

**Councillor Steve Harmer-Strange**

Brighton & Hove City Council  
King's House  
Grand Avenue  
Hove BN3 2LS

Mr Ralph Long  
Property & Design  
Brighton & Hove City Council  
Kings House  
Grand Avenue  
Hove  
BN3 2LS

**Date:** 3 March 2011  
**Our Ref:** 2011/PTH/Ward Consultation  
**Your Ref:**

Dear Mr Long

**Re: Ward Councillor Consultation on Portslade Town Hall**

I would like to make my comments on the above consultation and also for this submission to be taken as a formal letter to be taken to Cabinet so that I can speak about the issues I raise and to seek further clarification on the proposals from the Cabinet member.

My comments as far as the disposal of land adjacent to Portslade Town Hall are generally of support in principle. The town hall has long been a wasted and seriously under-used asset in the council's possession. I have spent the last 4 years asking for funds to be set aside to bring the whole building back into full council use and for the rooms to be used for greater community or council use.

Whilst I'm sure there will be some public dismay about these proposed intentions over the relocation of the housing offices into the town hall, I cannot see any major rational reasons why this shouldn't be done as there will be a roughly similar floor area available when comparing the two sites, especially when you take into account the current caretakers dwelling and the number of rooms that it has. The whole site with the relocation would be much more compact and a better use of resources.

Re-opening the doors to the general public for greater use of this building has to be good for the community. Local residents will become much more aware of it and the possibilities of how they can use it for their community groups. The main hall is a great arena for larger events and has very good acoustics. I see no reason why council public committee meetings can't be re-introduced back into the site so that the people of Portslade have a chance to see their local democracy at work rather than having everything run from Hove or Brighton. Portslade is a significant and important part of the city that needs rebranding!

The kitchen at the rear of the main building is huge and a complete refurbishment of it to provide new and updated catering facilities would go some way towards encouraging people to use the hall and facilities for more events. It is already somewhat dated and in need of something like this to make best use of its space.

In view of the financial austerity that the country finds itself in and the significant reduction in funding for the council from government then a redevelopment of part of the whole site to fund the refurbishment of the building has to be seriously considered or the building will just continue to be left to decay due to lack of funds for on-going maintenance. There is no way I could support a sell-off of the whole site including the town hall as this building is iconic and would be distinctly detrimental to the community and would take away one of their precious, though limited resources.

The balcony area of the main building clearly needs some renovation work and provision for access to either side of the building at this floor level without the need to go down to the ground floor and back up. I would like to see plans on how the new set up could be achieved to provide the services currently on offer to the public at the housing office.

The general and structural maintenance of the town hall has been left for far too many years and consequently has fallen into a state of considerable disrepair. Any building, especially of this size and structure, requires regular and planned maintenance to keep it fully functional. The condition of the upstairs rooms for public use has long since been impossible due to the lack of maintenance and general repair which has not mended any leaks and damages. Only the ground floor committee room to the west has been serviceable to any form, and until very recently, it has been in a fairly poor state to encourage public use.

The female toilet facilities need a considerable refurbishment to bring them into line with decent public standards to match the recently refurbished disabled toilet and mens toilets.

The external condition of the building is currently the subject of some inspection and maintenance. On recent inspection I noted that there was a substantial amount of repairs to be undertaken, especially to the windows and their frames as many were completely rotten and would require full replacement in some cases or major surgery to effect any kind of suitable repair. Any work on windows would also need to improve the building's carbon footprint and therefore double glazing of some form would be required. Other external features which need attending to are some of the pinched arches over the windows have dropped and will need repairing. I have not had chance to climb the scaffolding to look at the roof structure but a survey of it would be necessary to ascertain its state and life expectancy in its current form. If any repairs are needed or a complete re-roofing required then another substantial cost could be expected. It is vital that the roof is properly secured for long term use as this protects the entire integrity of the whole building.

In addition to these external issues I suspect that there are internal issues of concern. The heating system is of an age that would need updating or replacing to provide a more sustainable and efficient version. Judging by the size of the building this could result in some significant expenditure, as would the installation of all the IT infrastructure and an electrical inspection for capability that would be needed to make the building fully operational again for council purposes.

The only major concerns that I have relate to the bowling club and car parking facilities. The loss of the training green from the bowls club I understand to not be of major disruption for the club as it is not often used. However, whatever development is considered, then a suitable pavilion must be retained or be rebuilt to accommodate this community group to the extent that it must be able to house all their equipment, provide the necessary shelter (as many of the members of the club are older rather than younger) and viewing facilities as well as toilets.

Ideally, I would like to see a new or extended pavilion built along the entire length of the green so that it would provide a more suitable enclosure of the whole facility. The extra extension would then be able to house a suitable kitchen facility to prevent the club from having to use the main kitchen in the town hall. It would also serve to offer another community facility for smaller functions other than in the main part of the town hall. The current red outline in the plans indicate that the pavilion is within the boundary for marketing and I totally disagree that this should be the case. That line should be brought back to ensure that the pavilion is outside of the area. Alternatively, it would have to be made a condition of the marketing that if it is within the red line then whoever has use of that site would have to rebuild or replace the pavilion along the lines I have suggested.

Parking is clearly a problem in this whole area and it is essential that the current parking capacity should be maintained as much as possible. Whilst there will be some loss, further spaces can be gained by providing access to the space to the rear of the building via its eastern end. The parking around the current office entrance must be maintained and extended past the back of the town hall. Too much loss of parking capacity will have a direct impact on the use of the facilities by the public. Whilst there is current consultation to increase the parking capacity in Victoria Road along the side of the park, it would also be hugely beneficial, not just to the town hall users, but to residents and park users if the space in the current car park was extended up to the changing rooms in the park. This could be done by laying the plastic matting to allow grass to grow through it so that it doesn't appear that there is a loss of park to tarmac. This discussion has already been put forward by myself and Cllr Hamilton as a way of alleviating current parking problems.

If the public toilets are to be removed from the site then those in the town hall should be made available during the day for public use. Alternatively, they should be provided as an extension to the changing rooms in the park.

In the 4 years that I have been a councillor for this ward, the weather for the remembrance day parade has always been appalling and the gathering of so many people and children outside this location in such poor weather should at least permit them to congregate in the town hall until they are ready to move off with the parade. A small point in the greater scheme of things, but one that should be considered as part of this consultation, if we are going to make it a real community hub.

I welcome the preliminary discussions with the planning department but wish to emphasise caution in the number of units to be built in this area, if that is the outcome from the marketing to achieve best consideration. Over development would not be suitable and I would want to see any proposed plans for this site to maintain a balance for the community whilst providing much needed housing and the funds to enable the development and refurbishment of the town hall. It may also be more feasible to market the site as two distinct sites, one to incorporate the current housing office and the other to incorporate the main car park. It may also be possible to keep the housing office staff in situ and relocate one or other council teams to the town hall building and only market the training green and current car park as one lot.

I also have a few concerns over the positioning of the public footpath as no indication has been made on the plans as to whether it would be left where it is or whether it would be re-sited.

The area beyond the bowling green, though not marked on the plans, could be the subject of further investigation to see if it was suitable to be purchased for them for use as a

training green or even for further parking. With this piece of land being right alongside the railway line it would not be of much use for anything else.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. V. Harmer-Strange". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' and 'H'.

Councillor Steve Harmer-Strange