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The Leamington Society Newsletter

February 2015

Chairman's Notes

Submission of WDC Local Plan

At its meeting on 28th January Warwick District Council approved a Submission Draft of the Local Plan, by 25 votes to 10, with one abstention. The next step will be an examination in public of the Plan by a government appointed inspector, perhaps in April or May.

Before the meeting, WDC issued a short paper listing "Key Issues" concerning the Plan. These included: the Housing Requirement, Duty to Cooperate (with neighbouring councils), Distribution of Development, Provision of Infrastructure, as well as Traffic and Transport.

The Council has taken no account of the new ONS housing projections for the district published last May. Instead it has issued a consultant's report, based mainly on aggregate figures including Coventry plus neighbouring districts. The implicit assumption is that Warwick District is to provide substantially for Coventry's big increase in numbers — even though Coventry City Council has yet to make such a request.

Talks

Bandstands Paul Rabbitts

Thursday, March 12th, 7.30 Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Joint with Warwick Society

The Role of the Police and Crime

Commissioner

Ron Ball

<u>Tuesday</u>, April 14th, 7.30 Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwick

AGM

Thursday, May 14th, <u>7.00</u> pm
Christchurch, Priory Terrace, CV31 1BA
Formal, business, followed by
refreshments and an update on the
Pump Room Gardens project

Leamington only grew in the last two centuries, with limited historic boundaries, so most of the Plan's housing expansion will fall technically within Warwick, Bishop's Tachbrook and Whitnash. But be in no doubt that the impact on Leamington will be severe. We share the grave concerns of the Warwick Society and adjoining parishes regarding infrastructure, traffic and pollution. The Leamington Society has already responded with considerable evidence to WDC consultations; at the public inspection of the Local Plan we will argue that key aspects of the Plan are unsound.

Gateway refusal

The application for the Gateway development, supported by both WDC and Coventry City Council, was rejected by the Inspector and this was confirmed by the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles. In a 240 page report, the Inspector found the economic rationale for the development to be strong, but outweighed by the fact that the development would occupy a very large swathe of Green Belt.

The inspector concluded that any decision on the Green Belt should wait for examination of the Local Plan.

The WDC Draft Local Plan, to be inspected soon, proposes that this land be a sub-regional employment site and no longer designated as Green Belt. If the inspector agrees to this, a renewed Gateway application will surely be submitted.

"To Let" Signs

The streets of Leamington's Old Town and the town's Conservation Area have increasingly been cluttered with estate agents' letting boards. "To Let" boards stay on properties already fully occupied and remain simply as advertising.

One of our members, Gordon Fyfe, has lobbied planning and enforcement officers over many months to ensure that current regulations are applied. At the recent District Council meeting, another member, Cllr. Jerry Weber, put forward a motion to consider stricter control of these signs.

The concentration of these boards disfigures the street scene, as well as labelling them as 'student' areas; according to the Students Union their homes become targets for burglary. In any case prospective tenants and students seeking accommodation mainly use the Internet, a situation admitted by one estate agent on local radio.

There was unanimous support for the motion; councillors and officers will now examine how to restrict these boards through regulation, which have already been adopted by other local authorities with large student populations such as Nottingham and Brighton.

Back to the Future

Several years ago Wright Hassall solicitors moved out of town to large corporate premises off Europa Way. Their grand old Regency frontage on the corner of Waterloo Place has been looking sad and waiting for a new life. No doubt the interior was not ideal as a modern office space and now it is returning to its original function as town housing. The nine flats will not be cheap, but will restore the building and contribute to the town centre.

May 2015: New District Council

Politics and politicians are widely regarded as a turn-off, but it cannot have escaped your attention that a general election is in the offing – on Thursday 7th May. On that same day a new council will also be elected for Warwick District, as well as town and parish councils.

Overall WDC will remain at the same size with 46 councillors. For simplicity this brief summary is confined to Leamington, which will again be represented by 16 district councillors, but elected from eight wards (up from six) each with just two councillors. This has been achieved by moving boundaries, and creating two new wards.

North of the river there is to be a new ward called Newbold, To accommodate this, Manor and Milverton wards have been reduced from three to two councillors each; Crown continues with two, as does Clarendon in the centre of town although with much altered boundaries.

In the south, there is to be a new ward called Sydenham; to accommodate this Brunswick is reduced from three to two councillors, as is Willes, however Willes is being re-named as Leam ward.

A new Leamington Town Council will also be elected on 7th May, based on similar wards and also with a total of 16 councillors, the same number as before. Most of the polling stations will probably

continue, but you may well find that your address has been assigned to a different ward, depending on street by street detail. This information will appear on the polling card; or you could answer the door to canvassers and ask them.

Richard Ashworth

Forthcoming talks: For venues and times see front page of this Newsletter

Bandstands

The talk will look at the History of Bandstands: their evolution and importance to local people and the social history surrounding them in parks and seaside towns; the great foundries that evolved and manufactured bandstands worldwide; to their decline after WW2; and now their renaissance.

The talk will give examples of many historic bandstands, both lost and existing ones and the many restorations that we have seen, plus a few local bandstands. Expect reference to ours, just yards from the venue for the talk.

The speaker Paul Rabbitts, leading UK expert on bandstands, is enthusiastic about his subject, has published two books about it and is preparing a database of all bandstands ever erected in the country. Admission £2.

The Role of the Police and Crime Commissioner

In this year's joint talk with the Warwick Society, Ron Ball, the Commissioner of Police and Crime, will speak about his experiences after more than a year in office, and how he thinks the role itself is developing. No charge.

<u>AGM</u>

After the formal business, followed by refreshments, Archie Pitts will report on progress with the Pump Room Garden restoration project. No charge.

Waiting for the floodgates to open – Major Housing Schemes under consideration around Learnington Spa

Since the beginning of 2014, Warwick District Council has been dealing with 22 planning applications for large housing schemes (of 40 or more houses each) with a total of 5460 dwellings.

Seventeen of these developments are located to the south of Warwick or Leamington Spa and ten of these are clustered around Europa Way, running north to south, or Gallows Hill/Harbury Lane, running east to west. The rest are in Bishops Tachbook (two), in Radford Semele (three) and in Barford (two).

Only five of the twenty-two applications are not in this area. Two are in south Leamington, one in north Leamington, one in Warwick and one on the northern edge of Kenilworth.

This shows that the vast proportion of the applications, that is for 4855 dwellings, are on agricultural land between the M40 and the southern boundary of the Warwick/Leamington conurbation - and so far schemes with a total of 1816 dwellings have been approved.

Six of the developers whose schemes were refused have subsequently appealed against that decision. Two of those appeals have been dismissed (one in Bishops Tachbrook and one in Barford).

We await the outcome of the other four appeals with trepidation since we are in a situation where Warwick District Council is without an approved Local Plan and therefore as long as the proposals are 'sustainable' there is supposed to be a predisposition to approve, whether or not they are in areas designated by the District Council for housing.

These four schemes would add a further 1545 dwellings to the 1816 already approved in this area.

Since the Learnington Society is committed to resisting these developments, it has agreed to make a small financial contribution to groups opposing two of the appeals to help cover their legal costs.

Richard Ward

Waterloo Housing Association – 200 homes on Station Approach

At last a housing development that could please the town; it looks promising to the Leamington Society.

Waterloo Housing Association, working with Warwick District Council, is proposing about 200 homes on the area which extends from Lower Avenue to the Stagecoach bus depot. The site is 4.7 hectares



The site





Typical building styles

so there will be 44 homes to a hectare or 108 to an acre which many argue is justifiable for a site so close to the town centre.

The buildings range from two floor four-bedroom semi-detached houses to five floor blocks of flats.

This is a classic brown field site. It was railway station and sidings from mid nineteenth to mid twentieth century, then a car dealership and bus depot, with some waste land; for last few years much of the site has been a car park – mainly used by rail travellers.

From 2005 to 2008 a developer applied to build about 200 flats, in two brutal style blocks on less than half the site. This was ultimately rejected by WDC and went to appeal which was dismissed, This Society, with CLARA, was active in its opposition to that development. Those of us who remember that fight view the new proposal as a massive improvement.

The detail: About 200 dwellings; 45% are houses, 55% flats; 25% for sale; 75% for affordable rent and shared ownership – half and half); 303 car parking spaces for residents (two per house and 1 to 1.5 per flat depending on number of bedrooms); WDC will retain 100 public car parking spaces. The Leamington Society wonders why the council wants to keep public car parking here – at the rear of the development.

So far we have only seen outline drawings; there will be more to inspect – internal layout, storage for refuse, finer architectural detail and so on. But the omens look good. With easy access to the town by foot, cycle, buses and further afield by rail, and a short rail ride to Birmingham International Airport, for once we are optimistic and the Society looks forward to the full application.

Archie Pitts

Gallery 150 must move again

Gallery 150 is the artists' show room run by the charity Leamington Studio Artists (LSA) on Livery Street. It is a brilliant gallery giving its members and other charitable arts groups the opportunity to showcase their work in a professional setting. *Gallery 150* has grown from strength to strength over the years and has become a very popular exhibition space and retail venue for art lovers and shoppers.

Gallery 150 has been there for the last four years and now has been asked to leave, with one month's notice, to make way for a new restaurant - the second such move since September when Gallery150 moved across the street to make way for YO! Sushi. The volunteers spent hours renovating the new premises. Visitors have commented that it felt like a London Gallery, bringing local culture and events to Leamington's town centre. Sadly, LSA have to move in less than a month and are desperately searching for a new home.

Gallery 150 has staged a number of exhibitions supporting local charities. There was great pleasure in showcasing and selling photography artwork by the *Way Ahead* photography group. Alongside *Way Ahead*, money was raised for the *Rufus Friends Fund* through the work of Terry Dutton. All commission raised from the popular summer automotive art exhibition "Driven" was donated to **BEN** (an automotive charity which helps many Leamington people)

The gallery was fully booked with exhibitions until August 2015 and the many artists involved have been informed, very sadly, that LSA will not be able to host their exhibitions as planned. *Gallery 150*

was more than a showcase. It was the heart of LSA with over 350 members in Royal Leamington Spa, the Midlands and further afield.

Does anyone know of a new location for the gallery and LSA? Since their only funding is members' contributions and charitable donations, it must be a low-cost venue and of course they would like to be up and running as soon as possible.

Any ideas, information or suggestions on the future of the Gallery should be sent to, manager@gallery150.co.uk and should you wish to know more, please look at our website: http://lsa-artists.co.uk/

Leamington Studio Artists

Art in the Park, 2015

Art in the Park will take place again this year in Jephson Gardens on August 1st and 2nd. Last year saw 88 artists, 14 bands, a chain-saw sculptor, Heartbreak Productions, textile t-shirt designers, potters and artists demonstrating their crafts come together for this inaugural event. The result was a vibrant, lively and perceptively different event which had to be repeated. We have the continued key support and involvement of Leamington Studio Artists, Warwick District Council and Bid Leamington to deliver another exciting festival.



We'd like you to be involved in whatever capacity suits you; Art Seller or Demonstrator, Performer, Volunteer or Sponsor. Get a flavour of last summer's event at www.lsa-artists.co.uk where you can also view stall and booking options. Spread the word and 'Like' us on Facebook, let your friends and organisations aware of this opportunity to be part of two days of celebrating our stunning Parks and Creativity here in Leamington Spa.

Carole Sleight (Event Organiser) 07768 617 081 or Carole@artinpark.co.uk

Pump Room Gardens restoration: progress update

Funding

The FoPRG are committed to contributing £100,000 towards the overall cost of the £1 million project. We are nearly there having raised about 85% of our target and are enormously grateful to the generosity of many benefactors and particularly to the Royal Leamington Spa Building Conservation Trust. The recent contributions through Local Giving also raised about £2,200. Some of the donations and pledges are for specific items, like the bandstand or trees.



Thank you to everyone who has helped us get so far. We now need the final spurt to achieve our target. Remember that no pledge will be called until everything is in place and the project is ready to start.

Good news for Leamington's much loved bandstand

The undercroft has been opened up after being bricked up for perhaps half a century. Surveyors have reported that it needs remedial work to make it usable. We do not know yet what this would cost. Headroom is about 5' 8" (or 1725 mm). The space is damp (not surprising as it was bricked up), but not significantly wet and would be invaluable for storing seating for visiting bands; modern sound equipment and storage of the downright ugly electric boxes disfiguring the outside of the bandstand

Remember that Paul Rabbitts, UK's expert on bandstands is talking on his favourite subject at St Peter's Conference Centre on Thursday March 12th, 7.30. Check his website www.paulrabbitts.co.uk. He is not only enthusiastic for seeing surviving ones restored, but used again for their original purpose.









Bandstand undercroft

Roger Charters

Survey

The Friends of the Pump Room Gardens conducted a survey of users of the gardens over10 weeks, closing at the end of January with over 350 responses. These are now being analysed. Our thanks to everyone who completed the survey. An initial inspection shows that the top priority is the restoration of the bandstand and its use for musical events. A Wi-Fi hotspot nearby is also being investigated.

The project must live within its budget so some aspirations may not be possible, but the scheme is truly exciting.

Archie Pitts, Chairman, Friends of Pump Room Gardens

Andrew Davies on Dylan Thomas

Joint meeting with the Literary Society 11/11/2014

The speaker, Andrew Davies, was introduced as one of Warwickshire's most famous sons, having lived here since 1963. His subject was his centenary BBC2 drama 'A Poet in New York', focussed on the last year of Dylan's life.

Andrew Davies was born Welsh, near Cardiff and Dylan Thomas was his boyhood inspiration, encouraged by his father who was a teacher, poetry lover, and devotee of Dylan, also the son of a teacher. Dylan left school at 15 without qualifications, as he refused to study any non-Arts subject. (Andrew recommended the Andrew Lycett biography). Dylan's inspiration was always Wales and he was recognised as a poet early on.

His fairy-tale meeting with Caitlin Macnamara, a flame haired Irish girl, featured in the TV drama. She was beautiful and had been a professional dancer and mistress of Augustus John. They soon had their first child but were not good parents - being too young and bohemian. Dylan made money but they spent it. Her autobiography, dictated in old age *Caitlin - Life with Dylan Thomas* was recommended as the best account of their stormy relationship. AJP Taylor and his wife Margaret were admirers and bought him the boathouse at Laugharne where he had his 'writing shed' (and is worth seeing). Dylan's daughter Aeronwy describes having great fun, running free, and fantasising about the town and its people, which became "Under Milk Wood" and the fictional town of Llareggub (reverse this).

"Under Milk Wood" brought Dylan huge popularity, in USA as well as Britain. He ran out of money so he agreed to perform at the New York premier. However he was in poor health: a smoker and drinker with a permanent cough (possibly TB), diabetes, and brittle bones. After heavy drinking and an ill-advised large dose of morphine administered by his doctor, he died in New York at only 39.

Andrew illustrated his talks with readings and recordings and answered questions. It was an inspiring and poetic evening for the 80-odd people who came.

Fiona Williams [Call 01926 429174 for full article]

Coventry Cathedral

We were delighted to welcome Sarah Hosking to talk about Coventry Cathedral to a packed house.

Sarah trained as an artist and teacher, and worked in arts administration with the Arts Council. This was in the family tradition as Sarah's father, Dick Hosking, was Head of Coventry Art College and her mother, Alma Ramsey, was an artist and sculptor who trained under Henry Moore. Sarah's knowledge of history, architecture and art history and her relaxed and interactive style made her talk not only interesting and enlightening but distinctly amusing and, at times, controversial, creating debate within the audience! Her personal links made the telling more intimate and because of these links we felt as though we were privy to inside gossip.

After the bombing of Coventry and St Michael's Cathedral on 14th November 1940, the determination to rebuild was immediate, despite opposition from the local people who wanted new homes. Following a competition, Basil Spence was selected as architect: his design was the only one to incorporate the ruins of the bombed cathedral, with the new building rising like a Phoenix from the ashes. Basil Spence regarded this as a personal mission and brought together the very best

artists of the time: the stained glass baptistery window by John Piper; the bronze sculpture of St Michael; the enchanting door handles by Jacob Epstein; the iconic tapestry behind the altar by Graham Sutherland; lettering by Ralph Beyer; the beautiful stoneware pots by Hans Coper and the lyrical engravings of the Great West Screen by John Hutton. He did not use Sir Henry Moore and noone knows why – possibly because he was an atheist!

The Cathedral was consecrated on 25th May 1962. By then Spence was nearly bankrupt and in 1965 he resigned, as the appointed clergy of the time were 'making changes'. As Sarah put it "the clergy who were appointed were very fine priests but were put in a visual setting they could not cope with", and this situation continues today. In Sarah's words "it has been Coventrated"! She has very strong feelings about the way the premises are being looked after and believes that there is now a problem of changing usage. This iconic building which houses so many glorious artefacts offers little or no accommodation for community activities. There is no café and no loos and Sarah firmly believes "the churches and cathedrals that survive have loos and girls in the choir"!

Sarah finished with an amazing story of how Basil Spence in July 1962 commissioned her mother, Alma Ramsey, to make the Nativity tableau for Christmas. Alma modelled the head and hands for each of the figures and she dressed the wooden bodies in beautifully draped clothes. The baby Jesus was held in Mary's hand, just as the midwife had told Alma at Sarah's birth when the bombs were falling, to hold her baby in her hand as 'hand is safest'. In 1993 Sarah's mother died and in 1994 the Cathedral dismantled the structure after they had spray painted the figures and redressed them in bits of old clothing and had sawn the hand off Mary and put the baby in a crib! As Sarah owns both the copyright and intellectual property to her mother's work she was given permission and funds to restore the structure and figures based on the original drawings. She made all the costumes after careful study, using her Mum's sewing machine to redress them all. Amazingly, in a bag of scraps retrieved from the Cathedral, Sarah found some of her mother's original sewing recognized by her teeny-weeny stitches like the *Tailor of Gloucester*. Sarah now returns every year to put the Nativity in place.

Sarah's parting comment was "Look after art as it is harder to look after than chickens and children".

Sarah lectures widely, has published three books and founded the Hosking Houses Trust offering time and financial support for older women writers.

Julia Engwell

Biddulph Grange

Dr Charles Brown's sudden and inevitable cancellation of his talk on St George's Chapel and Windsor Castle at very short notice might have meant missing the January meeting altogether, but we were very lucky: Paul Baker offered to speak on Biddulph Grange Garden. He had been National Trust Property Manager there for six years at a crucial time.

Biddulph Grange garden was almost lost. By the time the National Trust rescued it, the house was a hospital; the garden had been partly filled in and its treasures buried. The process took years. Historic information came from the Gardeners Chronicle (for planting plans) and Country Life of 1905, with photographs of the house and garden.

There were, as always, the conflicting claims of conservation and restoration. James Bateman, who spent his coal fortune to build Biddulph Grange house and garden on moorland from 1840, was not

an aristocrat but a plant collector. In his twenties he had already published a book on Guatemalan and Mexican orchids in an "elephantine edition", with royal subscribers.

The garden is unique and truly Victorian - with a gallery combining geology with the seven days of creation; an Egyptian Court and a Chinese garden based on the "willow pattern" plate design. Well worth a visit.

Paul Baker's talk was erudite and entertaining and we are all grateful to him.



Chinese bridge - beautifully reconstructed

Marianne Pitts

Professor John Joseph (Jack) Scarisbrick, MBE

We are delighted to report that Jack Scarisbrick, an emeritus professor of history at Warwick University and long-time member of this society, has been awarded an MBE for his work on behalf of vulnerable children and their families. Jack, with his wife Nuala, launched a children's hospice in Coventry in 2011 called Zoe's Place, with its administrative headquarters in Leamington.

Congratulations to Jack on all that he has achieved. The society is proud of Professor Scarisbrick.

Betty Garscia

Betty Garscia, a long term member of the Leamington Society, was one hundred years old when she died in December. Having sadly lost two husbands she brought up her sons alone in Brookhurst Court on Beverley Road. She gave her two boys a good start in life and they expressed their appreciation at the funeral service on December 17.

Betty studied at Manchester University and worked for British Airways in their financial department. As a result she was able to fly cheaply all over the world, and as an enthusiastic traveller she took full advantage of these opportunities. Her interest in world affairs led her to join Amnesty International and she took part in an early friendship link with St Petersburg when she welcomed a Russian pianist, Dora, into her home and they formed a close life long relationship.

Betty loved living in Leamington and was actively involved in the cultural life of the town. Her greatest passion was for music and she was an excellent cello player. She played regularly in quartets and trios and attended as many concerts locally as she could. She was great fun to be with and her many friends will miss her.

Margaret Begg

Railway matters

Landslide at Harbury

The 350,000 ton landslide on Saturday January 31st on the Learnington side of the Harbury tunnel

has featured in the media. This is a major disaster for Chiltern Railways, Network rail, rail travellers – not only locals but those from much further afield. It has also been a disaster for major local businesses like JLR which uses the line as an important freight route to the south; their new vehicles must now be transported by road.

Important weekend maintenance work on West Coast Rail Routes has been postponed to cope with rail traffic displaced to those routes. Local traders have seen a notable falling off of business as the road system has become even more snarled. Network Rail currently expects the route to reopen in time for Easter. Let us hope it is right.

The end of the line for HS2 FINANCIAL TIMES, February, 13 2015

"Sir, I learnt with delight that David Cameron has announced to MPs that there will be free WiFi on all trains by 2017. What a pre-election masterstroke. For a mere £48m he has eliminated the need for HS2, which was due to start in 2017. As we all know the fundamental economic justification given for the quicker rail journey was the wasted time on trains. With this now eliminated we can save the £50bn planned for HS2. The only last tenuous argument left for HS2 was "capacity", which can now also be solved cheaply by full electrification and upgrades to the West Coast lines. We look forward to the announcement that surely must follow cancelling HS2.

Paul Fullagar, London SE1, UK"

Archie Pitts

New members

We welcome to the Society

Gordon and Patricia Cain

Chairman: Richard Ashworth, 32 Willes Road, CV31 1BN 01926 316703 **Vice Chairmen:** Marianne Pitts, 4 Leam Terrace, CV31 1BB 01926 885532

Geoff Renshaw, 19 Willes Terrace, CV31 1DL, 01926 770600;

Hon. Secretary: Margaret Begg, The Garden House, Clarendon Crescent, CV32 5NR, 01926 423822 **Hon. Treasurer:** Clive Engwell, Clarendon Cottage, Clarendon Square, CV32 5QT, 01926 420 454

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Newsletter Distribution: Clive Engwell and Dorothy 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

www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

Formed in 1956
Reg Charity No 516078



February 2015

Notice is hereby given that the Sixtieth **Annual General Meeting** of the Leamington Society will be held on <u>Thursday</u>, <u>14th of May 2015</u>, <u>starting at 7.00</u>, <u>in ChristChurch</u>, <u>Priory Terrace</u>, <u>Leamington Spa</u>, <u>CV31 1BA</u>.

Richard Ashworth, Chairman

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for absence
- 2. Minutes of the 59th Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 8th of May 2014
- 3. Matters arising from the Minutes not included elsewhere
- 4. To receive reports from the Chairman and Sub Committees
- 5. To receive the independently examined Accounts of the Society for 2014 2015
- 6. Election of Officers:
 - Chairman, Vice Chairmen, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer
- 7. Election of four Committee Members
- 8. Election of Independent Examiner
- 9. Any other Business.

PLEASE NOTE: **Nominations** of candidates for Officers and Committee must be forwarded to the **Chairman not later than Thursday, 23rd April 2015**. Any voting will be by Secret Ballot at the Meeting.

Any motions for consideration at the meeting should also be received by this date. Nominations or motions will <u>not</u> be accepted at the Meeting. Nomination forms may be obtained from the Chairman.

If there is to be an election or if any motion is received, notice will be sent to members seven days before the Annual General Meeting.

After the conclusion of formal business of the AGM we will break for refreshments after which Archie Pitts will speak give an update on progress on the project to restore the Pump Room Gardens