

# 1 The Uplands, St Leonards on Sea, TN38 OHL

Tim Cookson,  
Planning Officer  
Hastings Borough Council,  
Aquila House,  
Breeds Place,  
HASTINGS,  
TN34 3UY

16<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Dear Mr Cookson,

## **The revelopment of the Archery Gardens and adjacent land.**

As one of the few surviving persons who locally played a part in getting Burtons' St Leonards recognised locally as an example of pioneering town planning, I am drawing your attention to some of the compromises which were made when the Burtons's St Leonards Conservation Area was designated..

You will be aware that until the mid 1970's, the local authority was a County Borough with the powers of the Local Education, Planning and Highway authorities. Politically the most powerful of these was the Local Education Authority not least because it had a very large budget.

You will also be aware, that in the first two decades following WW2, very little regard was paid to conserving urban heritage. Whilst particular buildings may be listed, protecting groups of buildings and the spaces between (townscape as it was later to be termed) was not covered by town planning legislation or practice. Even the preservation of listed buildings was not taken seriously as witnessed the destruction of James Burton's Quarry House which at the time of its demolition was one the handful of listed buildings in St Leonards.

Then in the mid 1960's Ian Nairn started the campaign "Outrage against subtopia" in the Architectural Review and Duncan Sandys got a private members bill through parliament as the Civic Amenities Act which, inter alia, made provisions for Conservation Areas.

In 1967 I started the movement which became The Burtons' St Leonards Society when (on returning from a stint of 5 years in West Africa) I was amazed to see parts of the Burton estate being bulldozed and replaced by slab blocks of very poor design.

Unfortunately by that time the Education Committee had espoused extensive plans for further acquisition of properties and erection of more rectangular curtain-walled blocks. A first step had been made buying the frontage of Alegria in Quarry Hill on which the Education Committee proposed to erect an "Engineering Industrial Training Centre". It is hard today to think how anybody could have conceived that idea but at the time education was considered a holy cow and few people had the courage to question even the most obviously myopic proposals. Happily getting the planning application for that proposal rejected was the Society's first success.

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The Society then campaigned for a Conservation Area to protect the whole of the Burton Estate. In parallel with that campaign it elicited the support of J.M. Richards and Ian Nairn and as a result the Architectural Review published the article enclosed.

The Society's endeavours for this Conservation Area were strongly resisted by the Education Committee because at that time it still planned to demolish the Decimus Burton Archery Villas and St Leonards School buildings and all the buildings Nos 2 to 16 inc. West Hill Road some of which were retained in close to the original James Burton designs. The 1970 photograph of the model of those proposals as enclosed shows their extent and scale.

In order to try to further those plans, the Education Committee fought tooth and nail against the Society's submission that the whole of the Burton estate should be protected by Conservation Area status. You will note that we had support at national level for this as witness the article (copy enclosed) by Tony Aldous in The Times of March 1971

In the end the local politicians compromised by omitting the Archery Gardens and the remainder of the area which the education Committee planned to redeveloped from the Burton's St Leonards Conservation Area. (Conservation Area No2 in the Borough Plan).

The subsequent designation of a West St Leonards Conservation Area embracing the college lands although to a degree recovering some of the ground lost in the initial debate, may leave the impression that this part of the Burton Estate is not so important as other parts. That is an untenable position when regard is had to the overall planning of Burton's new town.

In any event, the fact that the Archery Gardens lies immediately adjacent to a conservation area with the designation "of Outstanding Importance" supports the conclusion that any redevelopment of that land should accord with the highest principles of urban design and conservation.

In closing, I record that I made submissions from 1969 onwards that a college with such a high traffic attraction potential, should be sited adjacent to a major transport node. At that time I advocated the then available West Marina station site. Subsequent events proved the objectivity of my advice.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Maxwell-Stewart  
Founding Trustee  
The Burtons' St Leonards Society

Enc. Copy Article Architectural Review May 1968  
Copy photograph of model of the extended Collge of Further Education 1970  
Copy Article by Tony Aldous in The Times March 1971