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The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2015

Chairman's Notes

Shadow Boxing with the Planning Inspector

Our last Newsletter recorded a harsh judgement by the Inspector on his examination of Warwick District's Local Plan. An urgent meeting of Coventry and Warwickshire planning officers in June noted this as "hugely significant". Effectively the inspector's letter to WDC had kiboshed all the emerging local plans on the basis that they have yet to agree how Coventry's very large projected increase in housing needs can be distributed across the county.

The first response had been for Warwick District's leader to write and ask the Minister to over-rule the Inspector's finding: not surprisingly WDC were told to go and talk to the Inspector. So now they are sending a plea to the Inspector to reverse his refusal to "suspend" the examination while Coventry and Warwickshire authorities get their housing plans in order. This tactic was agreed at a July meeting of Coventry and Warwickshire Shadow Economic Prosperity Board. They had got their planning officers to set out an accelerated timetable for offering the Inspector, early in 2016, an agreed distribution of the extra Coventry housing numbers – so that he could then resume examination of a slightly revised WDC plan. Having sat through the initial examination and read the Inspector's letter I would not hold my breath in anticipation that he will agree.

One might ask why the Coventry and Warwickshire group is called a "Shadow" EPB. It seems it has no legal or financial standing, while local authorities are hesitating between a properly constituted joint board or moving to the status of a combined authority (which would also allow them to manage and finance transport). This dilemma has been made more acute by the Chancellor's push for devolution of powers and cash through big city deals. Our District leader is clearly not enthusiastic at the prospect of being a very minor satellite in the outer orbit of Birmingham.

While the Local Plan is in limbo the developers have steadily banked a series of major outline permissions so any Plan will merely play catch up. Since January 2014, a total of 3,126 dwellings

Talks and events

The rich housekeeper of Warwick Castle

Dr Sylvia Pinches

Thursday, September 10th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Leamington Architecture

Brian Bassett

Thursday, October 8th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Staying on the right track:

My journey by rail

Rob Brighouse

Thursday, October 22nd, **6.30**
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

My life as a bookseller

Andrew Parkes

Thursday, November 19th
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

The full calendar of events for
2015-16 is included with this
Newsletter

Proposal for Student Accommodation: Canal-side student block in Althorpe Street by Alumno developments

Alumno Developments Ltd, a national developer of student residences, has submitted a planning application for purpose-built accommodation for 200 students close to the canal on the Althorpe Industrial Estate.

The proposal includes on-site 24-hour management, facilities that will be attractive to students and landscaping enhancements to the canal side. Tenancies will prohibit residents bringing cars. Alumno claim that their development would reduce pressure on family accommodation and mitigate the problems of refuse disposal and noise that are associated with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).



Graphic sketch of proposal

There are understandable anxieties about the scheme. Some wonder if car-free tenancies are enforceable; others have concerns about further growth in the number of young people in south Leamington and its distorting effect on the local economy and services. Some would prefer that the site be used for affordable

homes or retained for industrial use. And there is some concern that, once granted permission, the development and its management would be ‘trimmed’ in one way or another.



Location of site, overlooking canal

On the other hand, this development is qualitatively different from those presented in the past. The design is sensitive to the industrial legacy of the area and engages attractively with its canal-side setting. The location is some distance from housing and there are apparently robust management and security plans. The claim that developments of this kind are

attractive to students and, in sufficient quantity, do free up family homes is supported by evidence from other towns. And the argument that this stretch of the canal would become safer and more attractive with the addition of residents in a well-managed setting seems credible.

The proposal warrants careful consideration and evidently the developers should be pressed on the key concerns. It presents an opportunity for WDC, Warwick University, developers and the community to work towards a coherent student accommodation planning policy that works for all in place of the current piecemeal approach.

