



www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2013

Chairman's Notes

Up and down the Parade

Leamington's early life as a spa town began south of the river along Clemens Street, Bath Street and the High Street. As the town became fashionable and expanded rapidly northwards, the Parade defined the centre of Leamington. Down its length and along its cross streets are the principal shops, bars, pubs and restaurants, entertainment, public gardens, the Town Hall, the law, the church, the library, and the Post Office.

Now we are told the Post Office wants to abandon its fine, landmark building and tuck itself away in the Spar food store in Bath Street. Presumably the bean counters have decided they can save some rent, a typical short term response to the present economic climate. But where is their commitment, pride or leadership in running a public service? What kind of strategy is this for attracting customers and sustaining the future of the Post Office? If they get their way, what will become of the post office building?

We also await a new version of the Clarendon Arcade, promoted by a so called *Refresh* report on retailing commissioned by the District Council. The authors of the report clearly struggle to identify a likely "anchor" store to draw crowds of shoppers into this arcade. The Leamington Society takes the view that the town's future should be anchored down the whole length of the Parade and its adjoining streets and activities, not in one new mall.

Inside this Newsletter you will find an analysis of the *Refresh* report by one of our members. Geoffrey Renshaw is an economist: his article is not light reading but is very carefully considered. I urge members who wish to penetrate the surface hype of the arcade scheme to take time to read this article.

New lease of life for the Spa Cinema

For some months the Studio space in the Spa Centre has been without a cinema programme.

Talks

The Planning System: Leave your 'common sense' at the door

Ian Dove QC

Thursday, 12th September, 7.30

St Peter's Conference Centre

Dormer Place

State Ceremonial, Part 2

Lt Col Gerald Lesinski

Tuesday, October 8th, 7.30

Christchurch, Priory Terrace

My Life in Railways

Sir William McAlpine

Tuesday, October 29th, 6.30

Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Translation in Business

Joint meeting with Literary Society

Dr Isabella Moore, CBE

Tuesday, November 12th, 7.30

Conference Centre,

Dormer Place

A full calendar of events for 2013-14
is included in this Newsletter

Bring your friends as this is a fund raising event for the work of the Friends at the Station.

Entry £5 to include a glass of wine or soft drink

Tickets at the door, or in advance from Marianne Pitts; cheques payable to "Friends of Leamington Station" + SAE, please

Translation in Business, Dr Isabella Moore CBE (*Joint meeting with Literary Society*)

Dr Moore, founder and currently Managing Director of Comtec, a language services company based in Leamington, will describe some of the many interesting interpreting assignments she has found herself taking on and give amusing examples of how the message can be lost in translation. She will also explore the value of language skills to our economy and the competitive advantage, which can be gained when equipped with these skills in the global market.

XX

Housing developments South of Warwick and Leamington

Consultation has just ended on Warwick District's revised strategy for the Local Plan. Our response on major housing proposals was detailed and in parts highly critical. A summary appears in this Newsletter.

Although the Plan will not be in place for at least another year, several developers are already straining at the leash, while the District is relatively defenceless. The biggest so far is Gallagher Estates with three proposals for 720, 330 and 220 houses, all in the area adjoining the Europa Way roundabout. And the Europa Way Consortium has just applied for up to 800, south of Myton Way.

Gallagher has a tactical and temporary withdrawal, leaving just their smallest site which was recently granted outline permission. While objectors pointed to major problems of traffic congestion and pollution from all these schemes, the planning committee could only consider the 220 houses immediately before it. Councillors were also confronted with the government rule that there has to be a five year supply of housing land available to developers.

Yet another outline application has just been before the latest Planning Committee. This was from Thomas Bates & Co, for 275 houses at Woodside Farm, between Whitnash and Harbury Lane. Originally recommended for approval, there had been several last minute objections raised by County departments. The key objection was from Highways, since access was the one feature requiring detailed approval. Surprisingly, the applicants had failed to provide County with enough information for their modelling of traffic access from Tachbrook Road, hence the objection. WCC Education also objected to the lack of scheduling for school places. James Mackay of the Warwick Society also spoke strongly on the wider traffic implications of these cumulative housing proposals, causing increased pollution in the town streets.

As a result District planning officers switched to recommending refusal rather than permission. In refusing the application, Planning Committee gave as reasons the Highways and Education objections and also the effect on air quality cited by James Mackay. This could be an important point for an inspector, if and when such a refusal were to go to appeal. No doubt there is a shortage of housing, particularly affordable housing, but half of the projected numbers are for estimated inward migration to the District. The process is inherently flawed because the District is forced to predict and provide for 15 years, a period for which accurate predictions are impossible.

The report's methodology

A key concept in the report is a shop's sales density, defined as its sales revenue per square metre of its floor area. Each shop is assumed to have a *desired* or target sales density, a Goldilocks situation where the floor area is neither too large nor too small relative to its sales revenue. The report assumes, on the flimsiest of evidence, that the desired sales density of Leamington's shops is £6000 per square metre.

If a shop's actual sales density persistently exceeds this desired density, this means its floor area is too small and customers are tripping over one another. The shop will therefore wish to increase its floor area.

Conversely if a shop's actual sales density is persistently less than the desired density, this means that the shop is too large so that costly floor space is relatively under-used. Unless the shop can somehow increase its sales, it will wish to reduce its floor area.

To establish a need for a big new shopping mall in central Leamington, it is thus necessary to show that *actual* sales density of comparison goods shops greatly exceeds *desired* sales density, either at present or in the future.

The present situation

The study estimates that total floor area in 2012 was 42,397 square metres and total sales £314.1 million. Dividing the second number by the first gives actual sales density as £7409 per square metre. However, both the floor area and total sales estimates are questionable. Compared to the previous report, the floor area has mysteriously grown by exactly 25% between 2009 and 2012. The sales estimate is based on a telephone survey of members of the public, with questions involving ill-defined terms (such as "most of your spending") and requiring detailed recall of the respondent's spending pattern.

Nevertheless, let us accept for the moment that actual sales density is indeed £7409 per square metre. As noted above, the report assumes that desired sales density is £6000 per square metre. Therefore *actual* sales density, £7409, is 23% larger than *desired* density, £6000. If true, this means that shops selling comparison goods in central Leamington are *highly* congested. Consequently they wish, *now*, to expand their floor area by almost one-quarter, and are stopped from doing so only by the lack of suitable premises or sites with planning permission.

No one with any knowledge of Leamington could possibly believe this, and the report clearly finds it unbelievable too, for it quietly discards this conclusion and instead assumes that in 2012 actual and desired densities were equal, so no repressed demand for additional floor space now exists.

Future growth

Given this conclusion, the case for a big new mall in central Leamington has to be based on the forecast *future* growth of sales of comparison goods. The report arrives at this forecast by applying assumed growth rates of sales to the 2012 base value, £314.1m.

These assumed growth rates are highly questionable. At first, in the period 2012-17, the growth rate is a relatively modest 2.8% per year, a figure derived from Experian, a major market research company, which is probably fairly reliable. After that the assumed growth rates jumps to 3.6% per year in 2017-22; and to an even faster 4.2% in 2022-27 before dropping back to 4% in 2027-32. (For comparison, the growth of total consumption in Britain in the past 20 years averaged 2.4% per year.)

Fashion comes to Leamington



Lady Gaga will never be caught without a ticket

© Aleah Leigh

Photograph by Glenn Cockerill, Make up by Karen Salandy

The dress, designed by Aleah Leigh, is made entirely of Chiltern rail tickets.

XX

Chairman: Richard Ashworth, 32 Willes Road, CV31 1BN 01926 316703
Vice Chairmen Archie Pitts, 4 Leam Terrace, CV31 1BB 01926 885532
Geoff Renshaw, 8 Willes Terrace, 01926 770600;
Hon. Secretary: Margaret Begg, The Garden House, Clarendon Crescent, CV32 5NR, 01926 423822
Hon. Treasurer: Tony Parsons, 14 Fairhurst Drive, CV32 6HX, 01926 338572

Other Committee Members:
Dorothy Clark 01926 315185
Rodney King 01926 334053
Clive Engwell 01926 420454
Marianne Pitts 01926 885532

Newsletter Distribution: Jo Clark

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