

Eastbourne Borough Council Meeting – 18 November 2020, 6 pm

Item 4 – Public Right of Address

Three public speeches have been submitted as follows:

- a) On Item 11 (a) Completion of the Winter Gardens, Chris Leach, Chair of the Eastbourne Society
- b) On Item 12 (b) Motion 2 - Government Planning White Paper, Dennis Scard, Chair of the Meads Community Association
- c) On Item 12 (d) Motion 4 - Council meetings, Dennis Scard, Chair of the Meads Community Association

As live speaking at remote meetings has been suspended, the following speeches will be read out at the start of the relevant agenda items by an Officer.

Speech received in respect of Item 11 (a) – Completion of the Winter Garden Redevelopment from Mr Chris Leach, Chair of the Eastbourne Society.

The Society had agreed to and were very supportive of a package of works way back in 2014 which included new conference facilities, the new Welcome Building, the restoration of the Congress Theatre and the restoration of the front of the Winter Garden to its original appearance as shown in my drawing of March 1987.

We had pointed out that the most pressing item, in our view, was the replacement of the unsightly and dilapidated 1960s front of the Winter Garden which has disfigured the front of this outstanding Listed building designed by Henry Currey, the 7th Duke of Devonshire's architect. We were concerned that it was the last item on the list and therefore would suffer if there was an overspend. This proved to be the case.

We had assumed that the front was going to be restored as Levett Bernstein had drawn up detailed proposals which we had spent a considerable amount of time commenting on and approving. Planning and Listed Building Consent had been received for these exciting proposals which would have completed the restoration of the building (the roof works and the rear elevation facing the Park having been already carried out to great acclaim).

The first we heard that there had been a change of direction, and that a modern front would be added instead, was in the October 2020 Friends of the Devonshire Park magazine, where an article on the current Winter Garden works, slipped in a single sentence 'THE BUILDING'S EXISTING FACADE WILL BE REPLACED WITH A SLEEK AND CONTEMPORARY GLAZED DESIGN'.

We understand this decision has been made on cost grounds due to the fact that the estimates for the restoration proposals by Levett Bernstein came in well over the budget allowed. These costs included the fairly expensive reinstatement of the original double pitched roof which, we understand, has been omitted from the new design scheme. Apparently a new Brighton firm of architects has been commissioned to design this 'new sleek front'.

We await the new design but feel this will almost certainly be detrimental to this Grade II Listed Building and is not what was promised and agreed.

We would be very surprised if a modern high tech glass front worked out cheaper than reinstating the original design which was of a simple construction of timber framing set within the existing cast iron columns (which are hidden behind the 1960s glass cladding), matchboarding and timber windows all of which could be carried out by a local contractor.

If funds are not currently available for a complete restoration, we would suggest it could be carried out in phases starting with the first floor facade which is in dire need of replacement. The double pitched roof and the restoration of the ground floor could wait until funds are available in the future.

Speech received in respect of Motion 2 on Government Planning White Paper from Dennis Scard, Chair the Meads Community Association.

As planning committee members know we are very active in commenting on planning applications in Meads. We have expressed our concerns about the White Paper to our MP and we are broadly in support of this motion.

We support the statement in Paragraph 4 that says '*the planning process has over recent years become increasingly divorced from the needs and desires of local communities*'. This is highlighted in Permitted Developments Rights where offices can be turned into rabbit hutch homes and two storey extensions can be added to buildings without the need for planning permission.

Paragraph. 5 states '*the proposals contained within the White Paper will diminish the role of planning authorities, planning committee members and ward councillors*'. Agreed. But what are missing from this sentence are the words and '***the ability of local residents to continue to be aware and have a say on planning applications in their area***'.

The Meads Community Association does not believe that the present planning application system is flawed, whilst we may object to some of the planning decisions, we are content that the existing process for dealing with planning applications does not need such a radical overhaul.

We support the view that the Planning Paper needs to recognise that housing targets are best set by local Councils based upon their housing needs and restraints of the area. The algorithm that we should build 430 units per annum is unrealistic in that the average number of units built in Eastbourne is 153 per year. The notion of a studio flat and a large 5 bedroom house being described as a unit for housing targets is equally nonsensical and allows, particularly in Meads, for flat developments rather than family houses. As a priority we need to address the issue of sites where existing planning permissions for homes has been given but have not been built.

We are against the introduction of a national infrastructure levy. We believe that the level of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and section 106 levies should be set by local authorities and these payments should be spent locally on community infrastructure.

Finally, we want a commitment from Eastbourne Borough Council that if the legislation goes through that local communities will be consulted in the drawing up of the development plan that the Council will need to produce.

Speech received in respect of Motion 4 on Council Meetings

From Dennis Scard, Chair the Meads Community Association.

From Dennis Scard, speaking on behalf of the Meads Community Association, an organisation that takes a great interest in Council meetings and particularly Planning Committee meetings.

This motion supports the view that all scheduled meetings should take place albeit remotely. So far this year 6 of the 11 planning committee meetings and 5 of the 6 CAG meetings have been cancelled. It is interesting to note that despite Covid-19 none of the cabinet meetings have been cancelled this year.

Homing in on planning meetings. When they are cancelled, we have no way of knowing how and why decisions are made. Clearly they are being made as they are shown on the planning portal. We accept that meetings when they do take place have had to be digital but by doing so it excludes members of the public who may not have the necessary equipment or skills from taking part in the democratic process. It also denies the opportunity of the public attending meetings to show the strength of feeling when controversial proposals are discussed.

Parliament currently has a system where representatives can decide to attend in person or give their views digitally. The council has rooms large enough to do the same and arrange social distancing for staff, councillors and members of the public to attend safely under a hybrid system. It is not the same when the right to speak in person at meetings is denied and I have to rely on an officer to read my address.

I would request a time limit is set for digital only meetings - let's say until the end of the year when a review should take place. This review should decide the format for future meetings so as to ensure that members of the public are no longer excluded from the democratic process.