

NEWSLETTER 208
November 2005

West Pier AGM Inquorate!

The annual general meeting of the West Pier Trust was held at the end of last month in the former Bedford Hotel, now known as the Holiday Inn.

Less than 50 of the Trust's 900 or so members were there, so the meeting proper had to be postponed. Nevertheless the normal business was still conducted on an informal basis.

Is No News Good News?

Geoff Lockwood, the Trust's chief executive was not able to make any announcement about the great plans he has for the future of the pier.

He did give some background information. There are three separate commercial companies looking at the possibility of entering into a partnership with the Trust.

He was not able to name any of them because they are all still examining the feasibility of a development on the West Pier site. They do not want to go public until they have satisfied themselves that their schemes are financially viable.

Each company is working on a different scheme, details of which are still confidential. Dr Lockwood was able to rule out certain possibilities:

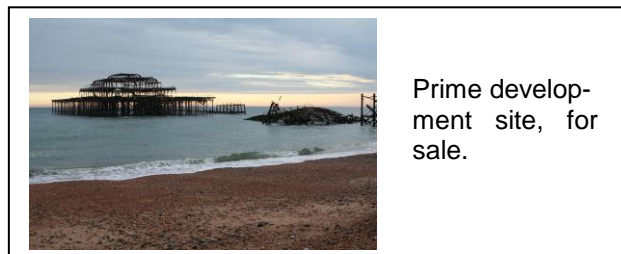
- no fun fair
- no casino
- no shopping mall.

One Day the Pier May Rise Again

He said one other very interesting thing: all the schemes leave open the possibility for the West Pier eventually to be re-constructed as it was in the mid 1920's. This is still the Trust's objective.

But what does that tell us about the developments which are being planned at the moment? They will need to be built in a way which allows for future rebuilding the pier itself. So where will they be?

All will be revealed by the end of February next year at the latest!



Prime development site, for sale.

West Pier Trust Insolvent?

One of the items at any AGM is a review of the annual accounts.

The Society published a policy statement about the West Pier recently which suggested that the Trust might be insolvent. In other words, it has liabilities greater than its assets. The liabilities in question are a responsibility for clearing away or making safe the remains of the pier.

If the trust were insolvent it would need to cease trading, otherwise the directors may become personally liable for its debts.

Geoff Lockwood responded to this suggestion earlier in the year by saying that the Trust owns the land on which the Pier stood. He claimed that the value of this land more than covers the costs that the trust faces.

At the AGM, Society chairman, Roger Hinton queried this aspect of the accounts. He asked the Trust's auditor to explain why the land was not shown as an asset in the Trust's balance sheet. He also asked whether the balance sheet should not include a provision for the cost of debris removal.

The auditor gave an assurance that the Trust is solvent in the sense that it can continue to operate for the next twelve months.

He said that the land was not shown in the balance sheet because the Trust had not paid anything to buy it. The cost of debris removal would be met by whichever commercial firm the Trust went into partnership with and so no provision was needed.

When will it all end?

There is a serious point behind these rather abstruse financial questions. If and when it becomes clear that no partnership will ever materialise, the Trust will need to be wound up. Responsibility for what is left of the pier will then pass to an accountable public body.

The Trust's new chairman, Glyn Jones gave an undertaking that once this did become clear, prompt action would be taken to end the Trust's activities.

It remains to be seen just how clear, "clear" has to be!

More about the Hostels

The Society committee had a meeting with two of the Council employees who are running the hostels at 14, 15 and 19 Regency Square. Steve Bulbeck has overall responsibility and Lisa Carrington is one of the local managers. They gave us a lot of useful background information:

- The houses were in use as hostels before the Council took them over and had been used by the Housing Department and South Downs Health Trust to house homeless people.
- The Council has now taken a 10 year lease on the properties which are being run by Council staff, between 2 and 6 staff on site at all times.
- Contrary to a recent report in the Argus these are not drug rehabilitation centres.
- There are 39 rooms in total, for homeless people, who often have alcohol, drug or mental health problems. The aim is to help them take a first step towards independent living. Only people with a “local connection” are offered places.
- Residents have a license rather than a tenancy; this means they can be asked to leave at short notice if they do not adhere to the strict terms of the license.
- Anti-social behaviour, including street drinking and harassing neighbours is not acceptable; if local staff are informed it is happening they will deal with it or call the police, as appropriate..
- Neighbours can contact hostel staff if they are aware of any anti-social behaviour:

☎ 294655 (Local Office)
☎ 294647 or 294648 (24 hours)

But Why Are They Here?

This is useful information but it doesn't answer the basic questions that local people are asking:

How were these hotels able to get change of use to hostels without the normal planning consultations?

What will happen if other hotels in the area now apply for a similar change of use?

Does the council still have a policy of not allowing hotels to change to residential use?

How can the council claim to support the tourist industry while allowing three properties in a prime location to be used to house people whose anti-social behaviour is liable to drive tourists away?

We still want answers to these questions and we are hoping to organise a meeting with senior council representatives who can give them.

Parking Proposals

The Council is proposing radical changes to residents' parking arrangements. The current parking zones, will be replaced by two large ones, North and South. Our area will be in South.

The aim is reduce waiting times for new permits. Some resident bays will be replaced with shared use bays. Vouchers will be replaced with a pay and display system similar to the one on Hove seafront.

At present there are 1.6 permits for every resident bay. This will come down to 1.3 if the new scheme goes ahead.

The Society has expressed concern about the risk of “internal commuting”; with such large permit zones it is possible that drivers from the northern part of

our zone will use residents' bays in our area when at work or shopping.

A traffic order is likely to be published early next year and there will then be a formal consultation. In the meantime you can get more details of the new scheme by phoning the council on 293329.

Lunch at the Gallery

Friday 25th November at 12:45
Gallery Restaurant, City College, Whitecross Street

Starters and deserts from £2;
Main courses from £4;
Tea and coffee 75p.

Book by sending your name, telephone number and a £5 deposit to
Ros Boulden, 8 Abbots, Kings Road, Brighton BN1 2FA.

Your deposit will go towards the cost of your lunch.

How Tall is Too Tall?

Plans have just been rejected by the Council for a massive expansion of Brighton Marina, including a 40-storey tower block, which would have risen way above the cliff top. The whole scheme would have provided almost 1,000 additional flats in 11 new buildings!

The Society believes this would have been serious over-development of an already crowded offshore site. We have donated £100 to the campaign that has successfully opposed it.

The campaign was headed by Kemp Town Society chairman, Derek Granger, who also played a leading role in the Save Our Seafront campaign against the St Modwen scheme for the West Pier.

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