

# Summary of Background to Haven Hotel planning application

## Quick Read

- A planning application to demolish the Haven Hotel and replace it with blocks of flats will likely soon be decided by BCP Council
- The current proposal envisages three, six-storey blocks of flats totalling 119 apartments in place of the existing hotel
- Over 3 ½ years after application first filed, BCP planning committee likely to decide it in the first three months of next year (2021)
- An exact date for the BCP planning committee to make a final decision is not yet clear
- SCG oppose the current Haven plans for reasons explained below
- The National Trust, Natural England and Dorset AONB still oppose the plans
- Over 3000 people have filed formal objections against the plans
- The developers have sought to downplay the public's objections on grounds plans have changed since people filed many of those objections
- SCG has launched a new campaign to raise public awareness & encourage people to object, even if they have already opposed - watch this space

## What is happening to the Haven?

BCP Council is getting close to deciding on whether to approve plans to demolish the Haven Hotel and replace it with blocks of flats. This note prepared by Sandbanks Community Group (SCG) explains the background and the issues in more detail.

## What is history?

In April 2017, owners FJB Hotels (owned by the Butterworth family - John Butterworth is CEO) and their planning adviser, Richard Carr, filed plans to demolish the Haven Hotel, the Sandbanks Hotel and the Harbour Heights Hotel.

The original plans envisaged that two completely new hotels would replace Harbour Heights and Sandbanks Hotels with a contemporary design. However, Haven Hotel would be replaced, not by a new hotel, but instead by a ten-storey tower block of flats totalling 195 apartments.

**Save Sandbanks For Everyone** - now a campaign run under the auspices of SCG - led a campaign that resulted in a record number of objections being formally registered against the Haven plans - over 3,000 people wrote complaints.

In the face of determined public opposition as well as opposition from the National Trust, Natural England, RSPB and our local MP Robert Syms, amongst others, the Haven application was suspended in August 2017.

## **What are the current Haven plans?**

In April 2018 the owners/developers submitted revised plans for the Haven, i.e. to build three, six-storey blocks of flats on the Haven site totalling 119 apartments, reduced from the original 195.

These plans essentially remain the current plans. There have been some minor tweaks since the revisions were submitted in April 2018, but they are not material for these purposes.

The current plans continue to propose to demolish the Haven Hotel and replace it with blocks of flats. The hotel and the ability for the public to access its facilities - and enjoy a meal or a drink overlooking this beautiful location - will be lost forever.

## **Aren't the current plans an improvement on the original plans?**

Yes, in the sense that the scale, massing, density and height have been reduced. Also, the plans propose a new footpath linking Sandbanks beach to Ferryway which is to be welcomed. The footpath plans have been further improved in response to public comments, e.g. to facilitate disabled access by removing steps and smoothing gradient.

The lesson is that public pressure can influence and improve these developments.

However, the way the owners/developers have approached this is also an old developer trick. First, propose something outrageous (the owners/developers' first proposal was 20 storeys). Then 'graciously' claim you have listened to objectors. Finally, concede scaling back to something that is still massive and what they always had in mind.

Be in no doubt that, even reduced as proposed, this will still be a massive, out of scale development for Sandbanks.

It will dominate views from and to the entrance to Poole Harbour. It will bring more congestion and traffic onto Sandbanks.

Very few buildings on the Sandbanks headland are higher than four storeys and none higher than five levels. Six will create a dangerous precedent for future developments on Sandbanks headland. And nothing is remotely close in scale and bulk to 119 apartments.

## **What else could be done with the Haven Hotel?**

SCG accepts that the existing hotel is approaching the end of its useful life. We are not campaigning to preserve the current hotel, just to keep a hotel.

The owners have to date shown no interest in engaging with us in any form of discussion about alternative uses or otherwise (but see below).

## Could the developers reapply later to make it bigger again?

Yes, suppose the planning authorities accept the principle of these plans and loss of the hotel. In that case, we expect further applications at a later date to try to increase the size of the development again.

In other words, these plans are bad enough, but they could be a Trojan Horse for something far worse to come.

## Why is the Haven planning application combined with applications to develop Sandbanks Hotel and Harbour Heights?

The developers claim that building flats at the Haven site 'enables' them to raise the money to redevelop the other two hotels.

These claims made by the developers lack credibility. First, they claimed the development must be twenty storeys to make enough profit to pay for the other two hotels. Then ten storeys were enough. Now, after massive public opposition, they claim they can make enough profit from six storeys of flats at the Haven to finance the development of the other two hotels.

SCG has challenged all these assertions. We obtained an independent financial assessment from a City bank respected in this field, BNP Paribas. BNP Paribas demonstrated that it is **not** financially necessary to sacrifice the Haven site to residential apartments to finance the development of the other two hotels.

In other words, this was an excuse by the owners/developers and not the real reason. The real reason is to maximise profit. No one is opposed to people making a profit. But not at the expense of sacrificing a critical public amenity and unique natural beauty of the Haven site.

BCP Council has also sought specialist financial advice on this question. Unfortunately, more than 18 months after they first sought that advice, it has still not been finalised. We have sought disclosure under The Freedom of Information Act (FOI), but the Council have repeatedly played for time. They claim the advice cannot be released because it is not finalised.

## What are SCG's main objections?

1. **Loss of hotel & public access:** including loss of restaurant, gym, tennis courts and swimming pool. This site has had a hotel on it for over 160 years with free public access, so this is a significant loss to the ability of the public - residents and visitors - to enjoy a meal or a drink overlooking the iconic entrance to Poole Harbour. It also represents a loss of local jobs and a loss to local businesses. It will turn what is currently an iconic location freely accessible by the community and the public into an exclusive, private enclave, sterilising a key Sandbanks location.

2. **Damage to the community:** this is the wrong location for intensive development of tower blocks of flats. The flats will not ease the local housing shortage since they will likely be expensive second homes empty for large parts of the year that risks making Sandbanks an even more exclusive Ghost Town
3. **Opportunity missed:** this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enhance this site with a great building local people can be proud of. This site deserves an exemplary piece of architecture befitting its prominent location at the entrance to Poole Harbour - the proposed blocks of flats are anything but - they are characterless, monolithic and out of scale. They do not fit the character of the area
4. **Enabling application:** proposals for the Haven site should be considered as a stand-alone application; the Haven Hotel should not be sacrificed to flats simply to make it easier for the owners/developers to develop other properties
5. **Trojan Horse:** we question the motives behind the reduced application - to secure change of use from a hotel to residential then work back to original plans with subsequent applications.
6. **Height:** the proposed buildings will have significant ridgeline 1.8m above the existing hotels pitched roof ridgeline with a dramatic change to scale of buildings on the site making it visually intrusive on the street scene
7. **Massing:** this is a vastly out of scale development for such a sensitive and uniquely important site
8. **Views:** the scale and design of the three blocks of flats will negatively impact views of Sandbanks from essential locations including the Purbeck Hills, Studland Heathland and Brownsea Island
9. **Precedent:** Nothing on Sandbanks headland is above five storeys or with this scale or dominance, so it sets a dangerous precedent for the future of the Peninsula
10. **Poole Development Plan:** these plans represent a material adverse departure from the Poole Development Plan. Intensive residential development on this scale in such a sensitive location is not contemplated in that Plan - the harm of the scheme far outweighs the benefit of the development of Sandbanks/Harbour Heights hotels
11. **Sequencing and Phasing:** there are severe doubts about the ability of the Council to effectively control the use of funds and sequencing of three developments to ensure that all are delivered as proposed
12. **Traffic, utilities & congestion:** many residents remain very concerned about the impact of a development on traffic on the Peninsula, flood risk, the strain on public utilities, mostly water and sewage, and the increase in congestion at peak times

There are many other more legal and technical grounds of objection that SCG will continue to raise.

## What is the timing?

Planning officers wish to bring this to the BCP planning committee for a decision in the next few months. BCP Council will probably decide the application somewhere between Jan-April 2021.

Between now and then, SCG is running a campaign to raise public awareness and encourage people who oppose the plans to register formal objections, even if they have objected previously.

It's important to note that, even if the application is approved, it will probably be years before the building work starts. When it does start, it will be an enormous project that will bring lengthy disruption and heavy plant traffic to the Peninsula during the construction phase.

We know from public documents that FJB Hotels do *not* plan to develop the Haven project itself. They plan to sell the site on to another (as yet unidentified) developer thus realising the financial gain from the uplift in site value that goes with having obtained the planning permission.

## **Who decides the application?**

It is a decision of the BCP Council Planning Committee. They are advised by the Council's planning officers who will make a recommendation to the Committee (approve or refuse).

The Planning Committee is a committee of BCP Councillors selected to serve in that capacity. They must decide following planning laws; otherwise, it can be challenged in the courts.

However, in practice, there is a degree of discretion and subjective judgement in such decision making.

Usually, they follow the planning officers' recommendations. But sometimes they refuse applications the planning officers have recommended and vice versa.

That means that, in essence, it will be a political decision (within the confines of applicable planning law).

That is why it's so important that the public have our say.

## **Aren't SCG's objections just NIMBYISM?**

No. We believe Sandbanks has a unique character and feel that's enjoyed not just by residents but also by many thousands of people who visit the area every year.

We have received support from people all over the world who have visited Sandbanks and know and love the area. We have heard from many people whose families have been visiting Sandbanks for generations.

Yes, the group is led by residents, but thousands of our supporters are not residents - we welcome that. We regard it as our duty to help protect and preserve Sandbanks for everyone to enjoy - it's a special place that deserves better.

We have no desire to see it become even more exclusive and cut-off from the public. That is not in anyone's interests.

We are not against development on Sandbanks. It is an inevitable part of progress. But it has to be a development that's in keeping with the unique nature of the area.

### **Where can I find out more?**

You can go to the BCP Planning portal to see all 4100+ documents relating to this application via [this link](#).

You can visit the SCG website via [this link](#).