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The Leamington Society Newsletter

May 2005

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

My first duty and pleasure is to thank the members of the society who supported me in my first year as Chairman, and particularly members of both the executive committee and the subcommittees. They have been wonderful. Next I am very pleased to welcome our new Vice-Chairman John Picking and our new Secretary Robin Richmond. John was Chief Executive of WDC for a number of years, and Robin has had a long interest in the welfare of Leamington. They will be great additions to our executive committee. I am also delighted that all members of the committees have agreed to continue for another year.

There are two additional programme events this summer. Following a really enjoyable talk by Jack Watkins on "Recent developments on the Leam Valley Nature Reserve" at our AGM this year, Jack has offered to give us a conducted tour of the Nature Reserve on Newbold Comyn, on Sunday June 12th starting at 2 pm. Jack is the Warden of the Nature Reserve and an expert on its wildlife, so is particularly knowledgeable in what we can expect to see there. Congregate just before 2 pm in the far car park on Newbold Comyn in suitable gear for walking on the Nature Reserve.

We are also pleased that there will be an extra double event on June 16th, at 2pm. Toby Cave who was our Chairman 1963-66 (and almost a founder member) is going to talk on the past, present and future of the society, on what we should be watchful for in the future. Following a break for refreshment, Alan Mayes, who is the Conservation Officer for WDC, is going to talk about conserving the buildings of Leamington.

Next year will be our jubilee year. We will hold various events to celebrate this. In addition we will commemorate the year by arranging for the lettering and some of the decorative parts on the gates to the main entrance of Jephson Gardens (opposite the Pump Rooms) to be gilded. David Palmer has very generously given the money for this. We expect that this work will be carried out this summer. We are grateful to Paul Edwards for suggesting and championing this idea.

A special tree planted is to be in Jephson Gardens. A few weeks ago media coverage was given to the Wollemi Pine. This tree, believed to have been common in the Southern hemisphere 100 and more million years ago but extinct for the last 10 million years, was discovered in 1994 to be growing in an inaccessible forest area of Australia. Since then a secret project to propagate the tree has been underway, and by next year it will be for sale. The society will be giving a specimen for planting in the gardens. This is possible as a result of the generosity of David Hayes, Chairman in 1967-69 and another almost founder member of the society. WDC has accepted both these gifts with pleasure.

It is wonderful to have generous members like David Palmer and David Hayes.

Archie Pitts

Additional Dates for your Diary

June 2005

**Conducted walk at the
Leam Valley Nature Reserve**
Jack Watkins
Sunday, June 12th, 2pm
Newbold Comyn, 2 pm
Meet at the far car park
just before 2 pm

**The past, present and future
for the Leamington Society**
Toby Cave

and then, after refreshments,

**Preserving Leamington's
buildings**
Alan Mayes

Thursday, June 16th, 2 pm
The Mission, George Street

CURRENT ISSUES

Housing. We all know that our part of the country has been very prosperous over recent years. As a result there has been an explosive growth of new housing applications within the district. WDC planners acknowledge this and are working hard to produce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to control the situation. Robin Richmond describes below just how bad the state of affairs has become.

One of the outcomes of our meeting last November on "Demolition Developers" was that John Archer promised to hold a follow up meeting "early in the New Year" at which we expected the launch of a SPD similar to that used by Solihull to protect their suburbs. A draft document has now been prepared but has been put on hold to give top priority to the housing numbers issue. This should be welcomed. WDC planning department also has the problem of the Coventry Airport enquiry.

Quicks site. The society is watching carefully the plans to redevelop Quicks site at Station Approach. A proposal to build a five floor block (4½ floors if you count a mansard roof as half a floor) of 183 flats was turned down by the Planning Committee in February; the developers (Miller Homes) are appealing. They are also expected to resubmit in the next few weeks a very slightly reduced proposal, in the hope that this will avoid the delay caused by the Appeal, which they may not win. The Society is expecting to make representations at the Appeal, if it goes ahead.

Parking at Leamington station. Chiltern Railways are expected to make an application to build a car park on the land owned by the railways between Lower Avenue and Quicks site. Such parking is urgently needed by rail users so it would be difficult to argue against it, as well as being perverse, given the importance of the station to the town. But we are also arguing that the development of the whole area between the railway and Avenue Road needs a carefully coordinated plan. This whole area, stretching all the way from Lower Avenue up to the stagecoach site and beyond to the old goods yard is a truly brownfield site which requires an integrated approach.

Decriminalisation. This ugly word simply means that parking (and like) offences are no longer a matter to be dealt with by the police; the control of such motoring offences will fall instead to the local authority. Our recent prosperity combined with the ever growing density of housing in central Leamington has led to an ever growing problem of car ownership, parking and traffic problems. The town is rapidly seizing up. Decriminalisation can help, but only if it is successfully implemented – in a way that takes into account all the town's road users – residents, business people and visitors. Robin Richmond also describes these issues below.

Overall authority for introducing decriminalisation will be in the hands of WCC, who will pass responsibility for running the scheme for our district to WDC. The details for the scheme in our district are not yet complete. We have been assured that there will be no financial or other incentives to encourage the traffic wardens, who will be WDC employees, to issue traffic tickets.

By the time the system is implemented in our district, we hope the authorities will have learnt from the teething problems that arose when decriminalisation was introduced in Stratford, and any residual ones when it is introduced in Nuneaton later this year. We must hope that conflicts of interest between residents; businesses including their staff, and visitors to the town will be fairly balanced.

Residents in central Leamington must expect to pay for residential parking permits. How much? Apparently garages can occasionally be purchased in Leamington for about £8,000. Will this increase when decriminalisation arrives? The price of some garages in Brighton (a town notorious for its parking problems) is apparently just short of £20,000.

Awards 2006. The executive committee of the society has confirmed that we shall be running our biennial Awards Scheme again in 2006 and look forward to receiving nominations from New Year to Easter next year. The details will be announced later this year.

Archie Pitts

<p>May we remind all members who do not pay by standing order that their subscriptions are due. Very few cheques have been received.</p>

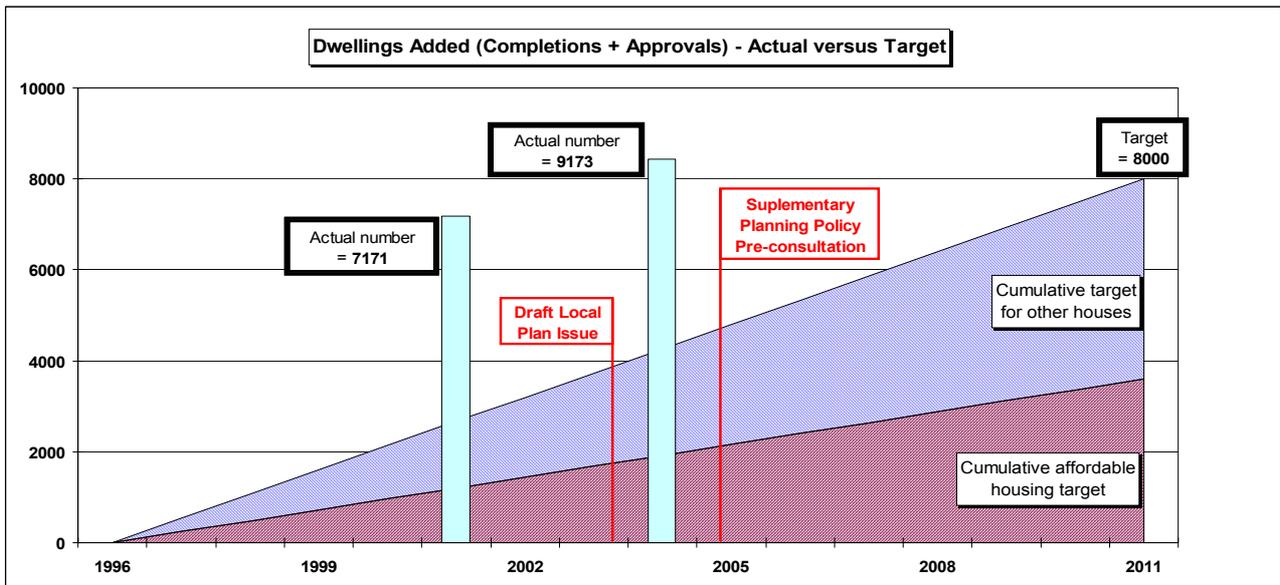
WARWICK DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN DEVELOPMENTS – HOUSING POLICY

The target number of new dwellings for Warwick District has been set at 8,000 for the whole of the 15-year plan period (1996-2011). This is a county requirement. Others are:

1. there will be no new housing allocations;
2. there will be restrictions in rural areas;
3. there will be no development on green field sites;
4. there is an increased requirement for affordable housing; and finally
5. new housing will be directed to urban areas.

Warwick District Council (WDC) has confirmed that the first four comply with county guidelines. However, it does not appear to have monitored the plan effectively, as required by government. The number of houses added in urban areas has been growing at a rate significantly above target and has now exceeded the total plan requirement. WDC admits that the Local Plan would not now comply with county guidelines.

When the First Draft of the District Local Plan was published in December 2003, WDC figures for 2001 showed that the number of dwellings already added (i.e. completions and approvals) had reached 7071 or nearly 90% of the target – one third of the way through the plan period. Three years later (in 2004) the number had reached 9173, so the plan target had been exceeded by 15% – just over half way through the plan period. See chart below.



In two other respects the situation is much worse than portrayed so far. The target proportion of affordable housing in the area is 45% of the total, but only 730 had been completed by 2004, or just 20% of the plan target, with less than half the period remaining. The lack of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on parking standards has contributed to the over-development in the district, as well as encouraging developments that have no off-street parking provision, so adding to our traffic and parking woes.

The District appears to be heading for a difficult social mix of some people without their own housing and others with no alternative but to park their cars on the street or pavement – not the balance of economic growth and environmental quality that the government is seeking.

Thank goodness that the planning department at WDC is now (in May 2005) working on an SPD for housing numbers, having recognised that it now requires 40% of approvals not to proceed and no more approvals over the next 7 years in order to control the situation.

WDC is intending that the housing SPD will be available for public comment in June and July 2005, and ready for adoption by September. The Society will be commenting on this, **so let us know your views on restrictions on dwelling numbers and whether there should be an early SPD on parking standards by contacting the Chairman, Archie Pitts or the Secretary, Robin Richmond.**

Robin Richmond

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, PARKING AND DECRIMINALISATION

Government planning policy guidance on transport and housing also covers off-street parking provision and standards, and the management of on-street parking arrangements. Helpfully, the documents encourage a coherent approach to policy development, e.g.

- *Strategies on parking, traffic and demand management should be consistent with the overall strategy on planning and transport;*
- *Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of integrating decisions on planning and transport in order to reduce the need for travel by car; and*
- *Active management of urban growth and development may require a phased release of development sites.*

They also recognise the existence of conflicting pressures, e.g.

- *The objective of reducing the need to travel also recognises that the car will continue to have an important part to play and for some journeys it will remain the only real option;*
- *Economic growth should not be frustrated by a lack of homes. However, the need for economic growth has to be reconciled with social and environmental considerations, particularly those of enhancing the quality of the environment; and*
- *On-street parking measures should complement land use.*

A phased release of development sites is intended to match transport infrastructure improvements. However, the removal, rather than a gradual tightening, of minimum off-street parking standards is preferred. This does not maintain planning coherence for in-fill development. The inclusion of maximum standards (1.5 spaces per residential dwelling) reinforces the legitimacy of off-street car parking provision and Wandsworth has shown that it is possible to interpret the guidance in a way that enhances the quality of the environment.

The guidance may understate residential car parking needs in respect of young couples seeking affordable housing, students in HMOs (houses in multiple occupancy) and disabled people requiring easy access to their car at the start of their journey. Developers are not required to provide more parking than they or potential occupiers might want and, clearly, financial considerations are likely to influence developers to understate these needs.

The current situation in New Street, Leamington Spa, illustrates the safety issues and deteriorating quality of the environment that can occur when a local planning authority is reluctant to take a coherent approach that focuses on the needs of all of its customers.



The Fire Service has confirmed that there were delays in tackling the blaze at the former Sikh Temple and that some cars had to be moved in order to connect to sufficient hydrants. The Service does go on trial runs



to ensure roads are not obstructed, but that does not mean they will be clear when it needs to attend a fire. Where residents' car parking needs have already exceeded the total parking capacity, inconsiderate parking can lead to others being trapped in their house – in one case for 20 hours at a weekend. WDC's new car parking strategy includes residents' parking schemes with wardens operating from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm on working days and, possibly, selected extensions for entertainment or shopping. Without other (out of hours) enforcement measures the schemes are unlikely to address this critical issue.

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The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is affiliated to the Civic Trust and to the West Midlands Amenity Societies Association. 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.

PLANNING MATTERS

Applications for conversion of buildings to flats, and purpose built flats of an ever-smaller size, continue to be submitted. This, despite the research carried out by the Housebuilders Association, showing a falling demand and a lowering market value for flats.

Despite a request for quality paving for the Parade, we seem to be getting concrete slabs. Much of Warwick town centre has been paved in high quality stone paving and setts.

The major concern of the moment is the design of the proposed Southern Justice Centre; see the enclosed coloured sheet.

Paul Edwards

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TRIBUTES

We are sorry to report the loss of two members of the Society in 2005.

Marion Atherton died in February. She had been a member of the Leamington Society for a number of years and attended many of our meetings. Although she had been ill for about a year she was always very cheerful and managed to take part in many activities. Only about a week before she died Jack and I brought her to the joint meeting with the Literary Society when Alan Grffin spoke about the Czech Patriots in Leamington, which she really enjoyed.

Michael Shelly died quite suddenly in February. He had been a member of the Society since 1982. He was a regular attendee of Society meetings and always ready to give us the use of his expertise, as until he retired he was a Planner with Warwick County Council. Michael was a valuable member of the Programme Sub-Committee and welcomed us into his home for many of our meetings.

Margaret Watkins

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