

Weymouth Civic Society Newsletter Spring 2023



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We need your help!

Weymouth Civic Society runs an annual awards scheme recognising the best new or redeveloped buildings in our area. We are expanding our award categories to celebrate more contributions to civic life. Can you name people, groups and companies that have delivered great things locally in the following categories:

- * Lifestyle – helping local people live life more fully and actively
- * Heritage – conserving our heritage or engaging people with our history
- * Culture – delivering programmes that help us consider and appreciate life, relationships and community
- * Natural environment – improving habitats to increase the opportunity for nature to thrive

Please reflect on what you've seen happen in the area over the last year that fit in these categories and has impressed you. Email chairman@nothefort.org.uk with your suggestions for worthy winners

'Buildings' remain in our awards but nominations have now closed.

Weymouth Civic Society calls for independent risk assessment of battery storage proposals.

The Board meets monthly. It alternates business meetings with more strategic discussions. The latest strategy meeting was used to explore the issues raised by the Solar and Battery storage schemes proposed for land North of Chickerell and issued the following statement

Weymouth Civic Society is well aware of the climate emergency and we fully support renewable energy development.

The Society understands the value of the solar array and battery energy storage scheme (BESS) proposed for North Chickerell, but we have severe concerns about its scale. As a



Society we have not offered any objections to the schemes, but we believe that because they are so large, they pose major risks to people living nearby and will have considerable impact on them during construction, whilst operating and when decommissioned at the end of their design life.

The impact on Chickerell caused by over 3000 lorry movements,

passing through residential areas, down a tortuous, narrow road with no pavements must be assessed and mitigations demanded.

We are also extremely concerned about the risks from fires. The following paragraph is taken from a bill presented to Parliament on 7th Sept 2022, due for its second reading on 23rd March 2023.

“Lithium-ion batteries are innocuous when they function normally, but if they fail, a process called thermal runaway—what we would call a battery fire—occurs, and there is a complex chemical reaction. It can occur for many reasons: the battery may be overcharged, there may be outside interference, or the battery may have a design fault. The only way to stop a battery fire is to cool it down with a constant stream of water and wait for the fire to go out, which might take days, creating huge quantities of water containing highly corrosive hydrofluoric acid and copper oxide—by-products of battery fires. These toxic chemicals cannot be allowed to seep into watercourses, because they would cause immense environmental damage.”

There have been battery explosions and fires at Liverpool, in a very small scheme, and further afield in Arizona and China. In each case the inert gas fire suppression system delayed a fire in a battery until the flammable gases built up to such a level that a huge explosion occurred. In Liverpool the blast happened before fire fighters arrived, those in Arizona and China were not so lucky and many were injured in the blasts. All the reports so far are from small installations, in Liverpool just 5MWh. The proposal for Chickerell is 400MWh. So many batteries together in one place makes a fire in the lifetime of the site seem almost certain.

We believe that Dorset Council should insist on a full Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) and that it should be widened from that normally provided by developers to include all of the matters raised here and by our Planning Committee. Given the size of this project, we recommend that the EIA is commissioned by Dorset Council, at the developer’s cost, from an independent expert consultancy of National or International standing.

My Favourite Building by Dog Walker



They don't have to be grand or old or even beautiful to enhance a view or to make it complete. The strange little fisherman's huts on Chesil Beach near Pirates Cove seem very remote and romantic. "But they are just sheds!" I hear you say, and so they are, but they function like punctuation in a sentence, making the meaning clearer. The other side of the Fleet is not for the likes of you and me walking our dogs. That is the land of the

fishermen who used to row their seines out in an arc and back to gather up the mackerel as they schooled by. Now, I expect, their children pay little more than homage to their fathers' efforts, exercising some ancient right to go fishing and maintain a boat on the water. But the little huts, and this one in particular, make me look and make me think about what went before.



The work of the Planning and Environment Committee until mid December 2022

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Football Stadium – 32 Affordable Homes (P/FUL/2022/05244)

While the supply of affordable homes is clearly a major issue in our area, in our view this is not the place for them, and we have made a strong objection to this current application for affordable homes at the Stadium. The two uses are incompatible, and noise and disturbance, especially when there is evening use of the Stadium, would be disruptive for young families with children.

Of prime concern is the loss of the two main car parking areas for the Stadium, which would be built upon to provide these houses. We think it most important to keep the parking provision to serve the Stadium and avoid indiscriminate parking on nearby road verges. Good accessibility is particularly necessary for disabled people.

The proposed development would also appear to preclude any extension and enhanced provision of the main built facilities as may be needed, constricting any plans for the future. Indeed, we think the ultimate viability of the Stadium could be at some risk if this development were to go ahead.

Bincombe Bumps Campsite – Use for 56 days per year permanently (P/FUL/2022/02471)

Each year farmers are able to use their land for camping for 28 days a year as an allowance, incidental to the normal agricultural use of the land. During the Covid crisis this was extended as a special additional concession. The owners have now applied for permission

for 56 days per year on a permanent basis. This site lies immediately next to the group of tumuli known as Bincombe Bumps, which are such a landmark in our local scene, a significant feature in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We are concerned that there should not be mobile toilets, catering facilities, tents and vehicles immediately next to this important group, an ancient burial site, originally a sacred area for the local inhabitants; and we also question the advisability of removing the agricultural use from this land for such an extended period on a permanent basis.



7 Custom House Quay – Alterations to Frontage

(P/FUL/2022/05777)

We have objected to a planning application to remove all the traditional Victorian windows in this harbourside house and replace them by windows without glazing bars and a long run of bifold doors on the ground floor, all in a dark tone of frame. We had already been deeply disappointed when a similar change was made to the building adjacent on the west side, resulting in the windows appearing empty and blank in important views from across the harbour.

The neighbouring property to Number 7 on the east side is the historic Custom House, one of the most significant harbourside buildings, and there are fears that this proposal could harm its setting. (picture from Google Maps)

Pulpit Inn, Portland Bill (P/FUL/2022/07274)

Following an initial public consultation, plans have now been submitted with the Council to demolish the whole of the Pulpit Inn and replace it with a new public house and 13 2-bedroom holiday flats. The design of the complex is clearly a response to the character of the Coastguard Cottages nearby, which would be quite appropriate in this area.

Unfortunately, the amount of development now proposed is far larger than the present Pulpit Inn, rising to three storeys high compared with the present two, and having a greater spread, with its three-storey frontage set much further forward towards the road. We do not think that Portland Bill is the right place for this amount of extra development, where the wide open grassy spaces are a key characteristic of this famous place.

Land at Newton's Road (Bingleaves) (P/OUT/2022/00852)

In March of this year we submitted objections to the Council on the plans for a major development of the former Quinetiq site. Now, following considerable opposition, the plans have been modified, with the 189 dwellings (mostly blocks of flats) reduced to 141, and the care home from 65 beds to 60. Nevertheless, we have maintained our strong objections. This would still remain a massive development, with the lines of apartment blocks rising to 6 storeys, as high as the cliff behind, affecting views of this coastline from miles around, but especially from the Nothe Peninsula and Newton's Cove, and seriously affecting the setting of this part of the World Heritage Site.

We have also stressed the need for more employment in the local area rather than a mass of new apartments, particularly knowledge-intensive based uses, to provide local jobs and reduce the need for outward commuting to other areas.

Our other original objections remain, including, notably, the amount of traffic generated on a road system which is already heavily under pressure. The large number of waterfront apartments are likely to be most attractive to second home owners or for holiday lets or the retirement market, and would not provide the local affordable accommodation which is needed. We also queried the suitability for such massive development of this piece of low-lying reclaimed ground projecting out into the waters of Portland harbour and the open sea, especially in the light of climate change and the risks of heightened water levels and storm surge.

WEYMOUTH SEAFRONT MASTERPLAN

We have recommended to the Society's Board a series of comments upon the draft Masterplan put forward by Hemingway Design. This follows our original response in July, now with detailed consideration of all the proposals, assisted by contributions from Society members. Broadly speaking our comments are as follows:

There are two all-important matters which we believe must be seriously addressed in the document: – a) the critical need for sea defences to be fully considered before other plans for the seafront; any barriers which may be required could incorporate planting beds and seating within their structure; and b) the necessity for regular, high quality maintenance for the Georgian and early Victorian terrace buildings, which are of exceptional historical value.

We agree that the open, uncluttered sandy beach is a most important asset, but have doubts about removing all of the modern rides, especially not to the Pavilion forecourt.

We do not see a need for several more cafés and restaurants on the Esplanade, as proposed in the document, in addition to the good provision that already exists;

We have doubts about further outdoor seating in the area between Bond Street and Marks and Spencer. Any additional seating on the promenade side could perhaps be provided as part of the sea defences which will be required. We agree with the idea of enhancing the area in front of Marks and Spencer, though in practice only modest changes may be possible, in view of the need for rear access to the store and into New Street.

We support the creation of an attractive space around the King's Statue. This must not be at the expense of the bus stops, which provide vital direct access to the town centre and should not be relocated at the railway station.

We agree that there could be a little improvement around the important Jubilee Clock, but not by cluttering it with pop-up cafés and other items or by building a large stepped area over the beach. Instead we have suggested planters with seating around the perimeter alongside the road, to define the space and separate it from traffic.

While the concept of widening the promenade north of the Jubilee Clock is attractive, it should not be gained by narrowing the road, which is a major access route.

Similarly, although the creation of a larger public space by the Pier Bandstand is a pleasant idea, the car parking provision is a vital necessity in this area which is sadly lacking in public parking, as well as offering blue badge space for those with limited mobility to sit and enjoy the beach view. The attractive flower bed which the Council created helps to conceal the parked cars from view.

Greenhill Gardens are well maintained and exceptionally attractive, but we agree that the tennis courts appear under-used and unattractive, and that other beneficial uses are worth considering.

The Consultants' proposals put forward ideas for Preston Beach including beach huts, a café and other features. We do not think that it would be necessary or desirable to clutter up this wide open space, especially bearing in mind the susceptibility of the beach to wave action, and the needs of beach re-profiling with heavy machinery from time to time. Likewise, the rock groyne was constructed to specific requirements, and we fear that a further outward extension as suggested might cause further erosion of the beach to its south.