



NEWSLETTER 191
December 2003

Breakfast at the Regency

Join your friends and neighbours for breakfast to welcome in the New Year. Meet at the Regency Restaurant on the southwest corner of Regency Square at 10am on Sunday 4 January.

It's very informal. The restaurant reserves a large table for the Society. Just take a seat and join in the local gossip. Committee members will be there so there's also a chance to have your say about the Society's activities.

You can have a cooked or continental breakfast for around £4 or £5. Everyone pays for themselves so you don't need to book – but put it in your diary now so you won't forget.

Council Decision Overturned

Number 128 Kings Road was a fine 19th century bow fronted house, on the seafront to the east of Abbots, the modern block on the corner of Regency Square.

Now it is a mass of scaffolding holding up a façade. The Planning Committee have given permission for demolition on the grounds that what remains standing is beyond saving as a result of a major fire. However, they refused permission for a modern block of flats, saying that a replica façade should be created in order to preserve the character of the conservation area.

The Society welcomed this decision and when the owner appealed we wrote to the Secretary of State to support the Council's position.

Unfortunately the appeal has been upheld, which means that permission for the modern block has now been granted over the head of the local planning committee.

Announcing the decision, the planning inspector expressed the view that the “block of flats will create a link between the higher block ... to the west and the older building to the east, both in terms of its height (which is intermediate between the two) and its relatively narrow frontage.

He says the proposed design is “uncompromisingly modern but ... well proportioned and carefully considered in respect of its siting and ... would make a worthy contribution to the Conservation Area”.

He disagrees with the Council's view “that it would be desirable merely to copy the original façade ... since that would have a false appearance in an architectural sense, and would miss the opportunity to allow the area to evolve in response to modern needs.

The inspector does impose various conditions, which are designed to ensure that good quality materials and finishes are used and that the flats are not occupied until the whole site has been landscaped. A dedicated rubbish and cycle storage area is also required.

What's wrong with that?

Some may accept the inspector's views, which are in fact consistent with the advice given to the planning committee by the Council's own officers. At the end of the day it is a matter of judgement whether this modern development will enhance our area.

The Society committee's thinks a replica would have done more to preserve the architectural heritage of the area.

We also believe that this decision gives the wrong message to developers about conservation areas. It suggests that if you allow a historic listed property to fall into a bad enough state of repair you will be allowed to demolish it and re-develop the site.

Ultimately it is the Council that must take the blame for this result. For years the owner of number 128 left it empty, failed to repair it and allowed squatters to occupy and damage it.

The Council tried repeatedly to persuade him to improve the property but without success. Had they taken a firmer line earlier, this blight on Brighton's seafront might have been cleared up long ago and the original building saved.

This will not be the last case of its kind. Let's hope the Council has learnt from its past errors.

The Society
committee wishes a



merry Christmas to all
our members...

Give us some light!

The Council is inviting small groups such as ours to apply for grants for community projects.

We have been concerned for some time about night time security in the gardens in Regency Square, for example for people walking across the grass or to the central car park stairs.

We are investigating the possibility of a grant to pay for some low level lighting, possibly solar powered.

What do you think of the idea? Do you have any experience or technical knowledge which would be relevant. Please contact the chairman or secretary if you have any thoughts.

Society Contacts

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The Only Way is Up?

Have you noticed all the proposals there have been recently for tall buildings? The King Alfred site is one example. Others are the former barracks in the Lewes Road and the Endeavour site near Preston Park.

The latest idea, much closer to home, is a plan to demolish the Brighton Centre and replace it with new conference facilities with a tower block of flats on top. Many of the flats would be for social housing.

Can Brighton and Hove absorb all these new tall buildings? The Council's answer is set out in a large (A3 size) and lavishly illustrated consultant's report. This document makes the point that if the

city is to expand it must go up because of the limits imposed by the sea and the Downs.

So it identifies areas of the city where tall buildings would be appropriate, and other where they would not.

Not surprisingly, most of the current proposals, including the Brighton Centre site, turn out to be in acceptable areas. The good news is that Sussex Heights is quoted as an example of an unacceptable location, because of its impact on the historic architecture of the neighbouring squares... but no, it is not going to be demolished!

The Council has invited comments. The Society has pointed out the need to ensure that adequate infrastructure is available for such a large development right in the heart of an old and crowded town.

Many of Brighton's roads, pavements, sewers etc are already under great strain in the central area and a development of this scale will surely add to the problems. Can they cope?

Another comment is that these proposed tall buildings are for residential use. There is a lot of evidence to show that people prefer to live in buildings on a more human scale, which create a real sense of place.

We have also said that all such proposals in or near conservation areas should be subject to an environmental impact assessment.

The Regency Square Breakfast

10 am

Sunday 4th January 2004

The Regency Restaurant

All members and friends welcome.

Jam Tomorrow

Lovers of the West Pier have become well accustomed to a diet of jam tomorrow. The date for the grand re-opening always remains just far enough in the future to not be worth putting in your diary.

Rachel Clark, the Trust's general manager, was quoted recently saying that work on re-building the pier is unlikely to start before 2005 at the earliest.

Western Road to be cut off ...

... from Clarence Square that is.

There is a junction linking Clarence Square and Western Road, near the Pull and Pump. At present it is one way only except for cycles. Many drivers ignore this and use it to drive into Western Road.

The Council has unveiled a new traffic scheme for central Brighton to reduce delays to buses. Amongst other things, it involves closing this junction entirely, except for cycles. The aim is to stop traffic getting from the seafront into Western Road.

What do you think of the idea? Are there any practical implications for local people that the Council should be told about before a decision is made?

Please let us know if you think the Society should comment on the scheme (☎ 321794). Details of the full scheme are given in the December issue of "City News", the Council's newspaper. There is also an exhibition in the foyer of Brighton Town Hall (9 am – 4.30 pm) until 9 January.

... and a happy
new year!

