www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

The Leamington Society

Newsletter

August 2016

Chairman's notes

Planning for Uncertain Times

At the end of September, examination of the draft Warwick District Local Plan will be resumed in detail, over a scheduled nine weeks. This exhaustive (exhausting?) procedure and the resulting Inspector's report will perhaps be the final chapters in setting a blueprint for some 17,000 new dwellings over the plan period (2011-2029).

The backdrop includes clear signs emerging of an economic slowdown. In recent years, home ownership is down, construction is slowing and each year more and more planning consents are being left unbuilt. This is hardly surprising, since OECD figures indicate that between 2007-2015 UK wages have fallen some 10% in real terms. Economic analysis is provided by the rear view mirror and the road ahead is always hard to anticipate, even without the Brexit vote and a new government.

Back in 2011 WDC issued a consultation paper asking us whether we wanted low, medium or high levels of growth in the District and my instinctive reaction was that such a choice was hardly in the gift of Warwick District. Later, Cllr. Mobbs concluded a public meeting with a bullish statement that he was going for growth. More recently the WDC housing numbers have been ratcheted up by projections of greatly increased housing need in Coventry. All of which brings to mind the proverb that you can lead a horse to water but cannot make him drink. An elaborately prepared Plan can propose housing numbers and demand 5 year land supplies leading developers (the horse) to be offered planning permissions (water) but will they build (drink the water)? Or will market logic suggest they bank permissions and eke them out slowly so as to maintain as far as they can an inflated market price?

House building by developers and buying by individuals is a long term project. Unlike more immediate consumption, the signs are that property markets respond poorly to supply and demand,

Talks and events

Capability Brown and Compton Verney
Gary Webb
Thursday, September 15th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

The Englishman's Castle is his Home
Keith Cattell
Thursday, October 13th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Reputations rebalanced: Beeching bettered Brunel
James MacKay
Tuesday, October 25th, 6.30

Joint meeting with Literary Society
Bombing of Royal Leamington Spa
Allan Jennings
Tuesday, November 8th, 7.30

British Motor Museum, Gaydon
Speaker TBA
Thursday, December 8th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

The full calendar of events for 2016-17 is included with this Newsletter

tending rather to boom and bust. Legislation that overwhelmingly concentrates on ownership, rather than renting, may have fuelled this tendency and has severely stretched the meaning of "affordability". Meanwhile the Council and the Inspector have to work within that legal framework. Whatever their labours, the outcome on the ground will depend as much on what Keynes described as "animal spirits" as on the intentions of the Plan. Currently the spirits of both builders and potential buyers are looking nervous at best.

Space Standards in Housing

While noting economic trends and housing policies, most of us are no more than spectators, but perhaps in small ways we can highlight particular issues. I make no apology for repeating remarks I made recently at our Awards Evening. In an age of fast moving consumerism, much of what we buy is for the short term and designed on a throwaway basis when it fails. Houses and flats are different: built for decades or even centuries of use. Cramped accommodation is no mere passing inconvenience; it blights family life for years.

An RIBA paper "The Case for Space" (2012) drew attention to shrinking space in new housing, with surveys that showed this was a very widespread cause of complaint. Time and again one sees plans with bedrooms with little room to squeeze around the outline of a bed. On average Britain is building the smallest houses in western Europe; Ireland builds 15% larger, Holland 53% and Denmark offers 80% more space. In the UK the marketing pitch is always the number of bedrooms, no matter how pokey they may be. On the continent by contrast, they define the floor space in square metres and while other countries have a tradition of more flats and terraces they are built to better space standards than British houses.

In 2015 the government brought out a very brief technical pamphlet on a Nationally Described Space Standard. Its table of required internal spaces were far from demanding, but even so were not mandatory, depending on councils to adopt them. RIBA evidence indicates that significant improvements in space will at most add a marginal cost, a very small component compared with land, main construction, many overheads, marketing and profit, etc. I urge Warwick District to adopt at least these minimal standards to ensure new housing that is fit for the long term future.

Richard Ashworth

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Resignation of Geoff Renshaw from the Leamington Society Committee

We are sad to lose the valuable contributions of Geoff Renshaw who says:

"I am resigning because I am completely disillusioned and disgusted with the planning process. The reality is that local democracy and public consultation are a sham. Council decisions respond solely to the diktat of central government and the pressure of commercial interests and invariably prioritise growth whatever its social and environmental costs."

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Forthcoming talks and events: <u>For venues, dates and times see front page of this Newsletter</u>

Capability Brown and Compton Verney, Gary Webb

Gary Webb, now Head of Landscape and Gardens at Compton Verney, previously worked at Hill Close Gardens in Warwick; the National Trust at Croome Park in Worcester and as Head Gardener at Dunster Castle in West Somerset.

With around thirty years devoted to horticulture and landscape maintenance, he has a keen interest in design and of heritage gardens in particular. His work at all these venues has seen him unravel the historical developments of each site, with restoration, development and improvement in mind. Gary is a strong advocate of wildlife in gardens and improving diversity.

The Englishman's Castle is his Home, Keith Cattell

The castle was a private family fortification brought over to this country by William the Conqueror as his 'secret weapon' to defeat and subdue the English. It has been with us ever since, with some of the most remarkable examples being built in the 19th century. Keith will look at our castles and how they have changed over the centuries.

Reputations rebalanced: Beeching bettered Brunel, James MacKay

One is lauded, the other decried.

One was a strategic genius,
the other an obsessed maverick without long-term vision.

One bequeathed a system struggling to succeed,
the other gave us the network we enjoy today.

But which railwayman was which?

James Mackay, a railway manager by profession, will analyse two giants of the industry, their achievements, and their weaknesses – and challenge our preconceptions

Bombing of Royal Leamington Spa, Allan Jennings (*Joint meeting with Literary Society*)

Allan has studied the six bomb attacks on our town between 1940-1942 to write the first and only history of the consequent death and destruction. Both at the time and at the end of the war, the news was suppressed and undocumented, so he had to find a variety of sources. Come and hear about his research on these important events in local history.

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Pump Room Gardens restoration project: another major milestone

In January (2016) the HLF and BIg lottery fund announced that the Pump Room Gardens restoration project would receive a grant of almost £1 million and on August 3rd the partnership (of WDC and the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens) were given Permission to Start work.

Up to that stage the partnership was on hold while a myriad of procedural steps had to be followed. This process has now been completed to the satisfaction of HLF. We can now start to appoint contractors to carry out the work. Since public money is being spent it we must demonstrate that best value is obtained. This process will take perhaps three or four more months. This may seem a long period, but £1 million is a large amount of money to spend. Then, all being well, contractors will be seen on the ground. The work on the bandstand will go to a separate contractor, experienced in that form of specialist work.

Archie Pitts

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'University and Community Matters', National Conference at Durham University 20th July 2016

The purpose of the conference was to share experiences, ideas and plans on the impact of universities on accommodation, community relations and the local economy.

It was generously hosted by the University and jointly organised with the National Association of Resident's Associations (NORA).

Almost 100 delegates attended from some 18 different University towns and cities across the country, representing residents, local authorities, students, law enforcement and of course the Universities themselves both individually and from their national grouping, Universities UK.

Our own District was well represented by two Council officers, a Councillor, a police officer and two members of Warwick University staff. As a forum for learning about best practice, different approaches to similar problems and where to find further information it was an exceptional event.

Graham Towl, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Durham, chaired proceedings and ensured there was very widespread participation from the floor, after each of the 10 or so speakers had delivered their short addresses, covering issues from almost every angle.

Whether delegates left feeling buoyed up by the progress being made and solutions found or daunted by the scale of the challenges – and obstacles – was not clear. For me it was a mix of both.

Personally I was encouraged to find that Warwick seems to be ahead of other towns in some ways (for example the street marshal scheme); in the middle of the pack in most others perhaps (adoption of Article 4 planning controls on HMOs – licensing not yet extended to smaller HMOs) and lagging in others (dealing with HMO waste, enforcement methods).

Only a few Universities seem so far to have clear student accommodation strategies agreed with local communities, businesses and Councils – Northumbria is the most notable. It has been willing to invest directly in halls of residence not just to maintain but to increase the proportion of students 'on campus' and so ease the pressure on local housing. They have regenerated a central area, pleased residents, local businesses and council – and make a decent return. Durham has possible plans to follow this example. We heard of no others with this degree of commitment. Neither wish to encourage private schemes (Purpose Built Student Accommodation, PBSAs) – but they are there and growing.

Other cities are not opposed to PBSAs and all are seeing growth but there were mixed views about what they do to rents and the student experience on the one hand, and their impact on easing pressures on HMOs/local communities on the other.

One area, Sheffield, has a particularly strong 3-way formal partnership between Council, Student Union and University, to check HMO quality on a two year 100% inspection cycle. The partnership called SNUG also includes community and landlord representation. Only SNUG-approved properties can be advertised on the student website and use the brand. Bath is also said to have an effective collaborative model.

There are other good ideas and practices which I am sure those of us who attended will want to follow up over the coming months, especially perhaps through the Task & Finish working group to review many HMO-related issues, recently set up by Warwick District Councillors.

Some of the most challenging may be how to incorporate PBSA beds in our planning policy (fortunately other Councils already do); how to ensure landlords as well as occupants meet their responsibilities on waste, recycling, property appearance and noise (again we heard of some good approaches elsewhere to draw on); and whether we should extend licensing to smaller HMOs (other areas have and claim clear community benefits).

Some are beyond our scope locally – for example whether Universities UK might wish to issue clear guidelines to its members on planning for on-campus/PBSA accommodation. Another hot potato which was discussed is to what extent Councils are still compensated by government for the loss of Council Tax on all student HMOs and may be in the future.

I look forward to us making progress locally over the next 12 months and being able to share positive experiences once more in a year's time – perhaps somewhere more central next time, such as Warwick!

Colin Quinney, Warwick District Councillor

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Alumno development

Each year, South Town becomes the temporary home of several thousand University of Warwick students, mostly second year. Local residents' group SoLAR (South Leamington Area Residents) negotiates with WDC to mitigate the effects that our many student residences have on their neighbours (to join them contact mary.kelly4@ntlworld.com). From the earliest planning stage, SoLAR have been involved in conversations with Alumno, the developer currently building a managed block accommodating nearly 200 students, along the canal at Althorpe Street.

Amicable meetings have addressed issues including the need to keep the building process from disrupting local businesses. Alumno have sought to allay fears about car parking arrangements by stressing the car-free nature of the development and the use of bicycle hire schemes. Problems with the overcrowded bus service remain but are effectively outside their control. Alumno address concerns about noise and student parties by indicating that the block will be managed, but can have no responsibility for any off-site parties. We considered ways in which students and community might help each other and it has been suggested that student volunteers 'give back' to the local community through charitable volunteering. The development notice board will be publicly available. Sadly the canal towpath's hedgerow, including mature trees, was cut down to enable development. Further meetings are planned for the near future.

Jill Barker, Town Councillor for Brunswick Ward.

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Friends of All Saints' Parish Church

The Friends of All Saints' Parish Church has been set up to help raise money to repair and maintain this iconic building. One of the ways we are doing this is to use the space to host other events. Recently, we held film screenings of the Blues Brothers and Life of Brian. Both sold out and the latter generated a fair bit of national publicity. In the autumn, we

All Saint's Parish Church, David Lewis

will run further screenings and also begin to arrange other events, such as poetry, comedy and music.

We are pleased to join forces with the Leamington Photographic Society to host their exhibitions. With their help, we have secured sponsorship for display stands and lighting. This will allow us to host a much wider range of art and community events and encourage a much wider range of people to visit the church.

Finally, a number of local artists have kindly donated art works. David Lewis has painted the above view of the church and the Jug and Jester have also given one of his paintings of Victoria Terrace

Victoria Terrace, David Lewis

(below). High quality, framed prints are available to buy from ArtsTrail studio (4 Windsor Street, Leamington) for just £175. Prints are also on display in the church café.

Please do get in touch if you have ideas for future events or you would like to help by giving time, skills and experience. For the church it really is a case of 'use it or lose it', so we need to think creatively about how we can use this space more for the community and protect it for future generations.

Adrian Gains

All Saints' Clock appeal

The clock stopped nearly two years ago, to our exasperation, because the steel cables holding and guiding the clock weights broke. The Church has decided to replace them by installing an electric auto-winder and also to overhaul the aged mechanism

Roughly £8000 is needed and we are raising this. The Town Council have already generously pledged nearly half the money (£3,500) and with the Leamington Society and other pledges we are well on the way. Please pledge on the enclosed flyer and sign the Gift Aid form. The Church is a charity and can claim.

Marianne Pitts and Christopher Wilson (Vicar)

All Saint's Church clock

Upgrading the Leamington Society website and communications

The Society is improving its website to make it both more informative and more attractive. It will also make changes that will make the website more flexible and easier to maintain. To do all this we will change our 'platform' from Dreamweaver to WordPress which is popular and simple to use; WordPress is designed for small organisations like our charity.

We seek members who are either already familiar with WordPress or those who would like to learn how to use it and help with maintaining the website. The society would organise and pay for tuition.

At the same time we shall also have a Facebook page.

Please let me know if you are prepared to be involved.

Archie Pitts

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Our 60th Birthday Party

William Thomas's impressive Masonic Rooms on Willes Road were an ideal choice for the Society's

Almost 60 members the Society's 60th anniversary

Diamond Jubilee dinner on June 10. We were pleased to welcome our MP and the Chair of the Warwick Society, both members, and many friends.

We met in the garden and immediately, as one would expect of people with so many other interests as the one they were celebrating, the conversation was energetic. It never flagged; the food was good and plentiful; the service fast and discreet. Good spirits are contagious.

Our speaker, who had the sense to be brief, tried to convey the idea that although the Society is perfectly capable of making a nuisance of itself, it is equally capable of being constructive. He mentioned the arches in the Pump Room Garden; the Awards every two years to imaginative architecture of every type; and perhaps especially the imminent restoration of the Pump Room Gardens towards which, as well as the hours spent in meetings and reams of correspondence, no less than £100,000 has been encouraged and received.

With so many people who love the town and who convert love into work, surely the town must prosper. All praise then, just this once, to The Leamington Society, always remembering that the Society is its members.

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Queen for the Day

In my absence in Austria, Chiltern Railways and the Friends of Leamington Station decided that I should impersonate the Queen on the station on her official 90th birthday celebration. June 11th 2016. I was in no position to protest.

It is, in fact, a great honour – so I agreed. The most difficult question immediately became “What do I wear?” My wardrobe is not regal or even formal and I wear a lot of black. The Queen wears suits or dresses with matching coats in monochrome pastel colours with coordinating shoes, handbag, hat and gloves.

My first call was the Fancy Dress hire shops – but they cater for witches and fairies and dragons, not elderly Royals. My next was eBay and the local Charity shops. There were a few suitable garments, but not in my size and the Queen cannot have straining buttons. “Mother-of-the Bride” dress hire has disappeared from the town.

Local retailers, both new and vintage, were intrigued by my problem “I have to dress like the Queen” and I had a remarkable response as an interesting customer worthy of attention and advice. (Nothing combining the right style and colour was available, and even if there had been, I would still have to collect coordinating accessories.) Many of the staff informed me that when “I” died, they would prefer the throne to pass direct to William, bypassing Charles altogether, as if I had a say in the matter.

The ‘Queen’ at Leamington Station

Costume Hire of Petersfield, Hampshire came to my rescue. They sent me a pale yellow couture dress and coat with matching accessories. The outfit suited but the accessories were unsuitable (apart from the handbag) so I wore better shoes and gloves from my own wardrobe. Then I had three strokes of luck:

- I needed a big straw hat to hide my hair and give the right outline and our local Hat Company of Regent Street loaned me a perfect model *for free*.
- My hairdresser Dawn of Diaz (by All Saints) made up my face – again *for free*.
- At the Service in St Paul’s the day before the (real) Queen had worn an outfit so similar that I could assure commentators she had loaned it to me for the station event.

The best evidence of how I looked the part was the number of strange passengers wanting to take photos and the incredulous double-takes of friends.

Marianne Pitts

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Art in the Park 2016

This two day event, now in its third year, was again a great success due to the painstaking preparation by Carole Sleight and her large team of volunteers. There were about 150 artists and other groups with stands exhibiting in Jephson Gardens. The weather was perfect for the occasion with about 10,000 attending.

The Leamington Society and the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens shared a gazebo with displays; members of both were always on hand to answer questions about their exhibits from a steady stream of visitors. The Society and FPRG are most appreciative of the time and effort of all these volunteers.

The town should be enormously grateful to Carole for organising this to the undoubted benefit of the local economy.

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Winding up the Leamington Society

To dissolve our society, of about 350 members, our constitution states that a dissolution proposal must be approved by 60% of those voting at an AGM or Special General Meeting. After that this vote must be confirmed at a second meeting at least 14 days later.

The Brexit decision was approved by 52% of those voting (37% of the electorate), with no subsequent confirmation vote to overcome any decision that might be deemed to have been taken in haste. “Brexit means Brexit”.

Which decision process provides a better and more rational democratic society?

Archie Pitts

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Leamington Society Awards 2016

The Leamington Awards Presentation Evening on July 14th was much enjoyed by over 70 guests and once again was an opportunity to show how the Leamington Society brings together members of the public, designers and Councillors to celebrate the delights of the town. Since 2004 this event has relied on the generous sponsorship of Chiltern Railways for which we are very grateful.

Councillor Jane Knight, Chairman of Warwick District Council introduced the evening by praising the work that the Society does to encourage the quality of the Leamington town environment.

The Chairman, Richard Ashworth then thanked those involved in the judging of the Nominations this year and particularly mentioned Peter Rogan, a Nottingham conservation architect, who had, quite late in the day, stepped in to act as Chair and Independent Judge.

This year there were 29 nominations and 14 awards given. These ranged in size from new cast iron work in Russell Terrace and Clarendon Square to the new Foyer at the Warwickshire College and in character from the Sensory Garden and East Lodge Garden in Jephson Gardens to the refurbished

Refreshment rooms on the up platform at Leamington Station. The awards were presented by the Mayor of Leamington, Councillor Ann Morrison.

In his recent illustrated talk describing the winners, Alan Mayes, one of the judges and the lately retired Conservation Officer at Warwick District Council, stressed the importance of attention to detail when introducing a new building into the townscape or restoring a neglected old one. This

Railings in Russell Terrace

New foyer at Warwickshire College

point was illustrated by the conversion of the Windsor Club on Warwick Street to housing, which used that opportunity to restore window and door details that had been lost in earlier alterations.

Projects in Clarendon Street and on Tachbrook Road were rewarded for much improving the streetscape and gates and murals at Strathearn Gardens, Rugby Road, for designing with children in mind.

Neo-gothic house, Upper Holly Walk

Winner of Bill Gibbons trophy, Leam Terrace

The saving of a near derelict neo-gothic house on Holly Walk and an ingenious contemporary house development bridging the gap between a Victorian terrace and 1960s housing were also honoured.

The winner of the Bill Gibbons Trophy, awarded for the best owner-occupied domestic design, was given to the extension of 91 Leam Terrace where a clearly contemporary extension matches the careful and highly innovative detailing of the original Arts and Craft house.

The cup was presented to Mr and Mrs Roger Sargent by Dave Penney, the Managing Director of

Chiltern Railways who then spoke of the close cooperation between his company and both the town of Royal Leamington Spa and the Leamington Society.

Richard Ashworth brought the evening to a close with a plea for developers and local authorities to provide more generous space standards in new housing as a further way in which the quality of life in Leamington can be improved. We lag quite seriously behind many of our European neighbours in this respect.

Richard Ward

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Development at Station Approach

The long-empty brown field space known as Quick's Site and recently used as a 300+ space carpark at Station Approach is to be developed by Waterloo Housing Association working with AC Lloyd. This will be a mixed ownership scheme – 40% affordable rent, 35% shared ownership and the remainder privately owned. There will be a mix of one to four bedroom properties; in total 212 homes.

WDC will retain 100 carpark spaces on the site. The ex-Travis Perkins site on Old Warwick Road is being transformed into a 380 space carpark for rail users. It is hoped that Chiltern will be able to open its new car park very shortly after the works begin. At this point WDC will close the car park on Station Approach.

Work is scheduled to start in late October 2016 and finish in late 2020 or early 2021 and will begin at the east end of the site, which extends all the way to Lower Avenue. The underpass to the station will be closed for up to 12 months; during this time pedestrians will be directed to a detour via Lower Avenue. Ultimately the footpath to the north of the underpass will extend to Lower Avenue.

To see detailed application documents for the development go to the WDC website at W/15/0905

First phase of building, at east end of site

and W/16/1287; for the latest information on the development see www.waterloo.org.uk/stationapproach.

Other railway matters

Underpass at station. The 16 murals have now been cleaned, repaired and remounted a small distance away from the wall ensuring the murals do not become saturated with water trickling down from the rail track above.

Gardens and planters. These continue to look good for the benefit of rail travellers whether they are local residents or visitors to our town. Thank you to all who work to achieve this.

Upgrade of refreshment room on Platform 3. This has yet to reach its final stage with the installation of catering facilities (coffee machines, microwave, …). Progress remains slow.

Archie Pitts

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New members

We welcome to the society

William and Dearne Jackson

Louise Catherine Radice

Mrs Anne Tarrant

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The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is a member of the West Midlands Amenity Societies Association and the National Organisation of Residents' Associations. It exists to preserve the heritage and improve the character of Royal Leamington Spa and to encourage high standards of planning and architecture

Charity No. 516078

Unless otherwise indicated, views expressed in these newsletters are the contributors' own and not necessarily the corporate view of the Society