

Portsmouth Update

Portsmouth hasn't had a conservation officer since early 2020 when the last one left. For a city which owes so much to defence heritage tourism, only using consultants makes no sense... In contrast, Gosport has the best conservationist in the area. As well as the proposed development at Tipner, advice will be needed on conversion of the former Royal Marines Museum to a hotel, the conversion of Boathouse 6 as a new home for that museum, Tipner West, Fraser Battery, dockyard buildings at risk, sea defences at Hilsea Lines etc... which is much better provided in-house.

On 9 March Portsmouth planning committee was due to discuss an outline application to build an 8-storey carpark and motorway interchange at Tipner to serve the proposed new community of 4000 homes to be built at Tipner West, now renamed 'Lennox Point.' The Portsmouth News dubbed the carpark the 'green mountain'; it would be jammed up against the M275. I pointed out that it ignores the warning from the MOD that any tall structures built within the 'vulnerable building distance' of their explosives store on Horsea Island would have to be 'of robust construction and design so that should an explosion occur at the MOD storage facility, buildings nearby will not collapse or sustain damage that could cause injury to the occupants. In this context, buildings that contain large areas of glass, tall structures (in excess of 3 storeys) and buildings of lightweight construction are of particular concern to the MOD.' (Defence Infrastructure Organisation Ministry of Defence 28 January 2021 Tipner West Environmental Impact Statements February 2021). It's not clear whether the carpark would be within this zone.

The Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust, the Sustainable Conservation Trust and the Naval Dockyards Society do not consider that the heritage implications of this application have yet been considered adequately as material planning considerations. The Planning Officer's report on the carpark application notes that 'the idea of an 'iconic' tall building to the entrance to the city is negated by [its] huge mass' which would impact on the adjacent protected areas of the harbour, especially accumulative effects for the Tipner West proposals. If the city aims to make Portsmouth a greener, healthy and accessible city with sustainable and integrated transport and a substantial improvement in its poor air quality, building an 8-storey carpark at its entrance would send out all the wrong messages. We understand the pressure the city is under to meet the housing targets the government is imposing on them – and a leading councillor has started a petition to the government to allow local planning authorities to determine where to build homes to meet local need rather than trying to meet impossibly high housing targets which cannot be met in a coastal island. As the use of the existing park and ride has been falling, how will the council persuade commuters to use it? Will they charge people to drive into the city - as London does?

Alternative proposals to downgrade the M275 to an A road and reduce the 4000 home proposal for Lennox Point and the 700 homes at Tipner East have been put forward by architect Walter Menteth. They are set out in his research reports:

1. <https://www.portsmouthisland.uk/reports/m275-portsmouth-tipner-west/>

2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347342733_M275_Portsmouth_Portsmouth_Tipner_West_Cosham_Paulsgrove

3. https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/files/25201471/M275_report_V_2.1.pdf

As a result of Ann's and my lobbying, Cllr. Vernon Jackson and Mr. Samuels, the head of regeneration have agreed to "consider the merits of the proposed alternative scheme as part of the Regulation 18 consultation. This would ensure that the proposals get full and thorough scrutiny from the LPA and the Transport teams. We will be confirming the timescales for this process shortly and hope you do take up the opportunity to submit these proposals." Walter's ideas have much to recommend them, and the proposals contained in them would lead to a more effective, efficient and sustainable future for the city. Conflict with Historic England, the Environment Agency and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust would be avoided if they were adopted. On March 9 the Tipner interchange proposal was withdrawn for the city council "to carry out briefing with members and further consider this application"...

However, in mid-March a glossy website announcing that the development at Tipner West was renamed 'Lennox Point' after Charles Lennox, Master General of the Board of Ordnance 'who was responsible for the protection and fortification of the south coast' was launched by the city regeneration team: <https://lennoxpoint.com/the-proposals/>. The creation of the two powder magazines from 1796 at a safe distance from the town was 'due to' Lennox. The 'marine employment hub' will be called Phoenix Quay, after HMS Phoenix the Royal Navy's firefighting and damage repair training establishment, based at Tipner between 1946 and 1993... We know there are some environmental concerns about developing Lennox Point on a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area and a Ramsar site, and are following stringent process to ensure any environmental impacts can be mitigated appropriately. We are liaising closely with our statutory stakeholders including Natural England, The Environment Agency and other[s].. to keep everyone informed and up to date with our proposals... The development will only happen if statutory stakeholders are satisfied." Marine ground investigation of the sea bed and land contamination 'near the site' was said to begin via drones, a jackup rig to drill a hole into the sea bed to recover soil samples and rock cores from a tow boat. Public consultation on the Local Plan and on the Tipner masterplan is promised in summer and autumn 2021.

But at the March council meeting leading Councillor Hugh Mason expressed doubts about whether the government will ever give permission to build on Tipner West. "If we are going to build there we will have to provide biodiversity on the site... because we will have to meet these government targets." More than 22,000 people have signed the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds petition against the proposal. The HIWWT said "These vital natural resources, once lost, can't be replaced or compensated for. We urgent need to re-think development at a local and national level. If we don't start prioritising nature's recovery, our cities will quickly become uninhabitable for both wildlife and people." Reclaiming the mudflats around the peninsular would also release gases presently locked up in them.

The NDS, Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust, Portsmouth Society, Hampshire County Archaeologist, University of Portsmouth and the new group Futures for Defence Heritage are being invited to join a **Tipner Heritage Forum** being set up by the city planning department. The draft protocol says its purpose is "to consider, assess and comment upon emerging development proposals with specific regard to potential impacts upon designated and undesignated heritage assets, including potential setting impacts to heritage assets beyond the immediate site boundaries. This shall include consideration of pre-application heritage

survey findings and mitigation measures as being progressed through site-wide Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The purpose of the Forum is to assist PCC as local planning authority in reaching a decision on related planning applications.” Historic England will be a member of this group.

Of particular concern are the listed Tipner Magazine buildings opened in 1801 for use by the Royal Navy following acquisition of land there between 1789 and 1791 – the risk emanating from an accidental explosion were minimised by situating the magazine complex in a remote corner of Portsmouth harbour. The buildings comprise two magazines (built 1796/8 and 1856) and a coopeage dating from 1798/1800. These are of massive brick construction and are not in the best of condition following industrial use.

On February 4 the University School of Architecture set up the new group: **Futures for Defence Heritage**. Conservation professionals and academics: including the NDS and Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust are members Its objectives are being drafted, but will cover two broad areas set out at the end of my harbour book: international research into how different countries protect defence heritage structures, how redundant defence sites are disposed of, and who benefits from the new land uses. This evidence will be used to make the case that the UK government land disposal system needs reform in favour of local benefit. One of the conservation lecturers in the group is interested in setting her conservation students a project for restoration and conversion of the Tipner magazines next year.

The Portsmouth News reported on 27 February that the **Royal Marines Wardroom Eastney** had been sold to the Grand Excelsior International Ltd. which proposes to convert it into a five-star hotel with at least 80 rooms and a swimming pool. The group spokesperson said they would “retain the site’s historic attributes, appeal and timeless décor” and that it would host “plays historical re-enactments and military ceremonies” as well as “hosting weddings, conferences and gala events.” The accompanying illustrations were extremely bland, but a resident of the former barracks said that most of those living there would welcome a 5* hotel rather than a pub chain or some sort of commercial development. “The most important factor is saving the iconic building and its main Victorian features, as well as the battery. The former offices need to be gutted as they were awful and a significant upgrade is needed to the accommodation and services... As for the swimming pool out at the back where the garages are, then that will largely be hidden and the external lift to the rear is both novel and out of the way. Overall, I think it is the best option we could have had and the owner, an extremely wealthy businessman, is a former Portsmouth lad, born and initially raised in New Road and who is keen to raise the profile of Portsmouth and bring something to the city, perhaps as his legacy.”

Celia Clark