

ISSUE 3

APRIL 2021

ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 restrictions still being in force for the present time a face-to-face Annual General Meeting will not be held this year. As we did for 2020, the N.O.R.A. Committee has decided to issue an Annual General Report which will be circulated by email towards the end of May.

We are pleased to welcome **John Walker** (BA Hons MRTPI), of **Loughton RA, Essex**, who has joined the N.O.R.A. Committee and has a wealth of experience of the planning and property fields.

NEW MINIMUM SPACE STANDARDS ARE COMING INTO FORCE



The **Nationally Described Space Standard** will replace the existing different space standards used by local authorities. It is not a building regulation and remains solely within the planning system as a new form of technical planning standard which specifies that any new dwellinghouse will only be eligible for permitted development rights if it has a gross internal floor area of at least 37 square metres. This will take effect from April 6th 2021. See also the article below "Planning rules relaxed for commercial to "resi" conversions" 

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CHIEF PLANNER OUTLINES POLICY CHANGES

Thursday, 8th April 2021

England's Chief Planner Joanna Averley has written to local authority planners about the changes to the planning system and temporary measures that will remain to ease the path out of lockdown and aid economic recovery.



Concerning the regulations laid on 31 March to create a new permitted development right (PDR) for the change of use from the new class E to residential use – which have been heavily criticised by built environment organisations including the RTPI – Averley says the right will take effect from 1 August 2021.

The right will be subject to a size limit of 1,500 square metres of floor space changing use and will apply to buildings that have been in a class E use for two years, including time in former uses now within that class. The buildings must have been vacant for at least three months and will be subject to prior approval on a range of planning matters.

The Chief Planner highlights that where there are Article 4 directions in place for office-to-residential conversions, these will

apply until 31 July 2022. The Planning for the Future consultation includes a new policy for Article 4 directions; the Government is considering the consultation response and will issue a response "as soon as possible", which will set out any policy changes.

Averley notes that the PDR aims "to help support housing delivery and enable more homes to be created in town centres".

The proposals do not impress built environment professions, four of which have joined forces to ask the Government to reverse the new planning regulations.

The Royal Town Planning Institute, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) have jointly written to the prime minister explaining the downside of the reforms – no quality control over the new housing, and high streets gone forever



The letter says “allowing commercial premises to be converted into homes presents a risk for our nation’s town centres and small businesses. Without the usual checks and balances through the normal planning process and without the facility for local communities to comment on proposals, this risks creating poor-quality housing.”

It continues: “Nobody can deny there is a looming crisis facing our high streets, but yesterday’s pronouncement will do nothing to help.

In fact, these measures will pull the rug out from under high street businesses that you have supported throughout unprecedented circumstances. Just as they prepare to reopen with our great unlocking, their future is put in peril.

“It is counterproductive for the Government to commit to reviewing business rates— with the express goal of keeping more businesses on our high streets—while simultaneously incentivising property owners to push them out.”

“Businesses, developers, residents and the built environment sector have all had serious concerns about these proposals from the start. Attempting to engage productively, the RTPI, RIBA, CIOB and RICS set out safeguards that could at least minimise the harm. None of this evidence appears to have been given consideration. No basic impact assessment of how this might harm our communities appears to have been done. Additionally, the Government has ignored the responses to its own consultation to rush this substantial change to our highstreets during Parliamentary recess.

“This announcement fails to consider the public good and demonstrates a lack of any forethought for those who will be affected. This is not only a failure to ‘level up’ but a threat to our local communities.”

Previously, the RTPI had proposed a series of additional prior approval matters that ought to be considered before proposals go ahead. These included the impact on the provision of essential services, access to amenities such as parks for outdoor fitness and exercise, the provision of fresh air through ventilation and the quality of design.

The RTPI also set out two ‘red lines’ to prevent the creation of large areas of residential development in existing warehousing and supermarkets in unsuitable locations: it proposed a size limit of 250 square metres and said that building being converted had to have been designated for retail or office use in December 2020.

It seems the Ministry of Housing evidently decided, on balance, to ignore the advice of the professionals. 



DO YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO LIGHT?



Whilst the planning system has to take into account loss of daylight, sunlight and sense of enclosure, there is also a separate private right to light under the Prescription Act 1932 as amended by the Rights of Light Act 1959. Planning Departments will consider loss light by referring to the BRE Guidance “Site Layout planning for daylight and sunlight: a guide to good practice”. This advises a material loss of light happens when there is a 20% reduction in current levels. However, your local Council can take other planning matters into account to outweigh the loss of light such as the overall benefits of the development. This does not affect a private right to light which may entitle the affected party to

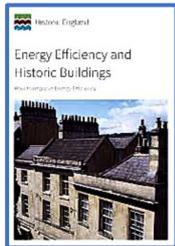
financial compensation for the loss or they can prevent the obstruction altogether, known as an injunctable right. If the relevant parties cannot come to an agreement over the level of compensation this can lead to a protracted and costly legal battle through the courts resulting in either changes to or a cessation of the development entirely or the awarding of damages to the property owner. The development can also range



from a shed or garden wall through to private extensions and larger housing or commercial developments. Local Authorities have a power to remove an injunctable right of light under certain circumstances. In December 2014, the Law Commission completed a review of rights of light in response to concerns about the increased threat of injunctions to stop developments, calling for more transparency (no pun intended). Specifically, this included recommendations for time limits on claims for loss of light, clarity around when damages should be awarded and when a development should be halted/demolished and amendments to the law in respect of unused rights to light. Whilst there are no plans to make any changes to the ROLA 1959 at present, it is important to keep up to date with these rights, whichever side of the fence you are on. 

CENTRAL HEATING IN LISTED BUILDINGS

(Robin Kerr, NORA Committee Member, Bath)



Heating Listed Buildings in a Carbon Neutral World

Our January article on heating listed buildings in a carbon neutral world pointed out the number of such houses, particularly in historic towns and cities, and the difficulty of switching them to non-carbon ways of being heated, as the Government requires us to do. Insulating them sufficiently to enable the favoured heating alternative of a heat pump to work would often be impractical or illegal, and, anyway, the equipment which has to be installed externally is large and unsightly, so unlikely to be granted Listed Building Consent, not to mention the very significant cost. We therefore suggested the use of Hydrogen (H²) gas in adapted boilers, with the existing pipework, as a way ahead; or of 'H² enrichment' as an interim approach.

About this there is good news, and news which is not so good! On the plus side: although H² needs to be distributed through the nationwide gas grid using the yellow polythene pipes, installation of these has now reached 80%, in place of the old cast iron ones. Moreover, National Grid has established an experimental site in Cumbria to test the ability of this pipework to distribute a range of Natural gas and H² mixtures, up to pure H². They are also testing the use of H² fuel cells to power a complete construction camp in Lincolnshire; and there are other sites in UK which have plans experimentally to supply new housing estates solely with H². As for conversion of our homes, Worcester Bosch have a prototype boiler on trial which can work not only on Natural gas, but also on H² and on mixtures of the two.

However, most of the H² presently available is made by 'reforming' Natural gas, which involves mixing the gas with steam in the presence of a catalyst. This is a process which is neither cheap nor very 'green' unless the Carbon Dioxide, which is a by-product, is captured, making it even more expensive. James May, of Top Gear fame, estimates that H² made this way costs about double the price of diesel fuel.

The alternative of electrolysis water requires huge amounts of cheap electricity, though a light on the horizon could be to conduct the electrolysis at night when much less power from nuclear power stations and wind turbines is required, but would otherwise go to waste.

More on this...

According to an article in the Daily Mail, homeowners will have to turn down radiators by 10 degrees for the country to hit climate change targets, it has emerged.

The Government has set a target of 600,000 heat pumps being installed every year until 2028 to replace current gas boilers to bring down emissions.

The pumps, which look like air conditioning units on the outside of buildings, suck energy from the air and use it to heat homes and are more efficient than using fossil fuel technologies.

But in order to run efficiently, they operate at lower water temperatures with Government advisors the Climate

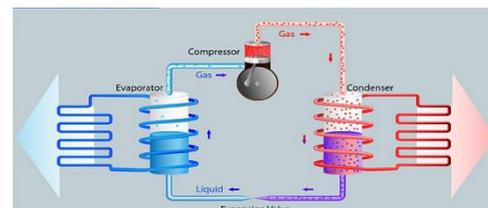


Change Committee saying they believe the technology will run at 50 degrees, rather than a gas boiler's 60 degrees.

It means families may have to splash out on larger radiators to get the same warmth or invest in other technologies such as under-floor heating and better insulation.

Making the nation's homes greener is one of the Government's main targets and ministers want as many existing homes as possible to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of Band C or better by 2035. Last year it was reported gas boilers will be banned in all new-build homes within the next three years.

The ban on boilers comes two years earlier than had previously been planned and is part of the 'future homes standard' which will mean all new homes must have low-carbon alternatives, such as electric heat pumps.



<p>Flashback Prevention</p> <p>Hydrogen has a higher flame speed than natural gas. One of the key technical advances in hydrogen boilers are burners which can hold a stable hydrogen flame against its high speed.</p>	<p>Flame Detection</p> <p>Hydrogen flames are invisible and create no electrical signal, but can be sensed by 4% ultra-violet (UV) sensors.</p>
<p>Gas-Air Ratio Control</p> <p>Hydrogen has very similar energy characteristics to natural gas, so the new components will be very similar.</p>	<p>Conversion</p> <p>In order to minimise the impact of conversion on end-users and installers, boilers will be designed to be quickly and easily reconfigured for hydrogen on commissioning day.</p>
<p>Condensate</p> <p>Hydrogen produces significantly more condensate than natural gas. This has little consequence but must be considered in heat exchanger design.</p>	<p>Performance</p> <p>Hydrogen burners will perform very similarly to natural gas boilers in terms of output, efficiency and emissions. The products of combustion are very clean.</p>
<p>Materials Compatibility</p> <p>All the low pressures used in domestic boilers, most materials currently used for natural gas will also be suitable for hydrogen.</p>	<p>Gas-Tightness</p> <p>Hydrogen has a small molecule size and is a very leaking gas. However, most leakage rates are very similar to natural gas and there is unlikely to be a need for significant re-engineering.</p>

An example of a heat pump under development



Experts say the heat pumps can cost up to £10,000 including installation with a fully modified home paying out as much as £18,000 for the likes of under-floor heating.
 One of the most ambitious proposals is a plan to produce five gigawatts of hydrogen by 2030 - even hoping to heat an entire town with the low-carbon fuel by the end of the decade.
 The proposal would see 25million gas boilers replaced with hydrogen or 'hydrogen-ready,' boilers (see above) over the next 20 years - at a rate of 600,000 a year by 2028.
 External pipeworks that deliver the hydrogen to homes and boilers will need to be changed, because hydrogen is a less dense gas - and it is often compressed and stored under high-pressure so it has sufficient energy content for processes.



ARE CARE PODS THE NEW "GRANNY ANNEXES"?

Designed to be installed at the bottom of the garden in a matter of weeks, a 'care pod' is a self-contained cabin that gives the resident their independence and their loved ones some peace of mind.
 Interest in these modern mini homes - which can range from 310 sq ft to 1,356 sq. ft - has surged over the last 12 months as extended families look for ways to live closer together after being kept apart during the



Two examples of models available

pandemic.
 Under the Caravan Sites Act, a mobile home, which includes habitable structures that can be easily moved do not need to have planning permission.
 This means it may be possible to buy and install an annexe such as some of the models above without it. Individual companies are able to advise whether this is the case for

individual models.
 According to The Times, 'The decision will also depend on the neighbours, the local Council's prevailing attitude towards garden annexes and whether your home is listed, in a conservation area, a national park or any other location where permitted development rules do not apply,'
 To be 100 per cent sure there will be no issues, it is best to secure planning permission.
 However, this might lead to limitations being placed on the annexe's size and design. However, please be aware this does not negate the need for planning permission if you are changing the use of the land. Plots of land that have never been used as such will constitute a material change of use.



PLANNING RULES RELAXED FOR COMMERCIAL TO "RESI" CONVERSIONS *(In case you missed it)*

New planning rules making it easier to convert commercial premises into homes came into force on the 31st March.

A new fast track for extending public service buildings has also been introduced to allow for bigger extensions to existing public buildings including schools, colleges, universities and hospitals.
 Unused commercial buildings can now become homes through a simpler 'prior approval' process instead of a full planning application while public buildings will be expanded more quickly through the planning system.
 To qualify for quicker planning commercial buildings must have been vacant for at least three months and be a maximum of 1,500 sq. metres.
 Public buildings can be extended by up to 25% of their original footprint under the new rules up to a maximum of 250 sq. metres.
 The Government has said the deregulation will help deliver more housing while giving high streets a new lease of life, transforming dilapidated buildings and making the most of brownfield land.
 It represents an expansion of permitted development rights (PDR), which allow certain schemes to go ahead without a full planning application.
 Instead, developers must navigate the much simpler prior approval process, where Councils are only able to consider a handful of matters including the scheme's impact on flooding, potential loss of health centres or nurseries, and whether the homes will have adequate natural light.
 Following widespread criticism of the quality of homes delivered through PDR, the Government announced last September that new homes delivered using the loophole must meet **national space standards**.
 Before today, PDR mainly applied to office blocks but will now include the majority of unused commercial buildings.



EMPTY HIGH STREET SHOPS WILL BE CONVERTED INTO FLATS, CAFÉS OR RESTAURANTS

- Planning restrictions will be relaxed so empty shops can be converted more easily
- Full planning applications will no longer be required to convert shops
- It will become easier to change empty business spaces into cafes or restaurants
- The package of planning measures will also introduce a 'fast track' scheme

A new drive to revitalise high streets and town centres hollered out by the Covid lockdowns is under way. Planning restrictions will be relaxed so that empty shops can be turned into flats, cafes or restaurants more easily.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick says full planning applications will no longer be required to convert unused retail premises for residential use.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government says converting unused commercial buildings into homes will encourage more people to live near high streets and use the areas for both work and leisure.

It insists that homes built under the new system will be subject to high standards, ensuring that they provide adequate natural light and meet space standards.

Thousands of shops have shut during the past 12 months as the pandemic hugely accelerated changes already being forced on the High Street by the rise of online shopping.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said: *“We are creating the most small business friendly planning system in the world to provide the flexibility needed for high streets to bounce back from the pandemic.”*

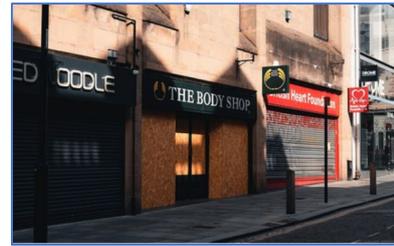
“By diversifying our town and city centres and encouraging the conversion of unused shops into cafes, restaurants or even new homes, we can help the high street to adapt and thrive for the future.”

“The public also want improvements to public services as quickly as possible and so these changes will also help schools and hospitals to adapt quickly to changing needs with a new fast track for extending public service buildings.”

“This will help deliver more classrooms and hospital space by helping them extend further and faster.”

Unlisted heritage assets to be protected.

The Government has also announced changes to permitted development regulations to ensure demolition of unlisted heritage assets, such as statues, memorials and monuments, must be approved by planners. 



NEARLY A FIFTH OF LOCAL ROADS ARE IN 'POOR' CONDITION

Nearly a fifth of local roads are in 'poor' condition and need digging up within five years due to potholes and other damage, a report revealed.

Some 35,000 miles of high streets, residential and country roads need resurfacing by 2026, according to the study.

Of these, at least 18,500 miles of roads have such shoddy surfaces that they may need digging up and re-laying within the next 12 months.

The study, by the Asphalt Industry Alliance, also found that local roads outside of London are resurfaced only every 83 years on average, compared to similar roads in the capital which are redone every 32 years.

The report suggested that it would cost £10 billion to clear the current backlog of maintenance required on local roads in England and Wales.

AA chief Edmund King said the report exposed 'the perilous state of many roads blighted by potholes which can injure those on two wheels and cause expensive damage to those on four wheels'. 



DEVELOPER WHO DEMOLISHED 100-YEAR-OLD PUB ORDERED BY COURT TO “REBUILD BRICK BY BRICK”

A 100-year-old old pub which was illegally demolished by a developer and was ordered by a planning inspector to be rebuilt 'brick by brick' following a campaign from locals will reopen its doors this month for the first time in six years.



Before demolition



After reconstruction

The Carlton Tavern in Maida Vale, West London, was being considered for Grade-II listed status when it was torn down in 2015 without the prior approval of the Council. A campaign was launched, backed by residents, including Red Dwarf star and Strictly Come Dancing contestant Danny John-Jules, to have the pub rebuilt. Westminster City Council issued an enforcement notice and served an injunction to prevent any material being removed from the site. The owners appealed against the notice and a refusal of planning permission to redevelop the pub for 10 flats. However, following a public inquiry, the planning inspector upheld the enforcement notice and turned down the planning application for 10 flats. Following the appeal decision, the owners CTLX agreed to rebuild the pub and it finally reopened on 12th April.



LEASEHOLD CONTRACTS HAVE HAD THEIR DAY?

The Government is planning changes, including making it easier for leaseholders to convert to a “commonhold” arrangement where tenants own the freehold collectively, as well as reducing the costs of extending leases with a zero-ground rent. These legal changes will not be quick: leasehold is deeply embedded in much of English property law and disentangling the mess will take considerable parliamentary time — the first consultations were launched in 2017.



The planned reforms also do little to address high service charges, focusing instead on ground rents. There are more immediate steps that the Government could take. The first would be to give an existing regulator responsibility for overseeing the contracts or appoint a new one. Leaseholders looking for restitution complain that no regulatory body takes responsibility, with complaints falling between different agencies. The Government could also prevent developers from acting both as managing agent and freeholder — a situation that some tenants allege causes a conflict of interests. Reducing the potential for freeholders and property managers to take advantage of tenants will hurt many good operators too: the shift in power that results from making it cheaper to usefully extend the leasehold contract may reduce the resale value of existing freeholds. But appropriate and affordable redress for that could no doubt be easily fashioned. Leasehold has become an inappropriate contract for modern Britain. Landlords can, however, reassure themselves that, historically, the end of feudal arrangements has been far less favourable to those at the top.



LONDON'S CONGESTION CHARGE HAS LED TO HIGHER POLLUTION DUE TO A 20 PER CENT INCREASE IN BUS AND TAXI TRAFFIC IN THE CITY CENTRE

Rush hour charging schemes and car-free zones are a hot political topic in many cities, with London Mayor Sadiq Khan expanding London's scheme to include Ultra Low Emission Zones with tighter rules and restrictions in 2019.

A study tracking pollution over London since the start of the congestion charge, designed to lower pollution and reduce traffic, was introduced in 2003. Some pollutant levels were reduced after the charge came in. **But other pollutants, such as the harmful nitrogen dioxide, actually increased.** This is due to more buses and cabs operating within the city centre.

Which poses the question....?



OWNER OF BIRMINGHAM'S BULLRING SLASHES RENTS IN REVIVAL BID

Over the past year, Hammerson, which also owns London's Brent Cross, collected about 75% of rents owed by its tenants and agreed abatements with those shops who needed it.

However, it expects to continue helping the retailers in its shopping centres which also include The Oracle site in Reading and the Victoria Quarter in Leeds.

"Typically, we're resetting our rents to more affordable levels," said UK boss Mark Bourgeois.

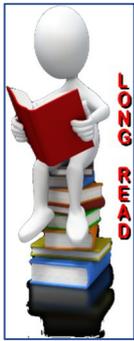
"We reckon across the board and our business we'll probably reduce rents from their peak by about 30% so we are really doing our bit as are all landlords to make sure we maintain vibrancy in these centres."



Source: BBC News

CONCRETE TO COBBLES: CAN A CITY CENTRE GO BACK IN TIME?

?



Have shopping centres had their day? With retail habits changing and the designs of the 1960s thoroughly dated, some centres are struggling to survive - but Nottingham has been offered a radical time-travelling solution to its own urban problem.

"Always unwelcoming, now it's apocalyptic".

It's not a tagline any city would want, but architect Peter Rogan's description neatly sums up the half-demolished hulk of Nottingham's Broadmarsh Centre.

The 1970s concrete and brick monolith has reached this sorry state by lurching from one failed renovation plan to another over the course of 20 years.

Major work finally got under way in 2019 - just months before owners Intu collapsed.



This left the Broadmarsh a shattered tangle of concrete beams and twisted metal.

Mr. Rogan, a Nottingham-based conservation specialist, said: "It's awful. But it also represents an almost unique opportunity - to [look at] a huge swathe of the city centre and think again."

The Broadmarsh was built in the waning days of an architectural fashion - Brutalism - which gripped architects and civic authorities across the UK in the 1960s and 70s.

Buildings as diverse as Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, National Theatre in London and Park Hill flats in Sheffield were constructed out of geometric, exposed concrete.

But many people's most direct contact with Brutalism and its offshoots was in the city shopping centre - a trend started by Birmingham's Bull Ring - often in the guise of an Arndale.

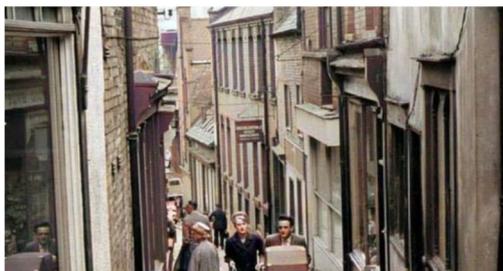
Simon Allford, president elect of the Royal Institute of Architects, says: "These were inspired by American malls and were seen as symbols of modernity."

"And, at least in terms of footfall, they were successful for a time."

"But the cost was the large-scale developments obliterated streets and sucked the life out of cities and independent retail".

All too often the "progress" championed by the planners and architects, from Manchester to Portsmouth, meant destruction for the fabric of the old city.

In Nottingham, the Broadmarsh development wiped out the old southern end of the city centre.



Drury Hill was one of the narrowest shopping streets in England



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A street pattern which dated back to the Middle Ages, including the quirkily steep and narrow Drury Hill, was swept away.

The Council's plan to turn the Broad Marsh area into a shopping centre was deeply unpopular when announced.

The focus was on the destruction of Drury Hill, a steep and narrow medieval road which was popular with locals and tourists alike.

Opposition was led by a group of women who wrote letters to everyone they could, and got local interest groups and the local papers to support their campaign.

Comparisons were made with other cities, such as York, which were said to preserve and celebrate their history - unlike Nottingham which seemed to be in the process of hiding or destroying it.

Would not, they argued, a revitalised medieval street, already popular, attract more tourists and shoppers than a new shopping centre?

They caused enough of a storm that public inquiries were held at various stages of the development, where the protesters and Council representatives each had to plead their case.





Former owners Intu planned a facelift for the Broadmarsh - but little change in its fundamental use as retail space



How that turned out

A representative of the architects, Ian Fraser & Associates boldly claimed: "We believe our professional skill and sensitivity will make the new area just as interesting and attractive as the old." Documents show a Miss A.M. Mills called the plans "a cheap imitation of an American town".

One unnamed official responded to the campaign by saying: "Isn't it ludicrous that a few old ladies should be allowed to spend time and money questioning the decisions of experts?"

Raising the temperature, it emerged the Council had given permission for demolition before publicly announcing the scheme.

The planners won, though did make some concessions: some of the city's historical caves were preserved, but Drury Hill would be destroyed and the Broadmarsh Shopping Centre would be built.

Miss E.M. Palmer said: "The Council has robbed citizens of a favourite part of the city."

She reported being criticised by a planner for acting out of "sentiment", to which she responded that he did not live in Nottingham and: "How would he like a favoured part of his garden to be stolen?"

Shortly after being completed, the Broadmarsh was voted the ugliest building in Nottingham.

Source: Nottsflax, YouTube historian

And while shoppers got their chain stores under one roof, the Broadmarsh - along with a neighbouring multi-storey car park and

four-lane through road - cut the city in two.

For a while, the Broadmarsh's mix of big, high street outlets, interspaced with burger bars and the occasional local name, drew in customers.

But now, changing retail habits, financial crashes, poor building quality and clumsy designs have left many cities wondering what to do with these behemoths.

Until recently the favoured solution was to remodel the building - a high-profile example was Birmingham's Bullring - but keep its purpose essentially the same: a big box full of shops.

But Nottingham has been presented with different challenge - the old building is all but demolished. Could it need a different solution?

The City Council cannot be accused of underestimating the importance of the situation.

'Green spaces'

A major consultation attracted more than 3,000 responses and an independent panel has been appointed to consider the site's future.

David Mellen, the authority's leader, said: "The Broadmarsh Centre is one of the largest regeneration areas in any UK city and presents us with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to renew our city centre and our city's character.

"It's no surprise to us that people value a mix of green spaces and other developments, such as retail, housing and offices which, alongside our carbon neutral ambitions, we'd want to see reflected in the site."

He defended the legacy of the original Broadmarsh Centre, saying: "It was convenient for a lot of people; it was bustling in the 1970s.

"But we want to look forward and create something suitable for the future."

Suggestions have so far been varied - from keeping part of the old shopping centre building but adding a rooftop garden, through performance spaces with vertical farming, to converting the entire area into a nature reserve.

'Golden opportunity'

But can Nottingham do something completely different? Step away from the glass and steel blocks favoured by today's urban developers?

There is one simple solution but it is radically unusual...

Just put the old city back.

Mr Rogan said: "Let's have streets which twist and turn. The old streets were there for centuries, the new pattern is barely 40 years old.

"Rather than huge blocks which make windy canyons and fill them with identikit stores, let's have smaller, individual shops.

"I work with buildings hundreds of years old that, if you look after them, will last and last.

"But I see offices and shops from the last few decades whose leases are longer than their life spans, that are so poorly built they are not worth repairing."

The idea is backed by the city's Civic Society, which called it a "golden opportunity" to deliver "state-of-the-art, energy-efficient, traffic-free, mixed-use community".

What might seem like a (literally) monumental piece of nostalgia has some significant backers - and some examples to follow.

Mr Allford says: "Putting back the streets makes a certain amount of sense.

"These are streets which developed over hundreds of years and streets change rarely.

"I always look at the historical grain of a city to see what I can learn about how it works with the topography and how it has connected with the citizens over centuries.

"So, looking again at those streets is not nostalgic; it is common sense."

TV presenter and architectural historian Dan Cruikshank has helped highlight the destruction of Britain's historical town centres in the 1960s and 70s.

He said: "Re-establishing old street patterns is a well-established policy and is often very sound.

"Interesting examples of replacing older developments with something more sensitive are Paternoster Square in London and Southgate in Bath."

An obvious issue is the cost of more traditional construction techniques - like those used in listed buildings - can be 30-50% higher than standard ones.

But Mr Cruikshank warns today's decision-makers must learn from the - well-intentioned - mistakes by planners of the 60s and 70s.

"They wanted more humane, more hygienic cities with more light, away from the terraces and factories and overcrowding of the Victorian era.

"The problem was it was often done with a lack of respect for history and tradition.

"Too often it was done on the cheap, then this was compounded by not enough investment for maintenance."

Mr Allford feels whatever scheme is chosen, the City Council must be both considered and yet also far-thinking, as demolition and rebuilding every 30 to 50 years is not sustainable.

He says: "The days of 'Brave New World' where we just rebuilt cities and told people to go live in them are long over.

"This needs to be a plan for the long-term. This mustn't just solve the problems of today but be adaptable enough to handle the challenges yet unknown.

"Retail is under a lot of pressure, so high streets may become smaller. Maybe schools and homes will move back in."

But Mr Cruikshank says more intangible criteria also play a part.

"Nottingham is a world-famous city with a great reputation for history of the most romantic sort.

"Any project must respect that.

"Individual character is what people remember, what can really define a place and give it a sense of belonging and soul."

Final demolition of the Broadmarsh Centre is due to begin in mid-April and will take 12 months.

The independent panel is expected to present its plans by the end of the summer.

This is not just a UK problem. According to a 2017 report by Credit Suisse, **one in four U.S. malls** is expected to close by 2022.

Source: BBC News



...and finally – laughter is the best medicine...

