

Rotherham District Civic Society

Notes of the first Quarterly Liaison Meeting with Environment and Development Services, Rotherham Borough Council, 27th March 2009.

Present:

Karl Battersby, Executive Director.

Bronwen Peace, Planning Manager.

Stan Crowther, Chairman, Civic Society.

Peter Hawkrige, Secretary,

Sheila Cameron.

Ian Hawkrige.

Bronwen Peace (BP) opened the meeting due to Karl Battersby being unavoidably delayed in another meeting. The following points were discussed.

1. Guest & Chrimes' Civic Office development and the poor quality of the pedestrian access over the Main Street bridge. BP indicated that if the Civic/RCAT/Housing scheme had progressed the pre-application advice would have been that a new pedestrian footbridge across the River Don should be included as part of the scheme.
2. BP then went on to explain the changing nature of planning submissions and the pre-application process recently introduced by H.M. Government.
3. The Society's views on Red Lion Yard were then outlined. BP responded that Cllr Gerald Smith had instructed his officers to look more closely at the condition of the Yard on his most recent town centre inspection with Julie Roberts.
4. In response to concerns raised BP confirmed that she would ask Peter Thornborrow to investigate whether increased protection could be given to the Alma Tavern on Westgate. Karl Battersby then joined the meeting. He indicated the following:
 5. RMBC is trying to acquire the remainder of the Guest & Chrimes site from Evans Regeneration. The problem is the high remediation costs already incurred. Yorkshire Forward is trying to acquire the Gloystarne site. If successful, Don Street would then be closed and a new high quality access off Main Street would be created. A bid has been submitted under the Government's 'Growth Point Initiative' for funding for a new river bridge from Sheffield Road into the south of the site to serve the proposed new housing development.
 6. Concerns were raised in respect of the Townscape Heritage Initiative and in particular that the priorities outlined in the Conservation Area Management Plan should be adhered to, rather than money being distributed on a first come first served basis. KB confirmed that overriding priority was being given to the Three Cranes/George Wright/Badger House/Dragon Pearl block. He explained that a Mr Willoughby, of Blandford Associates had bought the Three Cranes for £300,000 (even though at auction for £85,000) but his company was now in receivership. RMBC has done emergency repairs on the building, and is in negotiation with the Building Preservation Trust regarding its possible involvement in

a restoration scheme. Mr Willoughby's bank will be seeking to recover the maximum it can from his assets -even though the Three Cranes is clearly over-valued.

A compulsory purchase order is being actively considered. Funding to purchase all the block of property may, with Yorkshire Forward's consent, be diverted from that allocated to purchase the Ring Shop and other properties on Corporation Street.

7. Hanby's, No.20 High Street - Mr Ali, and the owner of the Essoldo Chambers, have all appointed conservation architects to work up restoration schemes for grant submission.

8. The THI has approximately another four years to run. The grant assessment, based on an increase in property value, has been imposed by the Heritage Lottery Fund so a more straightforward system, such as that used previously with the Urban Programme cannot be used.

9. The improvement of the Town Hall, and the conversion of the Eric Manns Building into member's accommodation, was outlined in relation to the intended use of the former Doncaster Gate Hospital by RMBC. Crinoline House staff may also be accommodated due to the very poor condition of that building. The possibility of then decanting the central library into the hospital is also being considered. KB confirmed that minimal works / alterations will be done to the hospital building.

KB indicated that museum storage is currently based at the Northfield Industrial Estate and a unit in Tenter Street. He will look into the Society's suggestion that the hospital be used for museum storage in the future. An additional option was raised, which KB will also look into, i.e. the Masbrough Chapel. Phil Rogers is already reviewing whether it should be purchased following it being recently put up for sale.

10. Concerns over the condition of Parkhurst and Blenheim House were raised. The difficulties of RMBC in forcing the owners to move forward were outlined. BP was, however, instructed to investigate whether a section 205?? notice re: the condition of the land, and boarding up of the property, could be served.

11. It was confirmed that the Cinema House on Doncaster Gate had been acquired and demolished by RMBC using Housing Market Renewal funds. A housing redevelopment scheme would be progressed.

12. It was revealed **in confidence** that RMBC is 'pausing for thought' following the demolition of All Saints Building. The work has revealed an important view of the Parish Church, and in any case the current recession is impacting on the business case for the new building which will not start until a 60% letting is achieved. The new building was to have been funded by Yorkshire Forward and Europe and is not directly tied into any 'delivery targets' for the Westgate Demonstrator Project. KB is, however, determined to avoid a situation like Bradford's Forster Square; accordingly the review of the future of the site will be quick and positive.

13. Iliad is currently looking at the refurbishment of the Westgate Chambers, which is likely to involve the demolition of the 1950's extensions on Domine Lane.

14. Concerns in relation to the Natwest Bank, and the indication on the Renaissance town centre model that this would in future be open space, were raised. KB confirmed that RMBC were trying to acquire the property but it definitely wouldn't be demolished. It would be converted, and Natwest would move into the ground floor of the new Iliad building next door. A decision by the Natwest/RBS board is imminent.