



No. 1374
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18 Sept 2014

£1.50

PRIVATE EYE

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ROTTEN BOROUGHS

NO SILVER LINING

WINCHESTER city council has been trying to regenerate the five-acre Silver Hill area of the city-centre since the mid-90s, but still a big question mark hangs over its future.

A scheme involving developer Thornfield won planning permission in 2009 and included 100 much-needed affordable homes; but this was temporarily thwarted when Thornfield went into administration in 2010. Henderson UK Property Fund then stepped in and the council pushed ahead with compulsory purchase of the buildings that stood in the way.

Martin Perry, Henderson's director of development, assured the compulsory purchase public inquiry in 2012 that many alternative sources of funds were available and that the scheme "as consented" would easily make the 10 percent profit required to prove its viability to the planning inspector. Indeed: new four-bedroom homes in Winchester sell for £1m.

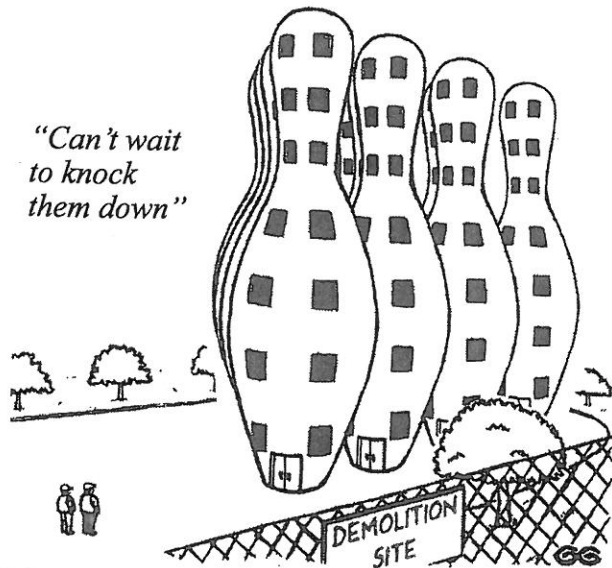
Now, however, the council has allowed its co-developer to drop the requirement for affordable housing on the grounds that it won't make *enough* profit. Last month Tory councillors voted to let Henderson submit new plans for more shops, fewer but bigger private homes and zero social housing.

Council rules say 40 percent of new housing in the city centre must be affordable, for rent below market rates or shared equity with housing associations, so those who work in the city can afford to live there. But for Silver Hill, any cash for social housing (somewhere other than in the centre) will have to come from the council's 50 percent share of the estimated £15m profits, a leaked council report suggests.

Cllr Kim Gottlieb, deputy chair of planning and leader of the Winchester Deserves Better campaign, which is opposing the scheme's dismal architecture and focus on shops, said: "I have been behind the scenes and seen enough of the council's own examination of the scheme and its many alterations to know that this process has been flawed and inadequate."

Council chief executive Simon Eden insists

"Can't wait
to knock
them down"



affordable housing makes the scheme unaffordable for Henderson. But if the scheme does not now go ahead, the council will be left with a crumbling multi-storey car park and other useless buildings. Eden denied council officers had been outwitted by the developer.

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