

## POSITIVE PLANNING FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT AND PRIVATE PLEASURE

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

*Worthing Herald Article*

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A list of self-help tips ends with the suggestion that instead of reading about how to be successful, try some action. I am glad I can give time and dedication to helping others. Virginia and I have been lucky in not needing much for ourselves – just as well in our first twenty years of marriage as we had little material wealth. In early years we would have a theatre evening on 10 shillings, 50p in today's money. With good eyesight we viewed the stage from the gods, high in the upper circle, close to the beautiful mythological scenes on the painted ceilings. We could look down on the grandees in the expensive seats: different from the 'boxes' at the back of Worthing's Pier Pavilion theatre, and not the same as the comfortable real boxes at the back of the stalls in the Connaught theatre.

Thanks to Major Tom Wye, Ron Noakes of the Friends of Worthing Hospitals charity, Tim Loughton MP, the then Herald editor Jon Buss and all-party support, the Pier theatre was where 6,000 hospital staff and patients came to discuss with NHS planners the apparent choice between hospitals in Chichester and Worthing. We convinced them it was an unnecessary choice. Dame Marianne Griffiths became the accepted leader of both. The effective response to the C-19 emergency was possible because followership responded to team leadership.

Marianne committed herself to making things better. She was trusted and backed by many, including the all-around good person Margaret Bamford. By good fortune, Margaret and Marianne each had husbands who were experienced leaders in social work, one of the greatest professions, callings and responsibilities. One short-sighted person asked me to make a public fuss about the Chichester hospital leader coming in to run Worthing too. My response was to trust she was chosen because she was competent, clear-headed, consultative and then decisive and consistent. I add the attribute that my wife values in her present professional life as a head-hunter: she seeks people with a subdued ego. Me, too?

This week I have been active in planning for homes, talking with the political editor of the Herald and Gazette after a session with the office of the planning minister. I have invited him to come to Arun District and to Worthing Borough where we could go through examples of where his ministry's planning inspectors have overturned or upheld local decisions. The notorious example was allowing the Lyons Farm retail park: that added to the traffic jams on the A27 national road; I would have overruled the inspector had I then been the responsible minister. The other way around, most local communities still suffer because the inspector's approval of the A27 scheme in the late 1990s was ignored by government. The environmental, health and economic consequences remain high.

Most planning applications are by shop owners and residential occupiers seeking a minor change. Those decisions are usually processed and approved easily and fast. I think some are hindered by unjustified rules. I fail to understand why listed properties are expected to reduce heat loss by secondary rather than double or triple glazing. The odd chance of noticing multiple reflections may be a problem for a peeping tom, not for the normal passer-by.

Unless the South Downs National Park contracts or the sea retreats, positive planning cannot expect too many new homes in our coastal villages and towns. We can gain when planning rules recognise reality, respecting decisions by elected local councillors advised by experienced officers.