

**WEYMOUTH CIVIC SOCIETY
PLANNING NEWS AND NOTES January / February 2023**

The work of the Planning and Environment Committee at the beginning of 2023.

WEYMOUTH SEAFRONT MASTERPLAN

Following our original comments sent to the consultants Hemingway Design in July last year, we responded in detail in January to the formal consultation on the Draft Proposals. We stressed two most important factors – first, the outstanding historic character of the Esplanade with the consequent prime requirement for adequate finances to fund regular, high quality maintenance and restoration work; and secondly, the vital necessity for the consideration of sea defences to be incorporated into any plans for the Seafront.



We fully agreed that the open sandy beach is a highly important asset, but did not agree with the removal of modern rides to the Pavilion Forecourt, which should be kept clear of such uses. The Esplanade itself is in our view already attractive and does not need any major alteration other than the removal of any unnecessary structures such as the laser light columns. We agreed that there may be some opportunities for enhancement, e.g. in the area at the rear of

Marks and Spencer, the tennis courts in Greenhill Gardens, and around the King’s Statue, but most certainly not by the removal of all the bus stops. We were not in favour of some other proposals, including the stepped area down to the beach at the Jubilee Clock, and what seemed to us a risk of cluttering the promenade space by over-provision of extra items such as kiosks and cafés, possibly to the detriment of some existing businesses.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR WEYMOUTH – DRAFT - CONSULTATION

In the short space of two weeks available for comment, we have looked at the first-draft plan and made our response. The consultation document covers much environmental ground, with which we are in general agreement, including both broad principles and detailed plans, such as protecting local green spaces and important open gaps and providing allotments where needed. As an example of valuable local spaces, we have recommended the protection of a small local space on Tennyson Road (see item below), and also the land along the Rodwell Trail between Sandsfoot Beach and Ferrybridge as part of the proposed Coastal Recreation Area.

Unfortunately we have strong concerns about a number of the other proposals. The most striking of these is the loss of shoppers’ car parks to development, particularly Park Street and Governors Lane, two of the most popular and busy car parks serving the town centre.

Governors Lane is especially valuable for the churches and businesses at the south end of the town and for Custom House Quay. These convenient car parks fulfil a vital function in providing good accessibility to the shops and facilities in the pedestrianised central area.



This is especially important with large numbers of retired people in Weymouth and surrounding areas, many of whom will have reduced mobility. We are also opposed to the planned redevelopment of the whole Bond Street Shopping Centre, which covers the cinema, all the shops including The Range, and the Multi-Storey Car Park. When all these proposals are taken together with those in the Masterplan and the draft Dorset Council Local Plan, we envisage the prospect that virtually all of Weymouth's town centre car parks and some on the periphery, would be lost to development.



We are also dubious about proposals for development on sites around the edges of the town. These cover the whole western borders of Lodmoor, including open land, the Household Recycling Centre, and even the Beach Car Park, which serves Lodmoor RSPB Reserve and Preston Beach - all of which land, and former tip, seem to us unsuitable, especially for housing. Greenfield sites identified for affordable housing include land at Wyke Oliver Farm/ north of Budmouth Avenue, and Redlands Farm near to the Wey Valley, both designated as

Important Open Gaps of Landscape Importance. We have objected to the proposed redevelopment of Westhaven Hospital, which we consider should remain to provide for the health needs of the community. It is to be hoped that by the time of the formal consultation, planned for September, these problems will have been addressed and the proposals modified.

SOLAR FARM AND BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE FACILITY

These two interlinked major projects have occupied the minds and discussions of the Board and Committee, as we noted in the last Planning News, with the solar farm covering a vast area, over five times the largest in the UK and the battery energy storage capacity reported as up to 400MW, which we believe to be as large as the very largest Things have now moved on, with a formal application (P/ESC/2022/08013) submitted to Dorset Council for a determination whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for a planning application for the battery energy storage facility, proposed at Coldharbour between Chickerell and Radipole Village. We took the opportunity to comment on this, stressing that there certainly should be a fully independent Assessment, and setting out our major concerns which we consider most important to address. Our greatest concern with such a facility is to what extent there might be potential for fire or explosion on a huge scale, when even very small-scale battery fires can have runaway effects, extremely difficult to extinguish.



The site chosen is close by the residential areas of Coldharbour and Chickerell, near to Radipole Village and with all of Southill not far away. We fear the effects there might be of any explosion and toxic fumes on all the locality around. There is the additional question as to the vast quantities of water required to extinguish any blaze, which we believe could then become contaminated with chemicals and pollute all the downstream watercourse.

In the construction phase, there would be the major impact of large numbers of heavy goods vehicles, including those of great size and weight, trundling along the local residential roads of Chickerell and Coldharbour, as well as on access routes to the area. Other concerns include the potential for ongoing levels of noise, such as produced by the cooling system, which we understand could take the form of low-level sound, audible over a wide area.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Land West of 1-7 Tennyson Road (off Chickerell Road) – Erect Two Houses - (P/FUL/2023/07656)

We are delighted to see that the recent planning application for two houses on this small green space has already been withdrawn. There had been most vigorous opposition by local residents to this proposal, to which we also made a strong objection. While two houses would only result in a tiny addition to the general housing provision of the area, this small green space is of tremendous importance to local people, as a place where children can play and community activities can be held. It is timely that the draft Neighbourhood Plan is highlighting the value of such small local green spaces, while they are being lost to development in various locations in our area.

Brewers Quay.

It is good to read that the current owner of Brewers Quay is finalising his plans, ready to get started on the work to restore and convert the building to apartments, shops and the Museum. We have seen a small 'holding' planning application for a set of steps into the building from Hope Square, submitted with a view to keeping the already existing planning permission alive and avoid further prolonged delays which would be the result of a fresh application, while waiting for this decaying building to be saved.



Radipole Park Gardens – Proposed Café - (P/FUL/2022/07855)



The ambitious plans for a café near the children's play area have now been modified to a smaller unit with outdoor seating. Nearby are a proposed sensory garden and area for pétanque and table tennis. We have written in support of this project, which we believe should extend the use of the gardens, and we hope it will be a well-used facility.

Colwell Shopping Centre, School Street - Redevelopment - 83 Room Hotel (P/OUT/2022/06846)

We have written to the Council about the proposed 5-storey hotel, which we consider to be over-development on this very restricted site: in our view the building is too high for this location, and any development here should be no more than four storeys.

Newlands Farm, Coldharbour – Change of use of Agricultural Buildings to Storage, and Siting of up to 43 Storage Containers (P/FUL/2022/07710).

This group of former farm buildings has been occupied by storage and distribution uses in recent years, but without permission for the change of use. Now there is a planning application, not only for these existing activities including 23 storage containers, but also for up to 20 more. We have objected to this as an over-industrialisation of what should be an agricultural use in an area designated as Land of Local Landscape Importance, with concerns that it would be increasingly liable to cause noise and disturbance to the local residents.

7 Custom House Quay – Replacement Windows and Door (P/FUL/2022/05777)

The protracted saga of windows to these two adjacent buildings on the harbourside continues. We had written a strong objection to the original application, which in our view would have been highly damaging to the character of this traditional harbourside building.



We are pleased that the latest proposals have deleted the long run of bifold doors on the ground floor, but it is disappointing that all the existing windows are proposed to be replaced by modern ones of a design and colour which we believe are simply not appropriate to this house.

PLANNING UPDATES

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

A welcome decision has been taken - this planning application for housing on the two car parks of the Football Stadium (see our October/December 'News') has now been withdrawn. We had objected strongly to this by reason of the loss of the parking provision, the unsuitability of this site for families with young children, and that this development would appear to preclude any future plans for expansion of the built facilities of the Stadium.



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

Our October/December 'News' recorded our concern at the proposed extension of the time allowed for camping from 28 to 56 days on a field adjacent to this significant group of round barrows. We were also concerned that there should not be mobile toilets etc. immediately next to this ancient burial site, such a landmark in our local scene. Now we are pleased that the application has been withdrawn, though it still leaves the 28 days permitted allowance in this sensitive location.



ANNUAL AWARDS

Each year we invite nominations for the Society's Annual Awards, which are offered for new developments, restoration work to historic buildings and other commendable projects which have made a good contribution to the local area of Weymouth, Portland and Chickerell. We are now in the process of considering nominations for the current awards for works completed during 2022. The Committee's recommendations are to be put to the Society's Board of Directors during March, after which all those chosen will be contacted. Finally, the Annual Awards Evening and Presentations will be held in May at a date to be decided.