

THE
MONTPELIER

AND

CLIFTON HILL

ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

No 11 November 2011



Alex work starts • Ice rink plans • Conservation awards

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Constitutional change

FOLLOWING the Special General Meeting in March the MCHA set up a forum so members could discuss how to change our constitution.

The MCHA constitution is now 38 years old and beginning to show its age. But one of the main motives for change is the challenge presented by the plans for the old ice rink site (see page 3).

Under the existing constitution the eastern boundary of our area stops at Dyke Road. The committee is keen to extend this area to cover those parts of the conservation area, notably Wykeham Terrace and St Nicholas's church and churchyard, that lie to the east of Dyke Road.

The forum met four times and was attended by up to 13 members. At the outset we were faced with a choice. Should we try to amend the current constitution? Or should we take the Charity Commission's model constitution and tailor it to suit the needs of the association?

The forum agreed unanimously that we should adapt the model constitution. As one member of the forum put it: "Why try to reinvent the wheel?" The forum also agreed to expand our area to cover the parts of the conservation area that are east of Dyke Road. This will make it easier for the MCHA to challenge the ice rink plans at any public inquiry.

One of the distinctive features of the model constitution is that it is divided into two parts. The first seven clauses—which include the definition of our area—can only be changed by a two-thirds majority. But the final 22 clauses can be changed by a simple majority—making it easier to fine-tune the constitution in the future.

Most of the changes are minor and simply reflect provisions in our existing constitution. The maximum



Added protection for St Nick's

number of trustees, for example, will continue to be 10.

Our current constitution also says that trustees should live in the area. A majority on the forum thought this should be in the new constitution, but two members had reservations about this. The committee thinks one of the MCHA's strengths is that it is a local group. There are other groups, such as the Regency Society, with a wider brief.

We discussed three ways of solving this problem. One was simply to say that trustees must live in the area. A second option was to have a "fuzzy boundary", trustees would have to live within 100 metres of the boundary, which is the way lawyers interpret our current constitution. A third option would be to have a quota of two outsiders. Or we could combine options two and three.

Tell us what you think. We want your feedback. Copies of the proposed constitution are available on our website or from Jim Gowans, 6 Compton Avenue, BN1 3PN.

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The MCHA executive committee consists of **Jim Gowans**, Chairman, **Mick Hamer**, vice-chair, **Chris Jackson**, Honorary Treasurer, **Corinne Attwood**, Honorary Secretary, **Alan Legg**, Membership Secretary, **Pauline Messum**, **Lori Pinkerton-Rolet**, **Ian Thorburn**, **Graham Towers**, planning group and **Gabi Tubbs**, conservation awards. The co-opted members are **Carol Dyhouse**, **David King** and **Jane Osler**.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS: Single membership is £10 and couples £15, corporate £30.

High-rise hotel for ice rink site

Developers' plans face frosty reception

PLANS to build a high-rise hotel on the old ice rink site were submitted to the council at the end of October. The MCHA planning group decided to object to the plans at its meeting on 1 November.

The developers want to build an upmarket six-storey hotel. The scheme has been designed by the Brighton office of architects Conran and Partners.

The six-storey building would be roughly the same height as the roof of the multi-storey office block in Queen Square. The sheer scale of the building will dominate the southern part of St Nicholas's churchyard and be an oppressive presence at the back of Wykeham Terrace, as well as robbing the conservation area of some of its classic views. Both the churchyard and Wykeham Terrace, which dates from 1829, are listed buildings and together they mark the boundary of our conservation area.

The bulk of the building has not changed since the developers first consulted on their plans in the spring. We told Conran then that the building was too tall. But the developers seem to have ignored the critical comments they received.

We wrote to the scheme's architects Conran and Partners in April saying that "in principle we



Grave concern: the hotel will be as tall as this office block

would be happy to see an upmarket hotel built on this site. But we are concerned about the impact of the plans on the listed buildings of St Nicholas's church and churchyard and Wykeham Terrace."

The only significant change in the plans has been the creation of a series of roof terraces overlooking the back of Wykeham Terrace, which makes the impact of this development even worse on the residents of this historic terrace.

The plans fly in the face of much of the council's planning policy. The

council's planning guidance of March 2009 is quite specific about the maximum height of any new development on the site. It says that the site is not appropriate for a tall building (roughly six storeys) and that "four storeys would probably be the maximum acceptable height for the development at its highest point".

There are fairly cogent reasons for taking this stance. The council's tall buildings strategy identifies a number of zones where tall buildings may be acceptable. Queen Square is not one of these zones. The strategy says that that conservation areas are "inappropriate for tall buildings" and that they should not adversely affect conservation areas.

The local plan also says that the council will not give planning permission to buildings that have an adverse impact on listed buildings because of their bulk, size or design. While the plan also says that buildings should not have an adverse impact on a conservation area.

The hotel plans are not expected to be considered by the planning committee until well into the new year. Our website will have regular updates on the plan's progress.



Rising concern: the hotel will blot out most of the blue sky in this picture

Our conservation award winners

Celebrating twenty years of the MCHA conservation awards

IT WAS third time lucky when Jon Sharpe and Angela Oliver finally took the plunge to leave London for Brighton. They had considered moving to 'London by the sea' a couple of times, but weren't quite convinced it would be the right decision. With nothing better to do, on New Year's day in 2009, they went online and checked out several property portals to see what was on offer when 3 Powis Villas caught their eye.

Jon and Angela didn't lose a minute and managed to get an appointment to view the house the next day. The house has a spectacular position, facing south on the corner of Powis Square. They had a look around and just loved it.

The house had been in the same family for around forty years and when the owner died, his daughter put the property up for sale. It was in rather a sad state of repair, literally everything had to be redone - from restoring rotten sash windows to damp proofing the ground floor, replacing missing cornicing, re-wiring and re-plumbing. The garden too was a wilderness, plants interfering with the classic lines of the house.

Extraordinarily, the whole outside of the house was covered in a horrible textured render. As luck would have it they found superb builders in ABS Construction with Jarek at the helm. He and his inexhaustible team worked six days a week for six months enabling the couple to move into their house in July 2009.

Before they applied for planning permission for various alterations, a visit to their neighbours across the road proved invaluable. Studying the layout of the



Original elegance: Jon Sharpe and Angela Oliver's award winning interior

house, a mirror image of theirs, gave them an idea of the original floor plan, as theirs had been changed.

With the assistance of an architect friend and the builders, plans were drawn up and presented to the conservation department. Without much delay the plans went through. These included creating an opening between the dining room and kitchen as well as replacing a door into the garden with large double glass doors to connect the interior seamlessly with the exterior.

Within a relatively short time span, the builders managed to do most of the restoring and renovation work. This also included taking up several layers of laminate flooring to reveal the original but worse for wear floorboards. As the pine boards were sound and free of woodworm it was decided to fill, sand and varnish them the colour of bitter chocolate, resulting in an incredibly smart floor throughout the ground floor. They were thrilled to uncover the original panelling when they removed some vast ugly radiators under the bay windows. The building company was also responsible for installing three new bathrooms and their specialist

joiners were responsible for the state-of-the-art kitchen as well as the floating cupboards in the sitting room and wardrobes in the bedrooms.

The exterior walls had to be hand stripped of their ugly render and then restored with lime render and white lime-based paint. Jon, who Angela says is responsible for the overall design of the house, wanted above all to re-create the elegance of the original villa. There is no doubt that Jon and Angela created an exemplary modern family home fully respecting the beautiful architectural details of this early Victorian villa yet effortlessly introducing contemporary design. Inspiration came from studying myriad design books.

Angela adds: "We wanted to create an easy on the eye, relaxed look, connect with the seaside but not in a naff way!" This was achieved by keeping colours neutral, introducing symmetry and repetition with furniture and accessories, resulting in a welcoming understated overall look. With the arrival of baby Heidi eight months ago, life in Brighton suits them perfectly.

Words and photographs by Gabi Tubbs

The winners and the highly commended

IN 20 years of the MCHA awards the standard has rarely been higher. The judges were also very impressed by 21 Clifton Hill which received a highly commended award in the residential category. The citation reads: "For the careful restoration of the Victorian exterior, removing fake Tudor facade and reinstating lead canopy of terrace house."

The judges also praised the work on 6 and 7 Powis Villas, in the commercial category, which also received a highly commended award: "For outstanding workmanship in restoring two listed Victorian Villas to their former glory." (Developer Ray Charmak, of River Oaks Homes, www.riveroaks.eu. 01273 447488).

Mary McKean, the chair of the Regency Society, presented certificates to the winners and runners up at a brief ceremony in Saint Michael's church hall prior to the MCHA's autumn meeting on 28th October. She praised the awards for their role in driving up the standard of restoration work.



Residential Conservation Award 3 Powis Villas

For the beautiful restoration and of the exterior and interior of a listed Regency-style villa built in the 1850s.

Builders: ABS Construction (Sussex) Ltd. Tel: 01273 417 242

www.absconstruction.co.uk.

Architect Foster Lomas,

www.fosterlomas.com. 020 74077445

Commercial Conservation Award: 90 Montpelier Road

A splendid and sensitive restoration of the main building with its magnificent cast iron and stained-glass porch; renovation of Victorian addition into small townhouse.

Developers: HR Developments.

www.hrdevelopments.co.uk. 01273 321 885

Planning round-up

Cheap and nasty

PLASTIC windows don't just look ugly, they are also bad for the environment. Whatever you might save by installing UPVC windows in the first place, they will end up costing you a lot more in the end.

A study carried out in the London Borough of Camden in 2004 compared the cost of timber and plastic windows.

While plastic windows are cheaper initially, in the long term UPVC will end up costing you about 25 per cent more than timber windows—because timber windows last three times as long. This is one of the major reasons why the Peabody Trust—one of the biggest housing associations in London—has stopped installing UPVC windows.

On top of that plastic windows are bad for the environment. Timber is a renewable resource, but it takes about eight tonnes of oil to make one tonne of UPVC—although the plastic industry is challenging this figure.

The MCHA is talking to the council about banning UPVC windows in the conservation area.



Graham's elevation

THE council's Conservation Advisory Group elected Graham Towers to chair the group at its meeting on 1 November. In addition to being an MCHA committee member Graham also convenes the MCHA planning group. He is supremely well qualified for the task. He is an architect and planner and for a number of years served on the planning committee of Kensington and Chelsea.



Victorian post box restored to rightful place

CONGRATULATIONS to the Brighton and Hove High School for restoring the flint wall of the Old Vicarage in Temple Gardens and for carefully setting the Victorian post box back into the wall. The photos show the post box before the work (left) and afterwards (right).

The post box would have been used by the Wagner family, when

they lived in the Vicarage, as well as the masters and pupils of the Windlesham School for Boys (1844), which became the New Sussex Hospital for Women in 1918 and which is now flats.

The Flintman Company of Lewes rebuilt the wall, recycling the original flint and using traditional lime mortar.

Estate agents welcome boards ban

VICTORIA Street is the latest road in the conservation area to become board-free. When the ban was introduced in September 2010 the street had three houses with estate agents boards.

The ban has had a dramatic effect on the area. Only five boards now remain in the conservation area—notably a cluster of three boards in Montpelier road and Denmark Terrace.

But the ban has brought about a marked improvement in the conservation area. Before the ban there were about about 60 boards in the conservation area.

In September the MCHA chairman wrote to local estate agents to thank them for their help in introducing the ban. "I am sure you will agree that the appearance of all

streets in the area has improved since these restrictions" wrote Jim Gowans. "By making this conservation area even more visually attractive, the absence of boards has brought benefit to residents, visitors and business."

Several estate agents wrote back agreeing with us. Alex Mackay, of Mishon Mackay wrote to us: "I am absolutely delighted with the effects that the lack of boards has had upon the area. I was, and remain, a massive fan of removing all estate agents boards from the whole of the city. I cannot believe we as an industry are allowed to 'spoil' so many of our beautiful streets, and I sincerely hope that the council takes your initiative and extends the 'no board' ban throughout the city, sooner rather than later."

Royal Alex work starts

A bitter sweet start as the demolition workers move in

DEMOLITION work was due to begin on the Royal Alex as the MCHA newsletter went to press. It will take about three months to complete the work, as some familiar buildings are reduced to rubble.

But the start of these works also signals the start of work to convert the much loved main building into flats. Work on the site is expected to continue for three years, with the restoration of the main building being carried out in parallel with building of the new blocks of flats.

Taylor Wimpey has already had a meeting with the neighbours, in an effort to minimise the disruption for those who will be affected by noise and dust, particularly while major demolition is being carried out.

The council gave planning permission for the conversion of the main building and the demolition of other buildings on the site in February. But a start to the works was delayed by council red tape.

During this period the derelict site was often the target of intruders, despite the presence of 24-hour security guards. Some of this was benign—photographers dodged the guards and took pictures of the basement under the main building and then posted the results on the internet.

But some of the intruders were far more worrying. Thieves successfully stole most of the lead from the cupolas making the building prone to weather damage.

After pressure from the MCHA the council agreed to allow Taylor Wimpey to undertake preliminary works. The works began on 18th August, when contractors moved in to replace the hoarding around the site and to carry out other minor works, including stripping out plumbing and electrical wiring.

By early October the main building had been cocooned in scaffolding and contractors are currently carrying out minor repairs to the facade of the building.

Meanwhile a number of dead trees and bushes have been cleared from the Dyke Road side of the site.

In the meantime Taylor Wimpey put in a planning application for a temporary marketing suite and two show flats on the green triangle in front of the main building. After talks with the MCHA, Taylor Wimpey made some minor changes to their plans to make the building less intrusive.

The commercial success of the site is clearly important if the main building is to have a secure future and the MCHA didn't object to the plans. The council granted temporary planning permission for three years in early October.

The MCHA is pleased to see that Taylor Wimpey's marketing push is going to emphasise the site's



Take a last look: all these buildings will go

historical associations. The new development has been dubbed the Royal Alexandra Quarter. Taylor Wimpey plans to name the new blocks after the old hospital wards. Once it has been converted into flats, the main building, which dates from 1881, will be called the Lainson Building, after Thomas Lainson the local architect who designed it.



Going.....Going.....Gone

AS exclusively revealed in the MCHA's July newsletter the eyesore at the back of the terrace of listed buildings in Hampton Place has finally been cut down to size.

Saint Mary Magdalen primary school replaced its oil-fired heating with gas during the summer, making the tall flue redundant. The gas flue barely projects above the school roof.

Streets ahead

Our strategy to improve the public face of the area

PLASTIC street signs cost about £360. But they only last 30 years or so—and maybe a lot less judging by the condition of some recently vandalised signs.

Yet for only a couple of hundred pounds more we could have replicas of original signs, such as those in Clifton Terrace and Montpelier Terrace (see below).

The precise cost of these signs depends on the number of letters. Each letter is a separate tile, so it will be appreciably more expensive to make a sign for Montpelier Crescent than it will be for Dean Street.

We only have a handful of early (or original) street signs left. Although many others are relatively good quality modern signs.

The executive committee has decided that it could set aside a small annual budget for replacing a couple of street signs every year with replicas, which would probably be fixed to the side of a house to prevent theft. The most likely way for this to work is that the MCHA would bridge the gap between a cheap



plastic sign and the cost of a top-quality replica.

“I'd certainly support a scheme if the local community were willing to stump up the extra cost,” says Councillor Jason Kitcat, who is not just our local councillor but also the cabinet member for finance.

This initiative on street signs is part of a far wider strategy that the MCHA committee is discussing with the aim of improving the conservation area. Our streets are the public face of the area. Our conservation awards already

encourage people to restore their houses to a high standard. But too often the area is let down by its public face.

We have had some successes: the campaign against estate agents' boards is a good example. But many pavements in the area show signs of long standing neglect, with sporadic patches of asphalt and other ugly surfaces.

Earlier this year the MCHA had discussions with the council about the practicality of replacing modern lamp posts with heritage versions, after residents of Montpelier Crescent found a number of Victorian lamp posts in a scrap yard. In the end the scrap yard lamp posts turned out to be unsuitable. But we did establish that it is possible to get replica lamp posts of the Brighton design that meet modern standards.

This is not the first time that the MCHA has talked about heritage signs. But it is the first time that we have had a practical plan. First we tackle street signs and then we move on to larger things. Watch this space.



Christmas party at St Nick's

THIS year's Christmas party will be held on Tuesday 6th December at St Nicholas's Church, Dyke Road. The event kicks off at 7 pm. Soft drinks, food and entertainment are all included in the ticket price.

Tickets, price £10, are available from the membership secretary Alan Legg, at 93 Montpelier Road (tel: 01273-328624) or on the door.

The Christmas party will be an ideal opportunity to catch up with friends old and new. More than 100 people attended last year's party so book your tickets early. It not only



This way for the Christmas party

helps you to avoid disappointment but helps us calculate how much wine and soft drinks we have to order.

If the Christmas party is one of the highlights of the winter social calendar then our garden party is one of the highlights of the summer. Once again the lovely lawns of the Brighton and Hove Girls' High School provided the perfect setting. And among the 80 people sipping sauvignon and listening to a classical music trio were the chair and vice chairman of the planning committee as well as our local councillors.