development, and the comments made by society members and by our local councillors, Martin Boggon, Roy Pennington and Nimrod Ping.

Consultation - talk to everyone

Standard Life have talked about the development to just about everyone that matters in the town - including of course the Regency Square Area Society.

It is clear that Mr Hannigan understands this area and its problems very well. Although the scheme that has been proposed doesn't please everyone, it is certainly well thought out.

Road Closed

One of the main issues for local people is the need to close some roads, especially Regency Road, which runs under the Square from Russell Square to West Street. This is not an attractive route but it is a very convenient short cut for people living in this area.

Mr Hannigan explained that it was not possible to keep it open and still create enough shopping space on the new lower mall. He was aware that closing this road would mean that people would have to walk further to get to the Old Town area.



But he had done his homework. He had walked from Cannon Place to Duke Street via Regency Road and via the other two routes, Russell Road and the front of

Churchill Square, timing the journey in each case. The longest route (Russell Road) was only 2 minutes

more than Regency Road - for a fit, young man with long legs that is.

At present Russell Road is not suitable for pedestrians at present. This will change. A new covered walkway will be created on the north side with less loading bays and traffic exits. There will also be a direct way into the new Debenhams Store.

The Price to Pay

The local councillors said that Brighton Council felt that the loss of Regency Road was the price that has to be paid for a major improvement to the town centre. Councillors have visited other shopping malls developed by Standard Life and were impressed with the high quality they had seen.

The chairman put a specific question to the meeting: should the Society oppose the road closure when the notice is published? There were one or two dissenting voices, but the clear majority supported the view that it should not.

What Kind of Shops ?

The big new store at the back of Churchill Square will be Debenhams, which will move from Western Road. BHS will also enlarge their existing store. There was disappointment that John Lewis would not be coming but Mr Hannigan said that they would have wanted a much bigger store than would fit.

No food retailers have shown interest yet. Groups like Sainsburys and Tesco are starting to open small town centre stores again, so there is a possibility that they might take space in the new mall. Mr Hannigan was left in no doubt that this is what local people would like to see.

There will be restaurants in the mall, but only open during shopping hours. This new mall will in fact be a large area of the centre of town which will be closed to the public. There was discussion of this point, and of what would happen if Debenhams pulled out at some future date. Mr Hannigan assured the meeting that Standard Life was committed to keeping the area open - he would say that of course.

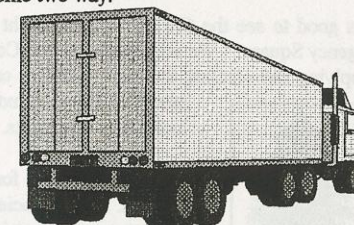
Beep Beep

The issue that generated more heat than any other was traffic. The development will include new car parks built to much higher standards than those there at present. There will be good lighting, video surveillance and regular patrols.

Standard Life have taken over the lease of the car parks from NCP. This means they will control parking prices, which may well come down to compete with places like Crawley and Tunbridge Wells.

Mr Hannigan was keen to point out that the traffic scheme had been planned in consultation with the local authorities, police etc. It will include "variable message signing" which will allow traffic coming out of car parks to be directed to the least congested route.

But there's no getting away from the fact that there will be lots of cars in Russell Road and the bottom part of Cannon Place, which will be widened to become two way.



When there is an exhibition in the Metropole or the Brighton Centre, things could become quite impossible. The new scheme provides wider loading bays for both buildings, but nothing like enough to deal with the crush of large vehicles that we see when there is a big exhibition.

Neither Mr Hannigan nor the councillors really had an answer to this problem. But when Brighton Council becomes a unitary authority next year it will take over responsibility for roads and traffic from East Sussex. So at least we will know who to complain to.