

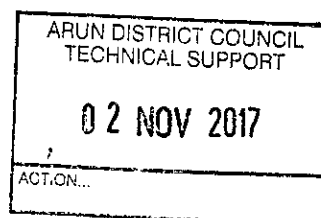


LITTLEHAMPTON CIVIC SOCIETY

Linked to the Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies and the Council for the Protection of Rural England

Registered with The Civic Trust The Open Space Society Registered Charity: No. 265208

Planning Department
Arun Civic Centre
Maltravers Road
Littlehampton, BN17 5LF



31 October 2017

Subject: LU/307/17/PL - Demolition of a promenade shelter and construction of a café and kite surfing school with a roof terrace and associated works

The Littlehampton Civic Society welcomes imaginative planning applications that help to safeguard the integrity of Littlehampton's unique open seafront, while promising exciting, quality improvements in amenities which local residents and the wider community both want and enjoy and to boost our tourism revenue.

We conditionally object to this planning application, subject to further information coming forward on the alternatives and opportunities to better integrate the three main water sport activities in this area (i.e. kite surfing, wind surfing and small boat sailing) and optimal ways to enhance the café/restaurant offer to help create a hub or "go to" area. That assessment can inform public consultation wherein this proposal can be one option.

There also is a question as to whether this proposal to build on the beach specifically complies with Policy DEV 35 and whether exceptions to the Policy are allowed.

The Society's views are elaborated in the detailed comment attached along with specific suggestions if a decision is made to proceed.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Tyrrell
Chairman, Littlehampton Civic Society
On behalf of the Officers and Executive Committee

cc. Executive Committee Members, Littlehampton Civic Society
 Peter Herbert, LTC
 James Walsh, Councillor

Littlehampton Civic Society Comment
On the proposed demolition of promenade shelter & construction of cafe
& kite surfing school with roof terrace & associated works

Reference: LU/307/17/PL
Status: Undecided
Location: Promenade Shelter Sea Road Littlehampton BN16 2NA
Parish: Littlehampton
Case Officer: Mrs A Gardner
Decision By: 24-11-17
Comment By: 02-11-17
Applicant: Mr J Hawkins c/o Genesis Town Planning 26 Chapel Street Chichester PO19 1DL
Agent: Genesis Town Planning 26 Chapel Street Chichester PO19 1DL

Context of the Society's Comments

On the one hand:

Many members of the Civic Society (not all) were excited by this planning application, though for different reasons. Some welcome the prospect to materially enhance water sport on the seafront; for example, if it helps to bring the British National Kite Sailing competition back to Littlehampton as an annual event.¹ For others, this application highlights an opportunity to create a hub for the seafront café/restaurant experience, in addition to the promotion of water sport and, specifically, to take advantage of synergy that arises with the new Leisure Centre, Aqua Club (small boat sailing) and skate bowl located in the immediate area, as well as linking to Mewsbrook Park and Norfolk Gardens. Together they offer multiple services and attractions.

Any proposal to increase the quantity and quality of café/restaurant provision should not be narrowly viewed as competition for the existing cafés/restaurants in this area.² Rather, it helps to “lift all boats”, in the sense that all enterprises will benefit from increased patronage by residents and visitors alike.

On the other hand:

While the Society welcomes this initiative, it does involve tradeoffs that may not only determine the degree of community acceptance of building a structure of this scale on the beach but also how this particular application can, or should be, viewed from a planning policy and sustainable development perspective. It calls for a decision based on the consensus vision for Littlehampton's beach.

The shingle beach is, of course, public land. The existing promenade shelter is a public building important for the new 15 Service bus route connecting seafront amenities to the

¹ Many residents enjoyed the 3-day events Littlehampton hosted in 2006-2008 that attracted many visitors, including those who normally would not visit Littlehampton. That helped broaden interest in modern Littlehampton and its future and presented a very positive outlook.

² Including the existing Mewsbrook Park Café, the new Leisure Centre Café (from 2019) and the Norfolk Gardens Café all under public ownership and privately managed under concession agreements, and the East Beach Café prominently featured in most advertising for Littlehampton.

Town Centre, Wick, Toddington and Courtwick. This is not an application where a private developer is seeking approval to develop a site they already own. It may be argued this raises the bar and asks for options to optimally develop these public resources and appropriate consultation on which option to select.

The application itself is for a café and kite surfing school (with classrooms only but not actual storage facilities for kite surfing equipment) to replace the existing brick shelter that otherwise could be rehabilitated. It has the appearance of a café/restaurant similar to the popular Perch café /restaurant on Lancing Beach which incorporates a gym.³ A significant concern here is whether approval of this application will set a precedent for further development and encroachment of Littlehampton's beach.

Why consider opportunities and alternatives?

Because this is public land, because it is a first encroachment of its nature on Littlehampton's beach, due to its scale (arguably beyond a small-scale extension to the existing shelter) and because of the opportunity to think imaginatively on how services in this "hub" can be better integrated, the Society's view is the community should be consulted on alternatives to achieve similar strategic aims before a decision is taken on this application. The consideration of alternatives is also important to ensure we do not miss opportunities for imaginative use of this public area.

For example, while most people welcome the kite surfing classroom, should wind surfing and small boat sailing also be fully integrated? Is there an opportunity to have an "Aqua Sport" school next to the existing Aqua Club, where there is storage space for boats that can be expanded to accommodate other sea-sport equipment after the existing Leisure Centre is demolished in 2019? Can part of the existing Leisure Centre building be rehabilitated at low cost and retained as a school or centre, given its ideal location? Have the relevant sea sport associations and groups now active in the area been consulted on this proposal specifically and their insights gathered on other opportunities more generally? Is there an opportunity to enhance the existing cafés/restaurants where concessions are already awarded, again thinking long term about expansion and growth?

On Planning Consideration for this site on the beach

While this current application (LU/307/17/PL) offers an exciting concept and, apart from the need to bring forward information on alternatives, concerns include:

- **Planning Conformance:** Does this application to put a café/restaurant on the beach beside the promenade comply with Policy DEV35 which says outside the built-up area, planning permission will not be granted for applications along the coast other than small scale extensions to existing facilities which do not detract from the character of their surroundings. The Planning, Design and Access Statement prepared by the proponent argues that it fully complies. Is this really a small scale extension to the existing promenade shelter?

³ The popular Perch beach cafe/restaurant which opened in 2014 is over 90 m from the road (A259) set behind a commercial garage (for quick fit tyres) also on the beach side of the main road. In this application, the existing promenade shelter where the café/ restaurant would be erected is 6 m from Sea Road in a prominent location that has a high visual profile.

- **No Precedent Guarantee:** Can Arun District Council (ADC) give assurances that if this planning application is approved it does not set a precedent for future building on Littlehampton's beach? Is there a vision statement or policy which can explicitly embody this guarantee, such as ADC in advance providing its no objection to include a policy not to build on the beach (beyond this one case) in future Neighbourhood Plans for Littlehampton and Rustington?
- **Support from Water Sport Associations:** Is there an indication of the degree of support the British Kite Surfing Association offers this application? Have other relevant water sport Associations been invited to comment on this application and offer their views on alternatives to take a more integrated approach to creating a water sport hub in the area, such as the Associations for Wind Surfing, small boat sailing and especially the Aqua Club?
- **Promenade shelter incorporated:** Assurance that a promenade shelter will be included in the design of this structure is important given its value for residents who use the 15 Bus Service that connects our seafront facilities to the Town Centre, Wick, Toddington and Courtwick.
- **Site and building design aspects:** Is this the optimal design for this building if planning approval is granted, recognising the value that a high standard (iconic) design offers (e.g. the East Beach Café example) and the fact the beach is public land and otherwise a treasured community resource to protect.

On the Site and building design:

The Society recognises that private investors must control costs to keep projects financially viable. As this is a public resource, it is reasonable to call for:

- **A high quality of design:** This very prominent and visible site where people drive into Littlehampton calls for an imaginative, high quality design. More information is needed to evaluate whether this design meets that objective. If a range of alternatives is explored to expand water-sport and café/restaurant provision in the hub in an integrated way and, hopefully they are, that would allow time for a design competition.
- **Mitigation of the visual impact in this prominent seafront/beach location:** The Design Statement describes a café extending over 2 floors (the upper floor being a terrace) whereas the application describes it as single storey. Clarification of the actual height including the roof-top terrace and proposal for wood screening to block the sight of the deck furniture and/or to provide wind shelter is important to understand its visual impact.
- **Integration of a promenade shelter in the design:** For reasons already cited, the design must incorporate a shelter with at least like-for-like provision that the existing shelter offers as an important bus stop.
- **Provision for protection and management of beach ecology.** The shingle beach habitat hosts a variety of flora and fauna which are both attractive and important as part of the ecosystem and food-web for bird life in the area (also with a connection

to Mewsbrook Park's bird life).⁴ Practical measures to help protect and manage impacts on the beach ecology will enhance sustainability (i.e., balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions).

With further clarification of factors such as:

- **Provision for car and bicycle parking:** Is it the intention to use the new Leisure Centre parking for café/restaurant patrons? How much will parking cost? What is the seating capacity of the restaurant? What portion of patrons are expected to drive/walk/ bike?
- **Road safety provision:** What provisions are made for safe pedestrian and bike crossing across the Sea Road to the beach café/restaurant?
- **Impacts on sea road traffic:** What interruption to traffic along Sea Road and vehicles using the Leisure Centre parking are expected, if any, given the narrow road at that juncture?
- **Arrangements for goods delivery:** What arrangements are made for goods delivery vehicles to cross the promenade? Where will they park? On the beach or on the road?

Summary:

While the Society is highly positive about the overall concept, our view is ADC needs to encourage information on alternatives and opportunities to come forward on ways to best integrate water sport and enhance the café/restaurant hub concept and offer in the immediate area. Consideration should be given to having a design competition for the recommended approach that emerges from the consultations (or as part of the consultation process). The existing brick shelter can be rehabilitated as an interim measure (e.g. clean up by sand blasting) to make it more attractive and welcoming for those standing in the wind waiting for the 15 bus.

⁴ As documented by Professor Brian Morton in "The historical ecology of the River Arun and its beaches at Littlehampton, West Sussex: 1000 years of change. <http://www.raysociety.org.uk/publications/general-and-historical/the-historical-ecology-of-the-river-arun-and-its-beaches-at-littlehampton-west-sussex-1000-years-of-change-b-morton/>