



We can't ignore a chance to rebuild

ALMOST 40 years after its turnstiles clinked shut for the last time, the most beautiful pier in Britain has lost none of its power to prompt people's passions and prejudices.

The Argus exclusive story last week revealing that large chunks of the remaining island of girders had collapsed made many Brightonians angry that the West Pier had not been properly preserved.

But at the same time there was opposition to plans for Brighton and Hove City Council to help fund the Brighton 1360 planned for the root end of the structure.

Taking much of the flak is the Brighton West Pier Trust, which has owned the brightlight structure ever since the authorities washed their hands of it in the 1980s.

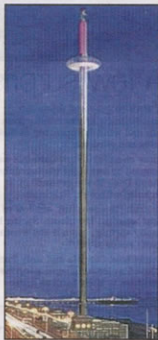
Several times since then, the Trust has backed audacious schemes to save the pier, only to have them snatched away cruelly at the last moment.

Gales, fires, chicanery and confusion have all contributed to the sad state of the pier, which now consists of the crumbling island beloved by photographers and a few square yards of decking off King's Road.

The 1360 gained planning permission from councillors a few years ago but has not been built because developers Marks Barfield cannot raise all the cash needed for the tower.

Marks Barfield are no fly by night financiers. They were behind the London Eye, currently the capital's most popular attraction.

It is also the only show in



The 1360

town when consideration is given to a new West Pier. Restoring the island site is not possible and no money is available for it.

English Heritage, whose withdrawal of cash led to the pier's demise, has expressed no interest in funding stabilisation of the wreck and has already introduced a policy of managed decline for this and other similar structures with severe damage.

Getting the 1360 up and running would give Brighton and Hove its best opportunity in years to lead British resorts in an exciting new venture.

It would quickly revitalise that part of the seafront and also the surrounding area because of the significant increase in tourists the 1360 would bring with it.

Anyone who has seen the sad state of Preston Street will be aware of the vital need for investment nearby.

The deal being proposed by the council is using a funding mechanism encouraged by this and the last Government to lever in private investment with very little risk.

This is because the council is borrowing from the Public Sector Loans Board at one rate and then lending it on at a higher rate to the development.

This kind of proposal is now being used by hundreds of councils across the country because of the unwillingness of the banks and other investors to lend.

The deal would not take one penny away from the council's increasingly restricted budget and would actually provide it with an income of over £1 million per year.

This could be invested in much-needed schemes such as the urgent repair work to the seafront east of the Palace Pier, notably restoring the crumbling terraces of Madeira Drive.

Marks Barfield are putting millions of their own money into the scheme and more will be provided by the local enterprise partnership.

Once the 1360 is up and run-

ning, interest in a new development on the site of the old pier will be much greater because of the number of visitors.

The Trust is looking at the options for a sea-based development and will soon consult on them. But already it is clear that the new structure cannot and should not be a pastiche of what was there before.

Although beautiful, the old pier closed largely because what it had to offer was no longer relevant to the leisure needs of the public.

Any new structure will need to be of excellent design, have public access and reflect the dramatically different tastes in entertainment that exist now compared with the 1970s.

Early next month councillors have to decide whether to do a deal that will enable the 1360 to be built.

Regrettably it seems some of them are being swayed by politics rather than the best interests of the city.

Because of that, I am indulging in pier pressure.

Forty years ago it was the trust that persuaded councillors not to proceed with their unpopular proposals to cut the pier in half. I reported that campaign and have remained a trust supporter ever since.

They will not be forgiven if they reject a deal that will be brilliant for Brighton and Hove, a city that has fared best when being bold. The alternative is long-term blight and neglect.

Do you agree with Adam? Or are his views completely different to yours? We want to hear from you. Write to our letters page or email letters@theargus.co.uk