

Draft

THE MINUTES OF ROMSEY FORUM

Held in the Court Room at the Town Hall on the 17th March 2004 at 7.30pm.

Attendance List: 60 including: Liz Truman, HCC; Richard Wilson, HCC; Giles Pritchard, HCC; Richard Ward, HCC; Bob Wallbridge, HCC; Kevin Ford; Sue Ford; Ron Dowling; M. Chandler; B. Chandler; Roger Langton; David Barker; Daphne Harris; Mavis Sawdy; Alan Wiltshire, Rom.Ad.; Heather Oliver; Jeff Carpenter; Joyce Carpenter; Geoff Morris; Val Morris; Neil Crawford-Jones; Ian Bullivant; Cheryl Collier, RTC; Gill Roberts, RDS; Shirley Rogers, RDS; Sarah de Sigley; Anthony de Sigley, Quidity Developments; Christina Hutchings; Mike Linnegar; Christine Linnegar; Phil Sands, CPRE; John Townsend, TVBC; Jeff Hawksley; Diane Hargreaves, RDS; Don Hargreaves, RDS; Paul Gardner, RDS; Chris Amery, RDS; Camilla Campbell, Rom.Library; Gillian Hughes; Claire Hills; Denise Amery, RDS; Mick Edgeworth; Mike Gray; Jan Gray; Max Gordon, N&RPC; John Parker, REPC; Tessa Parker; John Mason; Dorothy Baverstock, TVBC; Euan Russell, Bldds; Julian Gee, REPC; John Slade; Julia Slade; C.M. Cox; M.E. Cox; David Hill; Mary Hill.

In the chair: Phoebe Merrick; **Clerk to the meeting,** Cllr Mark Cooper, TVBC.

Item 1: Apologies: Phil Warner, Rita Mitchell, Tom Gould; Rod Simpson, Caroline Nokes, Anthony Porter, Elizabeth Porter, Sandra Gidley M.P. John Burgess, Steve Lees, Clive Collier, Romano Roverato.

Item 2: Minutes of the last meeting, 7th January, 2004. Approved after amendments to two names (David Barker and Chris Amery) in the attendance list.

Item 3: Matters Arising: There were none.

Item 4: Town Diary.

- 1 CPRE is having an open meeting at the Crosfield Hall on Night Light Blight, 20/3/04.
- 2 RDS 29/03/04; Charlotte Webb speaking on Sustainable Suburbs.
- 3 23/03/04 Choir from Lithuania at the Abbey.

Item 5: What is happening to Romsey Library?

Presentation by Richard Ward of HCC Library Service. It was an interesting time for libraries. There was a reading renaissance and national spending on libraries was being maintained at about a billion pounds a year. But library use was declining at about 10% a year from a peak in the 1960's. At that time there was habitual library use; family groups would attend the library and people would borrow six books a week; and there was not much TV choice. Today there is much more TV choice, videos and indoor shopping centres. HCC is determined to get customers back into the libraries and to maintain an 'informed democracy'. One way was to instil a love of books in children. It is a competitive market place; the libraries are competing for time, hence the need to refurbish Romsey Library.

Presentation by Giles Pritchard; Architectural Services, HCC. The project architect. The library was built as the Boys National School in 1871 (*moved here 1872; LTVAS*) and is designed by William Nesfield; it is Grade 2 listed. Later extensions and temporary buildings at the back blight the Nesfield building. HCC plan to extend at the rear to give an extra 100 m2 of library space in an east wing with the other wing for staff, a workroom and a meeting room. There will be 10 car parking spaces for library users and 10 allocated to the Appletree Centre. The heating and lighting systems are being replaced, voice and data systems installed and there are to be repairs to the elevations. The new extensions will match the original using traditional materials. The bell tower will be repaired using lime mortar pointing and the school house plaque will be restored.

Presentation by Liz Truman; Estates Surveyor, HCC. The project will cost 675,000 pounds. 225,000 has been granted by HCC; the shortfall is to be met by the disposal of 0.2 acres at the rear of the library. HCC will submit a planning application for residential use on the 0.2 acres; a planning brief will ensure any application is in keeping with the library building; residential is the most realistic way of achieving the capital receipt. It is hoped to market the site with the planning consent in Autumn 2004. The project can only proceed if the capital receipt covers the grant shortfall.

Presentation by Richard Wilson; Planner & Urban Designer, HCC. The most contentious issue is the loss of the car park to provide the capital receipt. Current Government policies would not require a car park at this location as there is easy pedestrian access to the town centre, the railway station and the bus station. But the library does not want to lose its existing customer base. Research has been done to see how the car park is used. 62% of the users are from within Romsey; some of these are potential walkers or cyclists. 65% come to the library by car, 28% walk, 5% cycle and 2% come by bus. The 50 capacity car park has been surveyed. It is near capacity at 11a.m. but the average capacity is half full. This begs the question: Is this a good use of the land? Of the car park users, 80% visited the library, 6% visited the Appletree Centre, 1% were Social Service users and 13% were going elsewhere, for example into the town centre. The Appletree Centre's needs should be met by its 10 space car park. Social Services will need to park elsewhere and the town centre parkers shouldn't be there. The issue is what happens to the library staff and library users? The 10-space car park is for the users, not for the staff. This is a substantial reduction from the present situation. It is not ideal but the project cannot proceed without the capital receipt. 36% of present users have said they would consider alternative means of travel and Government policy backs up this approach. 11 cycle spaces are being provided. People may be inconvenienced but there are public car parks such as Lortemore Place and Alma Road within 200 metres. HCC will produce a Planning Brief for the site to ensure a quality development; it could be 5 town houses or 8 flats and the design will reflect the character of the library such as the same brick and vertical windows. It is a visually much more attractive solution than what is on site at the moment; the price is the loss of the car park.

A question and answer session followed. The Appletree Centre access will be through the library car park through a barrier. A ticketing scheme for the library users was suggested and HCC will look at this. It was noted that many users tend to be young children or the elderly and both groups depend on car transport. Local residents expressed concern about more on-street parking pressures and asked that a residents' parking scheme be introduced for Station Road. The library service was talking to highways about increased rear access for Station Road houses and they will look at residents-only parking in Station Road. The RDS ask if they could place one of their blue plaques on the library and this was agreed. RDS had offered help to with restoration of the bell tower hammer: HCC does take this offer of help seriously. How many additional users did HCC think would use the library and where would they park? HCC was keen to get the figures up to the 1960's figures; they wanted a wider range of people especially teenagers who were non-car users. The condition and narrowness of local footpaths was noted and the comments passed on to Highways. Would the car park be available for wider use in the evenings and at weekends? This would be considered. How was library use measured? Three ways: the books borrowed; the number of questions asked; and the number of visits. Romsey was the 13th or 14th busiest library in Hampshire. What was the parking situation at comparable libraries? Ringwood shares a car park with a community centre; Petersfield has no car park; Winchester has no car park of its own; Alton has had its car park removed. Would there be more books in the revamped library? Yes, there would be; books remain the library service's main focus.

Item 6: The restoration of Saddlers Mill, The Causeway, Romsey.

Mr Antony de Sigley, the new owner, gave a presentation to the Forum. He and his wife Sarah ran a relatively new company called Quidity Developments. Saddlers Mill was their third project, the first being Brook Farm House and the second Rooksbury Mill in Andover. The external appearance has not changed much over the years. The mill was built in 1748 and the Mill House added in 1777. The Mill House was occupied up to 1970 and bought by the de Sigleys in May 2003. The Mill had been built on sound ground but the Mill House is on a peat bed and has suffered subsidence. It had originally been on larch-pole foundations that last about 80 years. Some underpinning had been done on the south gable and much cement render and concrete filler had been added including infilling of the fireplaces, which had created much extra weight so that the chimneys were now punching down through the building. The canopy over the footpath had been dismantled as it was pulling the wall out but it will be restored. The timber in the building is infested; it has been encased by cement or paint which has prevented moisture escape. The Causeway has shrunk as a result of bank erosion.

Objectives include: saving the building; it is an invaluable part of Romsey's past as an 'industrial town': then to find a viable and enduring future so that the building's current state does not re-occur. Plans in the past have been focused on commercial re-use but with the Causeway as the only access re-use is realistically limited to residential.

The proposal is to create three separate dwellings (i) the Mill House (ii) The Wheel House - the middle section and (iii) The Mill. The current planning application relates to the Mill House only. It is relatively straightforward and the appearance will hardly change. The character will be retained: it is a restoration. Getting light into the

building is a very real challenge and has led to the slight changes in fenestration, for example, one dormer at the front and one skylight and one dormer at the rear. At second floor level there are six grain bins which cannot be breached. Each space will need its own staircase.

There is a phased work programme. (o) Essential repairs (i) The Mill House and Cottage (ii) The sluices, hatches and gates. Planning application 2 (ii) The Mill and Wheel house...Planning Application 3.

At present the Wheel House culverts are completely blocked and the upstream area is completely silted. The hatch house is derelict and the salmon hatches closed until recently. The consequence is that there is a flood risk as water does back up very quickly. It is planned to make the Mill Race the main flow and to get the fish to travel that way. It is planned to renovate the Hatch house so that this becomes the main point of river flow management. An aspiration is obtain some public access to these gates.

A question and answer session followed.

What is the involvement of the Environment Agency? We would like the EA to take control of the hatches. What will happen about the Causeway repairs? Some resurfacing has been done but has not been that successful. We need The EA to permit us to put in some emergency piling along the river bank. We need to complete the resurfacing in hogging and then to extend the bank to encourage wildlife. There will be no fences but one problem is damage done by dogs accessing the river.

The timeframe for the whole project is 18 months.

Item 7; AOB. The Chairman asked the Forum for suggestions for future Forum topics. She has arranged for Laura Taylor, Head of TVBC Environment and Health to come to the June meeting. The Romsey 2007 Charter celebrations needed discussion: Christine Cole to discuss Town Centre Management. The Forum suggested an item on the Borough Local Plan Inquiry and an item on the Station Approach.

Item 8: Dates of future Forum Meetings. The secretary suggested the following meeting dates: 16/06/04, 08/09/04; 08/12/04, all Wednesdays at 7.30 at the Town Hall. The dates were accepted by the Forum.

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