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Gosport SPD Resident's Comments.docx

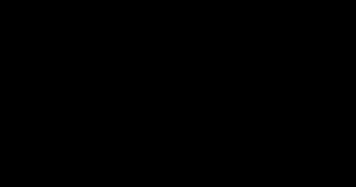
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**From:** Peter Cardy [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 25 September 2017 22:14  
**To:** Planning Policy Internet  
**Subject:** Comments on the SPD

Attached are my comments on the SPD, from the point of view of a current resident of the Waterfront/Town Centre.

Peter Cardy



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# Gosport Waterfront and Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document

Comments from Peter Cardy, Resident

September 2017

## 1: The Vision

1.1 Congratulations to Gosport Borough Council for thinking about the whole of the Waterfront and Town Centre, and for setting out in the SPD a plan for the medium and long term. This area embodies much of what is great in the history of the town and its potential for the future. GBC needs to anchor its plans in reality; Gosport's quiet and modest attractions are not likely to rival the hectic Portsmouth waterfront. The SPD rightly proposes building on the uniqueness of Gosport's assets, rather than trying to out-do Gunwharf Quay, the Historic Dockyard, the Spinnaker Tower and the Naval Base.

1.2 The area now includes several development mistakes resulting from a piecemeal view without an overall vision, from following short-lived design trends, and from reluctance to negotiate with developers assertively and in public. These remain as a stark lesson to today's planners and it appears that in the SPD, the Council is preparing to grasp the nettle.

1.3 The Council owns only a few of the sites considered for development by the SPD, on which it can call the shots. Without that control, it must rely on setting out clear intentions and having the public firmly behind its proposals, to persuade development partners to follow its vision. GBC should market that vision aggressively, so that future maverick developments do not slip through by default. It should be part of a joined-up marketing campaign for the whole town, for tourism, for business and for heritage. This will require commitment from GBC, and some investment in skill.

## 2: The residential Waterfront and Town Centre

2.1 I live and work on the Waterfront by the Ferry. I would like the plan to recognise clearly that the Town Centre, whatever other purposes it may serve, now has a larger resident population – and growing - than at any time since the 1960s. The draft SPD rightly gives much emphasis to business. The SPD should be clearer about, and give greater weight to, the interests and contribution of residents balanced with the interests of business. The residents of course pay Council Tax and contribute to the economy. Permitted development and conversion of premises to residential use is likely to continue as the retail shopping economy falters generally; conversion of ground floor premises to food and beverage outlets is also likely to continue.

2.2 Several segments of the High Street and parts of the Waterfront have a high density of flats. During the working day, except for competition for parking (see section 6) the mix is rarely a problem. In the evenings, and especially late at night at weekends, it can be more serious. Creating more food and beverage outlets and building the night-time economy has the possibility of magnifying the current late night rowdiness, anti-social behaviour, littering and low-level crime, and risks defeating the good intentions of the SPD. Although order is generally maintained at present, changing the balance of usage could tilt the balance the wrong way.

2.3 Reconciling residential and commercial development as visualised in the SPD is a challenge that will require assertive management. This may seem mundane compared with the greater vision. But clear statements are required on the maintenance of order and good behaviour, responsibility for management of rubbish from the fast food outlets, pests such as pigeons, seagulls, foxes and rats, and respect for the residents of the area. The SPD should address these firmly.

## 3: Falkland Gardens

3.1 Thank goodness, the SPD does not visualise major change to Falkland Gardens! This retro area with its lawns, flowerbeds, trees and shrubs offers a tranquil welcome for

visitors by Ferry, bus and taxi, and a haven for the many residents who choose to use it for reflection and recollection. It deserves to have its character reinforced rather than swept away, as envisaged in the trendy and needless 2016 proposals for redevelopment.

3.2 Falkland Gardens could make a bold statement that Gosport is a maritime town, ancient and modern. Minor changes would emphasise its character, introducing marine plantings and architectural items, perhaps including some of those recently dredged from the Harbour: Haslar Marina provides a fine example of this.

3.4 The association with the Falklands War and the armed forces generally is of profound importance to many residents of Gosport, and further afield. This should be emphasised without needless disruption of the memorials. The Gardens are also an assembly area for events of local significance, most recently the arrival of HMS Queen Elizabeth and previously the return from the Vendee Globe of Alex Thomson. It lends itself well to occasional performances by local bands and troupes, which enhance the Waterfront.

#### 4: Iconic buildings

4.1 'Viewpoint', the new McCarthy & Stone tower at Harbour Road, is the most recent development blunder. The company seized the initiative to conduct a bogus consultation of local residents about its proposals, while in fact inviting support as the only real option. The end result is the sacrifice of an important site that should have been earmarked for marine development. The building is to maximum height and right to the edge of the site, without even a hint of landscaping. In appearance it is a dog's breakfast of design. It fails even to mirror the simple elegance of Harbour Tower and Seaward Tower with their powerful murals and green surrounds.

4.2 To sacrifice the Bus Station site in the same way would be the worst kind of vandalism. A development that overpowers Falkland Gardens in scale and style would flout the character that has grown up over the last fifty years. Filling the site to the edges and to maximum height for the developer's benefit would equal the worst of the development crimes to date in the Borough. The aspiration to an iconic edifice is superficially attractive, but trying to compete with Gunwharf and the Spinnaker Tower is – frankly - daft.

4.3 Asserting the character of this small but never-defeated town in a special building alongside its many other attractions is possible. But it is a shame that the Council has not so far invited comment on the proposal for the Bus Station site, which it is currently negotiating with its preferred developer. The trickle of information that has oozed out is not encouraging; it suggests that the worst possible solution could happen.

#### 5: The transport interchange

5.1 Although the present bus station is very tired and overdue for retirement, locating the bus services even a short distance further away from the Ferry, as seems to be the intention, is a mistake. We have at present a successful, genuine transport interchange between buses to/from Gosport, the Ferry, trains from Portsmouth Harbour station, and taxis.

5.2 The mistake is plain to see in the smart new bus station across the Harbour at the Hard. Longer distances from train to bus, from train to taxi, from bus to taxi, and for car pick-up and set-down for bus and train are a problem for people with any mobility impairment, for people with heavy luggage, and for everyone in rain, hail or snow. 'It's only another 100 metres' is a poor response: 100 metres is a long way for anyone in these circumstances.

5.3 The basic concept of the transport interchange at Portsmouth Hard was flawed from the outset: it did not attempt to integrate the different forms of transport, ignoring the train and Ferry and the needs of foot passengers, but instead focused on a landmark

building. It is indeed a fine building, but it just doesn't work for users. The distances, spatial relationships and results were not considered properly: Gosport does not need to repeat the same mistake - the lesson has been set out in plain view already. We have compact and effective interchange that should be augmented, not dismembered.

5.4 Gosport lost its rail link decades ago after the Beeching cuts. This may have been correct at the time, but the growth in rail passenger demand means it is no longer. A new rail link is improbable, so we should make the most of what we have: Portsmouth Harbour station with its direct connection via the excellent Ferry service. This needs to be publicised and the easiest way of doing it would be to rename the station 'Portsmouth and Gosport', on the model of Portsmouth and Southsea. Although it is possible to buy a train-and-ferry ticket to Gosport, people mostly discover this by chance; neither the old South West Trains timetable nor the new South Western Railway timetable mention it at all. It is opportune to press this now the transfer of the franchise has taken place.

## 6: Car parking

6.1 Car parking for the Waterfront and Town Centre is frequently criticised, but by comparison with nearby towns it is both plentiful and cheap. There is pressure on certain car parks at particular times of day. Minnitt Road South is a case in point, where the volume of use by long stay permit holders means that there is rarely any space at all between 0900 and 1700 during the working week.

6.2 This is a problem for all users but especially local residents, for whom it is their nearest car park, and who are forced to lurk and pounce to get a space. The Church Path car park could be made long stay: it is under-occupied, within easy walking distance, and almost as close to the Ferry and High Street as Minnitt Road.

6.3 The SPD proposes that some of the car parks should be considered for building development. It also proposes that the Waterfront can be used for more business and recreation. It would be mistaken to eliminate car parking that could serve growing business and recreational needs; current usage is not a very good guide to future demand in this respect. Blanket decisions should be avoided and car park space released only when it is clearly surplus.

## 7: Boaters and the Town Centre

7.1 Being personally involved in maritime Gosport I am encouraged that, after years of indifference, retailers seem to be getting the idea that the Boating £ is important to the Town Centre. Encouraging boaters to spend in Gosport rather than in their town of departure should be an objective for everyone.

7.2 The missing link is making the Town Centre appear attractive to boaters. Once beyond the Ferry Gate there is no obvious welcome for boaters at all, and yacht crews are often seen dispirited only a few metres up the High Street, before turning back to the marinas. It is a pity that the 2014 proposal for marine street art sank without trace because of the problem of anchoring the elements to poles and buildings. There are many alternatives and it would be good to revive the idea, maybe using different concepts and materials.

7.3 A simple statement in shop windows: 'Boaters welcome here' could pay back handsomely. There is a perception that choice is limited and of low quality in the High Street shops. This is not true: it is possible to find all the necessities of life in the High Street (by contrast with Gunwharf Quay, which sells brands but few necessities). What is missing is more imagination, better ranges and flair in presentation and display; the former Town Team could have given more support to independent retailers.

## 8: Making more of what we have

8.1 The Town Centre has as many assets as other small attractive towns such as Cowes, Lympington or Yarmouth, and more than most. The vista of the Harbour, the tree-lined, curving street and an interesting mix of architecture are a unique combination. Though it is well cared-for from dawn to nightfall by the diligent and assiduous cleansing team, the Town Centre gives the impression of not being managed and having no leadership.

8.2 A design scheme is needed into which owners and tenants can opt, to give the frontages some coherence. Chichester town centre is an excellent example of coherence without uniformity. A style guide with example illustrations, colours and options would be a low-cost way of encouraging change over a period, but it would need a proactive approach to tenants and owners to encourage its use.

8.3 The Town Centre and Waterfront include many important elements of history that speak for themselves, without needing to be excessively groomed and manicured. The existing interpretation boards were an imaginative step but could be greatly augmented. But it is not simply about buildings. It includes green spaces, secluded corners, unexpected views, alleyways, bodies of water and streets unchanged over many decades.

8.4 One of the best examples is the Trinity Green/Trinity Church area, which is full of attractive views and corners, is rarely crowded and provides tranquillity as well as the prospect of the busy entrance to the Harbour. It needs protection rather than improvement. By contrast, the Gosport Lines will benefit from work to join up and create access to the area as the 'green lung' for the Waterfront and Town Centre.

## 9: Finally...

Although it has been under the same pressure as town centres everywhere, the Town Centre has not been destroyed by out-of-town shopping. It is remarkable in having five supermarkets within a small radius, which have helped to support the retail heart and the evolving mixed usage. The Waterfront still retains immense potential. Leadership and drive are now needed to push forward the vision set out in the SPD, to enhance its economic potential, to reconcile residential and business development, and to assert its essentially maritime character.

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