

WEYMOUTH CIVIC SOCIETY PLANNING NEWS AND NOTES July/August 2021

The Civic Society's Planning and Environment Committee continues to meet monthly to discuss matters of concern and interest in the local area. Our latest meeting reverted to Zoom, as we remain cautious, with Covid still about, the resort packed with holidaymakers from outside the area, and the increase in close mixing of people. This report summarises some topics we have been discussing and acting on in July and August.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

During these two months until our latest meeting on the 13th, there were few new planning applications of any significance. We have commented on a small number of these, with our usual concerns about over-development of residential sites and similar matters, one of which is the following:

20A School Hill, Chickerell (PIP/2021/02212)

Our area of interest covers Chickerell as well as Weymouth and Portland, and we responded to an application for 'permission in principle' (PiP) for eight or nine houses on the site of a single bungalow. Chickerell has experienced vast new developments, one of which is now under construction immediately adjacent. Notwithstanding that, we think the density in this particular scheme is high for such a small site, and the seven separate accesses from individual car parking spaces directly on to the road could cause potentially risky reversing movements on this through route. The Council needs to act fast under the PiP arrangements, and has now granted permission, but only for the location plan with an outline of the site, and the number of new dwellings. Our comments were noted, but the layout and access were not open for consideration at this stage under PiP arrangements, so we must await detailed proposals, in the hope of an improved plan in due course.

Weymouth Railway Station Forecourt (WP/21/00111/FUL)

In response to a further consultation on the plans for reorganisation of the station forecourt, we have written to strengthen our serious reservations on the proposals, which in our view promise at best only very marginal improvements; and nor do we think that they make the alterations necessary to create a viable transport hub.



There is a risk that implementing the present scheme could preclude potential funding for a more worthwhile scheme in the future. We have also further stressed our concern at the proposal to cut down all the trees that encircle the forecourt, which, with the flower beds surrounding them, have been nurtured for many years, thanks, in a large degree, to the hard work of volunteers.

Campervans - Land at New Ground, Portland (WP/20/00639/FUL).

There are several long-standing planning applications which have not yet come to a decision by the Council. One which has reached a conclusion is for a site at New



Ground on Portland, where we are pleased that permission for a 20-pitch campervan site has been refused.

It would have occupied a part of the wide open area of natural grassland at the top of the island in this most important location, where visitors from all over the world come to marvel at the magnificent panoramic views over the sea and Chesil Beach.

We had concerns that it would damage the character of the open undeveloped landscape and could pose a risk to the natural environment of the terrain, which is covered by designations of wildlife and habitat importance. This is the second refusal on this site, the previous application having been for 20 touring caravans, and we hope that it will be the last attempt.

CUSTOM HOUSE QUAY

The Committee considered the proposals for Custom House Quay, and submitted comments on a number of aspects, which we can broadly summarise as follows.

We are pleased that this area is being opened up for everyone to enjoy, and a widened harbourside walkway is welcome. However, we have stressed the vital importance to protect this as a working harbour for fishermen and other users. To this end we support the provision of loading bays on the harbour side of the road. As much loading and unloading activity is for businesses on the opposite side, we have recommended that some space is available on that side also, between the pub and restaurant sitting-out areas.

Additionally, limiting the carriageway to 3m width with no variation would not allow for vehicles to pass any obstructions which may occur. We have strong concerns



about the proposed cycle lane, which we consider to be a potential risk to both cyclists and pedestrians. Eastbound cyclists would be travelling against the traffic flow, which could be especially dangerous in the summer season, with visitors unaware of the system.



The two spaces for parking for disabled people are in our view in the wrong place, next to the raised platform of the old Cargo Landing Stage, with all the traffic passing directly by them, especially as there is no access from them to any pedestrian walkway. We also feel it is a pity that there is absolutely no view from these spaces.

On the question of harbourside railings, the consultation document confirms their temporary nature but says 'We will consult ... *at a*

later date to establish how a more permanent structure can be installed'. This is clearly a controversial issue, with strong opinions for and against any railings at all. While not taking a stand for either option, as these temporary barriers so disfigure this important harbourside location, we have urged that action to take the necessary decisions about the whole situation should not be delayed indefinitely, as the consultation seems to imply.

SIGNS

Consent has now been granted for a huge sign on the wall of the Sunseeker building at Osprey Quay. After both the Civic Society and Portland Town Council objected to the original proposal, a disappointingly modest reduction in size was achieved: - at 8.4m x 5.2m this is still well over twice the size of a standard advertising hoarding. Our fear is that if permission is granted for large signs, it could be difficult to refuse others elsewhere, resulting in proliferation of ever larger signs and more clutter.

A belated mention may be made of a happier outcome which was achieved at Iceland's 'Food Warehouse at Jubilee Retail Park, where a set of wall mounted signs were proposed last year, which were far larger than ALDI's had been, and out of proportion to the building. We wrote to the Council about these, and were pleased that the signs which the company eventually placed on the building, though still relatively large, are considerably smaller than those originally proposed, and much less dominating.

DORSET COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN.

Although the public consultation on the draft Local Plan closed in March, we have still not seen the promised results of it, which were intended to be issued in July. Clearly if there are staff shortages and difficulties owing to Covid, any work on such a large-scale undertaking may have severe problems, especially as it covers such widely varying parts of the County, with a large total population, and involves the merging of several different planning regimes of the former local authorities.

CONDITION OF BUILDINGS

We are hoping to have talks very soon with Dorset Council's Conservation Officers about the condition of some of the major historic and other buildings in our area.

These include Brewers Quay, in a seriously dilapidated looking state, the Old Assembly Rooms in Trinity Street, where buddleias are again growing out of the structure, and the former Swan Inn on Dorchester Road at Broadwey.



In Castletown, Portland, there is concern about two buildings which have been empty for some considerable time, as well as the notorious grim empty shell of the former naval accommodation block on the slope behind.





What a first impression this gives for the thousands of visitors from overseas, who come in on the cruise ships to see the delights of our area. Buildings in Weymouth town centre also give cause for concern, including the former Meech's at 103-104 St Mary Street, raised by the Weymouth Town Centre Group.

Old Assembly Rooms



Unfortunately the problems with restoring buildings to a good use and condition are increasingly acute and seemingly intractable, exacerbated by the loss of town centre trade as a result of Covid and online shopping.

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