

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE WORTHING SOCIETY

TO

THE RESIDENTS OF WORTHING

I am writing an “open letter” on behalf of the Worthing Society to reassure residents of our sincere commitment to the future progress and regeneration of Worthing. The Worthing Society has been established for over 30 years and has worked tirelessly to protect the heritage and character of Worthing by ensuring that new developments work well with our local heritage. The Society does not wish to “mothball the town” but feel new plans need to fit in with their surroundings. We are anxious to avoid the planning mistakes of the past which are only too evident in High Street and the Grafton Road car park area.

My Committee, which is a dedicated team, has asked me to write to you following the very critical comments which were made about the Society at the recent Aquarena Planning Meeting and recently on various social media forums. Certain statements mistakenly implied that the Worthing Society submits objections for no good reason and in the case of Roffey Homes had registered objections to all their development proposals. This is not the case and I feel we should have the right of reply, particularly regarding the issues affecting the redevelopment of the Aquarena.

We are keen like everyone else to see a vibrant redevelopment of the Aquarena site and to continue the regeneration of the East Beach area. The Society acknowledged the improvements in the redesign submitted by Roffey Homes, including the beach cafe and open garden. The objections we made were seriously considered and we opposed the design for the following main three reasons:

1. The tower does not fit in with the surrounding area and is bulky and overpowering in design, being contrary to local Planning Policy.
2. It was acknowledged at the meeting that the development will harm the setting of the Farncombe Road Conservation Area and backdrop of the Gradell* Listed Beach House, of significant importance to Worthing’s heritage.
3. We were standing up for local residents, particularly those in New Parade, and who it was acknowledged at the Planning Hearing, will be significantly and adversely affected by the inclusion of a 15 storey tower block.

We consider these reasons for objection are valid and well balanced. Financial issues are certainly a concern for the Council but the significant overdevelopment of the site is unwelcome and unnecessary. A high quality design lower in height and density, perhaps 4 to 5 storeys could still achieve a good return on this landmark site without the necessity of a tower. This avoids the harm to the surrounding heritage, the coastal sea views and neighbouring residents. We feel this is a situation where heritage and economy need to be balanced –it should not be either or. A luxury tower block on the beach side is the wrong place for a bulky, tall building. Our Petition with 2318 signatures and over 1000 letters of objection reflected the genuine and serious concerns of Worthing residents of all age groups. People were pleased to discuss the issues and we had queues waiting to sign. I was dismayed that these sincere views were not given a higher priority by our

local Councillors sitting on the Planning Committee. We are also deeply concerned that the national and local planning policies which should guard against harm to our heritage were not in our view given sufficient weight.

People do care as we do about the future of our town and will naturally have different views but I consider the criticisms of the Society to be unfair and unfounded. Other issues have been raised during recent weeks which need to be clarified and I must defend our reputation. Roffey Homes have suggested that the Worthing Society have objected to all their development plans in the town. This is unfortunately inaccurate as our records show that we did in fact support the Warnes Hotel development and the Eardley apartments. In fact I have recently commented that both contribute positively to the seafront area and I will be writing to Roffey Homes to resolve this issue in due course.

Regarding the Vista Mare building, developed by Roffey Homes and which recently received a Distinction in Building Award from the local authority, I would like to stress that these awards are considered by a panel including the Design and Conservation Architect, local Councillors, the Conservation Area Committee and not solely a member of the Worthing Society. We were indeed against the Council's initial decision to allow flats west of Grand Avenue and hoped the historic house on the site could be saved. This was not to be but it was the panel which gave the DIBA award NOT the Worthing Society. We did not oppose the award and I consider our representative showed integrity and fairness in recognising the design quality of the new building. I hope this clarifies the situation. We are not hypocrites as has been suggested.

Another comment was made on a social media site to the effect that our Society "agreed" with the demolition of the Old Town Hall to make way for the Guildbourne Centre. This is totally incorrect as plans were submitted for this site in 1968, well before the Worthing Society was formed. We very much regret the loss of the Old Town Hall and similar buildings lost in this area. I am pleased to correct this inaccuracy.

The Worthing Society is an independent charity, working hard to protect your heritage for you, your children and their children to enjoy by ensuring that all new development contributes positively to the unique character of our town. Without the Society becoming involved it is unlikely that Worthing would retain many of the listed buildings we see and enjoy today. These include Beach House, the Dome, The Burlington Hotel, Pizza Express in Stanford Square, and the Desert Quartet. I hope this letter which is written in good faith, sets the record straight and shows that we are sincere in our aims.

We have a website www.worthingsociety.org.uk. Please log on to this site which gives full details about our Society. If you have any questions or concerns I shall be pleased to answer them personally.

Susan Belton

Worthing Society Chair.

Endorsed by Tony Malone, President of The Worthing Society.