



THE WORTHING SOCIETY

PRESIDENT: Robert Elleray A.L.A., F.R.S.A., F.L.S.

PLEASE REPLY TO:- David Sumner
Chairman, The Worthing Society
18 Mill Road
Angmering
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November 14th 2012

To: Mr James Appleton
Head of Planning, Regeneration and Wellbeing
Adur and Worthing Councils
Portland House
Richmond Road
Worthing

Ref: Planning Application AWDM/1037/12, Montague Place

Dear Mr Appleton,

The Worthing Society strongly opposes this application to build in Montague Place.

Background to the Application

Four applications to build on the east side of Montague Place have been made since 1982.

- WB/568/82 for outline planning permission was refused and went to an appeal, and in March 1985 this was dismissed by Inspector B.D. Bagot RIBA MRTPI etc.

- The second application WB/44/85 for planning permission was again refused and the subsequent appeal was dismissed by Inspector G.E. Roffey MRTPI MSc(Econ) etc, who in his decision dated 2nd June 1986 noted that "the width of Montague Place is an echo of the original setting of the terrace" and that "the benefits (of the scheme) do not outweigh the very severe disadvantages that would flow down from the narrowing of Montague Place".

The Worthing Society was an objector at these appeals.

Two further applications in 1999 were withdrawn.

The Heritage Statement by Richard Maile BSc. FRICS submitted with this application claims that the Worthing Society had ongoing discussions with the applicant over the years. This is not true. The Worthing Society has always clearly stated its opposition to any encroachment on the space in Montague Place.

Cosmetic changes to the various applications do nothing to counter serious objections to any proposed scheme.

Description of Montague Place

Montague Place is a significant and historic site, and of the Grade II listed buildings on the west side several date from the end of the 18th Century and were some of the earliest lodgings as Worthing developed into a Georgian resort. They once looked on to Montague Lawns.

This space has been preserved by choice or deliberate action, whilst covenants were responsible for its preservation and the east unperforated boundary wall.

A study by Eric Cockain, the Conservation Officer for WBC in the 80s, supported the view that any reduction in the width of Montague Place would make the open space more akin to a street. In the Local Plan of 2003, Policy BE29 states that "Development of substantial structures within the volume of Montague Place will not be permitted.

If this space is built over it is gone forever.

Protecting the Conservation Area Status of Montague Place

The WBC South Street Conservation Area Summary of November 2001 highlights "the wider corridor formed by Liverpool Gardens open space and Montague Place, substantially enclosed by listed terraces and the sculptured heads of the late Dame Elizabeth Frink" (now listed) as integral to the Conservation Area being the widest corridor linking the seafront to the heart of the town.

As such, Montague Place enjoys the statutory protection of the *Listed Buildings and Conservation Act 1990* which is concerned with any adverse effects on the "setting" of listed buildings. This must be a factor when the application is considered.

Core Strategy and Montague Place

At the Examination In Public, it was agreed that by the Inspector "it is improvement of the public realm which is the main driver of change in this area rather than providing significant retail space or residential units".

The Society's view is that any enhancement should not compromise the volume and space defined by the existing buildings.

In the short term perhaps outside funding can be found to enable a planting scheme to enhance the east boundary if desired. Meanwhile major enhancement to the view to the east should wait for eventual redevelopment on the existing building line. **This long-term potential of the east side would be lost forever if the proposed application is granted.**

Vehicle Access

The proposed stopping up and changes to vehicular access would create more problems than benefits.

The planned access with turning head will sometimes be inadequate or inconvenient hence the removeable bollards to allow delivery vehicles and services onto the paved area. Therefore no fixed landscaping is allowed for.

It is suggested that the taxi rank is moved to Liverpool Gardens. Apart from not being practical, additional traffic movement in this area would be detrimental.

Montague Place is an important and convenient central "pick-up" and "drop-off" point for residents and taxis, in the main shopping area of Worthing and, together with a loss of short-term parking spaces would have a major detrimental effect on the businesses in the area.

The applicant's Access Statement (13) states that by limiting access to the eastern side of Montague Place, an unopposed route for pedestrians through Montague Place to the seafront is created. **Such an unopposed route exists now on both east and west sides.**

Additionally, The Society notes that Dominic Smith of WSCC Highway Authority has raised an objection to the proposed development given "that it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that there will be no adverse impact on highway safety as a result of the development and alterations to the highway".

Proposed retail units

There is not a demonstrable need for additional small shops. The national task force "The Distressed Retail Property Taskforce" is looking at the problem which results in shops closing nationally at the rate of 32 a day.

There is a ready supply of unlet units in the town.

Design and mass of proposed building and the Public Realm

The computer-generated illustrations prepared to support the application and shown on the Council website create a false impression of the size and mass of the proposed building which will encroach on the open space, will harm connectivity between the seafront and the commercial area of Montague Street, and reduce the vistas now enjoyed from the seafront north and Liverpool Gardens south.

The Rotunda and its surrounding area, which is a major asset in the public realm, will be cramped and no longer centrally positioned.

The proposal will reduce land in the public domain for community purposes. The result would be private gain and public loss.

Conclusion

Montague Place is a Heritage Asset forming part of the original streetscape of Worthing. This application seeks to destroy this historic landmark site.

The scheme would seriously detract from the setting of the listed terraces of Montague Place (west side) and of Liverpool Terrace.

Once the land is built on it is lost forever. Loss of public space would amount to environmental vandalism. The common good is not served by this application.

To grant this application would be akin to the planning disasters of the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition, the acquisition over many years of historical legal documents and deeds has allowed Gracemount Development Ltd to purchase the subsoil of Montague Place from the eastern boundary to the pavement edge on the west side, i.e. approximately two-thirds of the existing open area. A stopping-up order would allow Gracemount to lay claim to the freehold of this entire area, with far-reaching planning and development implications.

I urge you to heed the words of Sir Hugh Casson 1910-1999, English Architect and President of the Royal Academy, "The space between buildings is more important than the buildings themselves".

The proposed development, if allowed to go ahead, will change for all time the character of the South Street Conservation Area which is an important part of the town's historic environment.

The Worthing Society is vehemently opposed to this application and urges and respectfully asks that it be refused.

Yours sincerely,

David Sumner
Chairman, Worthing Society

Planning Application AWDM/1037/12
Land west of 35 Montague Street in Montague Place

Objection, on the grounds of

- Loss of general amenity
- Highway safety, traffic and parking,
- Overdevelopment

The open space which connects the seafront through Montague Place, across Montague Street and into Liverpool Gardens forms a well-proportioned vista that is one of the most attractive open spaces in the centre of Worthing. It is well-used by the public as a gathering place and sitting-out area. Workers bring their lunch, shoppers take a break, mothers sit and chat knowing that their children are safe from traffic. This area is also used by musicians, flower sellers and market stalls, and is a focal point for charity fundraising events.

The current planned development would ruin this public amenity space for ever. The views to and from the sea would be largely obscured; Montague Place would become just another street; the pleasant and airy sitting-out area would become cramped and overshadowed.

The importance of this public open space has been recognised in various documents published by WBC, including:

1-South Street Conservation Area Appraisal September 2001 pp7-8

2-Worthing Local Plan of 2003 Section 5.82 et seq.

Partial quotes are included here, fuller text at the end of this submission.

1-South Street Conservation Area Appraisal September 2001 pp7-8

Liverpool Terrace, Liverpool Gardens and Montague Place. This urban space, which extends from the north end of Liverpool Gardens south through Montague Place to Marine Parade, is of major townscape significance.....The large paved area around the rotunda is much used by pedestrians and occasional exhibitions. The seating here encourages people to dwell and relax.....To the south of the rotunda, the open nature of Montague Place with its shops and open air cafes links Montague Street through to the seafront.

2-Worthing Local Plan of 2003 Section 5.82 et seq.

5.82 Montague Place is a significant and historic urban open space in Worthing town centre.....

5.83 Following the findings of an independent townscape appraisal, the Council considers that Montague Place should be properly defined as public open space providing for the social, leisure, and commercial needs of Worthing people and visitors. Any structures erected within Montague Place should be.....free-standing, with the character and appearance of street furniture, so as not to compromise the volume and space defined by the existing buildings. Any development must not detract from the character of the open space.....

5.84 Accordingly, no development of substantial structures will be permitted within the volume of the public open space that is Montague Place.....

POLICY BE29

Development within Montague Place will be permitted provided that.....

(iii) the development would not significantly alter the proportions and openness of the space defined by the existing buildings.

Development of substantial structures within the volume of Montague Place will not be permitted.

In addition to the loss of the public open space, the development would be likely to have a detrimental effect on the businesses in Montague Street and the Montague Centre:

- The current open view has the added advantage of catching the attention of seaside visitors walking along the prom, and attracting them into the town and its shops.
- If disabled parking (already in short supply) is reduced, and vehicle access for dropping off/picking up no longer possible, this is likely to reduce the number of potential customers visiting the shops in this area.
- Is more retail space needed when there are already many empty units in town? Seeing boarded-up shops and to-let signs does not encourage visitors to return.

Further points to take into consideration are:

Traffic

In particular, the impact on highway safety of service vehicles being driven on what is proposed to become a pedestrianised street; disruption to local residents by increased waste bin collections and deliveries to the new shops; and - as more residences would also mean more cars - increased pressure on scarce parking spaces in this part of town.

Enhancing the east side of Montague Place

One argument that has been advanced in support of the proposed development is that the wall to the east of Montague Place, and the area in front of it, are unattractive. This could be remedied by adding more fixed seating, painting the bike racks, planting shrubs, small trees, and climbing plants....all of which would improve the visual aspect of this public open space rather than resorting to the draconian measure of building over it.

NOTE: We should beware of illustrations that have been printed in local newspapers. These are artist's impressions, and are deceptive as they do not clearly show the size of the development and how it relates to the buildings to the north and west, nor to those all-important "spaces in between".

Planning permission for this development has been refused before and, as there is no substantial change, it is my submission that there is nothing new to justify a change of policy.

FULLER QUOTES FROM DOCUMENTS MENTIONED ABOVE.

1-South Street Conservation Area Appraisal September 2001 pp7-8

Liverpool Terrace, Liverpool Gardens and Montague Place This urban space, which extends from the north end of Liverpool Gardens south through Montague Place to Marine Parade, is of major townscape significance. The rotunda at the hub of the pedestrian shopping area is a major focus of activity. The large paved area around the rotunda is much used by pedestrians and occasional exhibitions. The seating here encourages people to dwell and relax whilst the flower sellers provide life and colour. The area to the north of the rotunda is comparatively peaceful by reason of the tranquillity of Liverpool Gardens, enclosed by the Regency style terraces on the east and west sides. To the south of the rotunda, the open nature of Montague Place with its shops and open air cafes links Montague Street through to the seafront. Montague Place is used for occasional markets and children's fairs.

....

Architectural historic landscape and townscape elements which should be preserved:

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Important town centre spaces at Liverpool Gardens, the paving around the rotunda and the wide expanse of Montague Place.

.....

Enhancement Opportunities:

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Montague Place: Encourage proposals for enhancement in accordance with the Worthing Local Plan Review, to improve the character and appearance of this important public open space.

2-Worthing Local Plan of 2003 Section 5.82 et seq.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

SPECIFIC SITES

Montague Place

5.82 Montague Place is a significant and historic urban open space in Worthing town centre.....

5.83 Following the findings of an independent townscape appraisal, the Council considers that Montague Place should be properly defined as public open space providing for the social, leisure, and commercial needs of Worthing people and visitors. Any structures erected within Montague Place should be to support such changing and adapting uses. They should be free-standing, with the character and appearance of street furniture, so as not to compromise the volume and space defined by the existing buildings. Any development must not detract from the character of the open space, and should reinforce the connections between Montague Place and the seafront.

5.84 Accordingly, no development of substantial structures will be permitted within the volume of the public open space that is Montague Place. The Council will, however, promote enhancement of Montague Place, and will explore possibilities for achieving the design and implementation of enhancement measures. The Council will permit proposals for enhancement provided they do not compromise the proportions and openness of Montague Place or detract from the character and appearance of the area.

POLICY BE29

Development within Montague Place will be permitted provided that

- (i) any works enhance Montague Place as public open space providing for the social, leisure and commercial needs of Worthing people and visitors to the town;**
- (ii) the development provides for a high quality visual and pedestrian link between Montague Place and the seafront, with a floorspace proportionate to the scale of the surrounding buildings;**
- (iii) the development would not significantly alter the proportions and openness of the space defined by the existing buildings.**

Development of substantial structures within the volume of Montague Place will not be permitted.