

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

4 DECEMBER 2008

Deputation concerning Kemp Town Heritage

Mr Paul Phillips (Spokesperson)

“My name is Paul Phillips and I am Chairman of the Kemp Town Society. I appreciate the opportunity to present this deputation on behalf of the Society and residents of Kemp Town.

You have before you Presentation material. It is a series of photographs and other documents which were, in effect, part of a PowerPoint presentation. I would urge you to have a look at it and take it away and study it if you have a moment.

Thomas Kemp brought the citizens of London to Brighton. It is a time to encourage tourists – the wealthy ones – to return to Brighton and to return tourism as a top economic driver for Brighton’s prosperity.

The heritage seafront is the crown jewel of the city and the primary reason for visitors to come here. Four and a half miles long and considered the most important heritage seafront in the UK, arguably in Europe, and certainly unmatched anywhere else in the world

But it is in decay – as the photos show – no less in Kemp Town.

No money, no pride and perhaps unloved – why has it been left to decay? How many years will it be before these and other street lights are rebuilt? The lamps are Grade 1 listed.

The recent Core Strategy document fails to place Heritage as the fundamental platform for Brighton’s economic prosperity - it is our trump card. It should be and we need to play that card again in these economically stressful times.

The Core Strategy is essentially a housing policy document. This has its value, of course, but unless the foundations of the city’s prosperity are protected, the tourists will dwindle away. It is the built heritage, which needs to be placed into a primary policy as part of the city’s economic strategy moving forward, so it is protected for generations to come. I love houses – good housing. I have been involved in it most of my life. I know what it is all about. It is vital for the well-being of us all. But economic activity does not come from it - once built.

I encourage those who have authority in such matters to insert the heritage seafront to be protected on a statutory basis and annually funded to ensure its regular and consistently planned maintenance.

It is great that the bandstand has been funded, but it should have been a matter of course.

Roll out the red carpet for tourists. With more visitors staying for longer the city's businesses will thrive – even in the off-season.

The proposed Marina development is a dark cloud for those who treasure heritage. We are not against redevelopment. I single it out, as we have had waves of highly significant planning procedures, which seem to come out with very little warning – the immediately affected residential community seemingly the last to be consulted and the most affected by it. The result of this is that despite soothing words in the planning application documentation, there is a seething discontent at having this immense project thrust upon us.

The imposition of such a massive development on such an exposed, constrained and sensitive location impacting on our sea horizons and skyline is unconscionable.

The loss of key strategic views for all of Brighton and its damage to the image of Regency Brighton for the sake of squeezing in much needed housing, as I am led to understand, is highly detrimental to the overriding character of Brighton's seafront image. All the SPDs, SPFs will become all but worthless if their guidance – the spirit of the guidance - is ignored. English Heritage is not happy – neither is the Society.

There is a better solution. Not least to resist all current applications until the new SPD is developed for the area. A new one with this development underway will render it virtually pointless.

The Marina Act is there to protect the City from such sacrilege. I hope this does not become the fulcrum of decision for a heavyweight contractor to push its way to achieve its ambition to build a new (free) supermarket and the highly compromised housing estate off the backs of the presumed wealthy – who are most unlikely to be the primary purchasers there.

Shoe-horning a modern poorly laid out development, with no iconic architecture to justify its special treatment, is not welcome.

I hope all will see the wood for the trees in the potentially disastrous outcome should it be passed by the Planning Committee in its current form. Or rather natural and built heritage values to be obliterated by a new seascape of towering blocks of concrete.

Let's instead rebuild our prize attraction of iconic heritage, and build only sensitively styled, quality buildings which integrate with the vast historic canvas already in place and roll out the red carpet once again for visitors and strategise ways to keep them coming throughout the year, for years to come."

RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR THEOBALD

“Could I just say at the start I would invite members of the Kemp Town Society to meet with officers of this council for a full briefing on the content of the core strategy. I mean that’s available to you, we would be delighted to see you and to go through this with you.

I do want to emphasise that many of the new priorities that the Kemp Town Society has proposed as revisions are already in the revised preferred options core strategy and I have to emphasise this that at my instigation these include specific reference to investing in public spaces and priority to maintenance of the seafront.

In that connection, and you did mention this, we have been in Administration now for a year and a half but in that period you will have seen the Bandstand being given the go ahead and works are carrying on, also the Madeira Lift, so I take what you say extremely seriously. The importance of heritage is emphasised in the core strategy but a strategic document is not the place to set out detailed protection policies. The appropriate place is in the Local Development Framework, Development Policies and Sites Allocation Development Plan.

I want to emphasise something else and that is that we have added two additional Conservation Areas in this period and may I say another point is the question of boards in the central area of the city. Therefore as part of the consultation carried out earlier in the summer the views of the Kemp Town Society are being considered alongside other amenity group comments. I have asked officers to consider whether a programme dealing with high quality heritage areas can be brought forward in more detail alongside the Local Development Framework. This must be attached to the emerging LDF, but I have asked that officers report back to me on whether this programme can be brought forward independent of the LDF work programme.

You then went on to talk about the actual planning application and I am not going to comment directly on the Marina Development application because, and my colleague, the Chairman of the Planning Committee, and the Mayor have made it absolutely clear, this is a matter for the Planning Committee and I am not a Member of the Planning Committee. Again I want you to take into account the fact, and you did refer to it in your presentation, of the Marina Act. This is extremely important because if, and I have to say if, the Planning Committee did vote to go forward for a scheme that went over the cliff then it would have to come back to this council and this council would have to vote to agree that, so the Marina Act is an extremely important Act and ought to be of some reassurance.”