

COUNCILLOR HUGH MASON
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT - ST JUDE WARD
32 CHELSEA ROAD
SOUTHSEA
HANTS PO5 1NJ



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

023 9281 6794

h442@btinternet.com

27th September 2008

Hector W McNeill
128 Copnor Road
Portsmouth PO3 5AN

Dear Mr McNeill,

I must apologise for having taken so much time before responding your letter concerning a recent planning decision concerning the former petrol station site in Copnor Road. You, quite reasonably, wished to know the reasons why the decision was made. In my case there are a number of contextual elements which provide the broad framework for decision making to which are added an evaluation of the specific elements of an application.

The first context is that, despite being a densely settled city, Portsmouth needs a lot of new housing. Its population, having falling from about 230,000 fifty years ago to under 190,000 a decade ago is now rising, is about 197,000 and is predicted to reach 205,000 by the year 2026, largely due to the fact that we are in the most economically successful part of the UK. A 4% rise in population may not seem very much but three things are happening which will mean that we will have to provide many more houses and flats. First, family sizes are falling since people are having fewer children; second, due in part to the divorce rate, more people are living alone; and third, since people are living longer and thanks to improved health and social services are able to live longer in their own homes. The result is that Portsmouth, if it is to remain a successful city, will need to provide more homes and, although neighbouring authorities will be able to provide housing such as the developments in the countryside west of Waterlooville, Portsmouth will need to increase the amount of housing provided within the city.

The second context is the need to provide houses. The housing associations, faced with the very high price of land, are responding by building one and two bedroom flats such as those at Fratton Bridge and, nearer to you, those in Manor Park Avenue. We are thus faced with a limited amount of land and a very high demand for family houses. I was until recently the councillor with oversight for council housing and am aware of the thousands of families living in flats who are desperate for a small house.

The third context is the framework of planning legislation. In the same way that the idea of English common law is that you can do anything unless the law says that you can't,

the planning legislation in this country is based on the presumption that you can construct what you like unless there are good reasons why you should not. Thus if the Development Control Committee is minded to turn anything down we have to provide good reasons in planning law or from the City's own plan why the application should be rejected. We cannot be cavalier in rejecting any application because the applicant can always appeal to the government's Planning Inspector who, if s/he feels we have been *in any way* unreasonable, will overturn the rejection and charge us quite a few thousand pounds for the privilege!

Turning to the specific application, if we are realistic, the two options for that site would have been for flats or modest sized houses. Given the closeness of the development to the houses in Coniston Avenue it was certainly preferable to have houses rather than flats and so I was sympathetic when an application was made to build houses. The questions which I then had to answer in my own mind were those of density, layout and design: all matters which had also been raised by local residents.

On the matter of density, the density was considerably more than the area of large houses to the north and east but these days with the very heavy traffic on all main roads, developers know that big and thus expensive houses on main roads are not an attractive proposition. Main roads are, however, places where smaller houses are built and can be sold. The question I then faced was that of whether the density was too high for the area. This part of Copnor has a range of house sizes and there is a row of modern small terraced houses across the road from the development site. I concluded that the density which had been proposed was high but not unreasonably so.

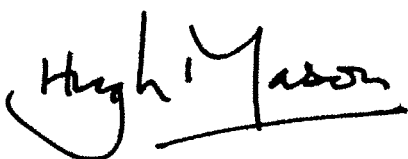
On the matter of the layout of the site, I thought that anything other than building along Copnor Road would lead to building up to the road in Coniston Avenue and would thus be unacceptable. This was not the location for a housing to be placed around a central courtyard.

On the matter of design, I cannot imagine that the designs will win any architectural awards, being rather bland, but, none the less, the designs would not stand out like a sore thumb in Copnor Road.

There was one other matter on which I needed assurance which was the access into Coniston Avenue to the north of the site. I received an assurance from the highways engineer.

This was my line of reasoning. I suspect that you will not agree with my judgement but I trust that you will accept that I made a considered judgement about the application.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hugh Mason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end of the name.

Cllr Hugh Mason