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The Leamington Society Newsletter

May 2015

This issue of our Newsletter has been held back to report on the result of the recent news about the Local Plan.

Chairman's Notes

Now it Really is Back to the Drawing Board

Perhaps we should be careful about what we wish for. Community voices have been saying for at least the last year that the District's Local Plan was unsound. The Inspector has agreed, but not for the reasons we had suggested. I have summarised the main points — and offer some implications—in a separate article below.

Warwick District: A Great Place to Live and Breathe?

One consequence of the Inspector's finding may well be worsening pollution around Warwick and Leamington. Especially so if WDC persists in locating huge numbers of extra houses in sprawling car dependent suburbs.

Talks and events

The first event after the summer interval will be a talk by Sylvia Pinches

The rich housekeeper of Warwick Castle

Thursday, September 10, 7.30 Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Details of this talk and the calendar of all events for the coming year will be included with the August Newsletter

Many more people's lives are shortened by poor air quality than die in road accidents. While a motorway pile-up attracts banner headlines and sensational pictures, pollution is unseen and lacks drama. No screech of tyres or shocking impact – just a stealthy undermining of public health which neither central nor local government is inclined to take seriously. "We'll do our best" is about as tough or decisive as it gets as a policy statement.

Recent Courier headlines have offered conflicting advice: air quality is improving, then again it's serious and needs tackling. That mirrors divided comment from not very joined up local councils. County does the roads, while District is legally responsible for air quality.

This is quite a technical subject, with emissions of CO_2 and NO_X but also diesel particulates. There is a move locally to understand the issues better and to demand that air quality is no longer an afterthought in public policy. I hope the Newsletter will return to this in later months.

Motes and Beams

Opposite the Town Hall you may have noticed a change just lately and decidedly for the better. "Bills" is no longer glaring out at the Parade with its 'in your face' huge illuminated sign.

It's been nearly a year and a half since the Council suggested this aggressive sign was out of place in a conservation area; then issued a discontinuance order, which was appealed and then the planning inspectorate took six months before finally making up its mind to reject the appeal.

Many thanks to members Dr. Andrew Cave and Richard Ward for pursuing this

It's surprising that Bill locally was so stubborn about this, since branches in other towns had shown more appreciation of their surroundings. But my title alludes to a more recent ugly sin committed by Warwick District itself, only just down the street and right by the entrance to the Jephson Gardens. I refer of course to the WDC sponsored advert for a Vauxhall dealer. It would be nice to think that council enforcement officers might contemplate action against their colleagues to remove this outrage. Sadly, we may have to put up with it for quite a while and accept that in Riverside House there are people who will stick a price tag on anything but fail to recognize its value.

Richard Ashworth

Inspector finds Warwick District Local Plan Unsound

A government planning inspector presided over four days of hearings in the Town Hall, with local planning officers on one side and local developers down the other. Interested parties sat at the end.

These sessions examined three key hurdles (listed below) before considering any further detail and each was split into a long list of questions about numbers, separated from their practical consequences and disregarding the plan as a whole.

A commendable three weeks after the hearing the Inspector sent his conclusions to the Council.

1. Duty to Co-operate

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires co-operation between neighbouring authorities: Coventry City and the other Districts of Warwickshire. The central issue is Coventry's very large projected housing need: how might some of this be shared out? Consultations on this only began in earnest last year, after Coventry's Local Plan was rejected but the process still has a long way to go. The inspector questioned planning officials from each authority in turn, to reveal a muddle. Each council is at a different stage with its Local Plan, while they are required to achieve a joint housing strategy for the whole area – based on official population projections which have shifted markedly from one year to the next.

Because WDC had been talking to its neighbours, the inspector concluded that it had fulfilled this legal duty – even though he failed them on other matters because there is not yet an agreed joint strategy.

Consultation has been through joint committees, typically composed of council leaders and chief executives. The WDC barrister excused the delays as requiring "political buy-in". Geoffrey Renshaw pointed out that there was a democratic deficit: joint policy was being delivered to councils for their assent without open debate, let alone public discussion. The inspector seemed to stifle a hint of amusement and the barrister opined "Well you know how it works sir." Which was very much the point we were making.

This matters, at a time of major debate about devolution of power and finance, but to what form of authority - big city groups, unitary authorities, counties, districts? Someone will have to lead in coordinating plans even if it is no longer called a regional strategy. Localism is a hollow concept.

2. Overall Housing Provision

Dave Barber, lead officer for the Plan, was repeatedly questioned on this, with long arguments over detail. Developers and their agents urged higher provision while community spokesmen queried the projections of population growth for Coventry.

The inspector's letter is blunt: he is satisfied that the population figures used by WDC are correct, based on the most up to date national projections and employing reasonable assumptions. He ignores the evidence from Geoffrey Renshaw and Ray Bullen that the projections for Coventry are exaggerated. Is it credible that Coventry's population will keep on growing at a rate three times faster than other comparable cities in the UK?

The curiosity to question such volatile figures is strangely lacking. Inspectors exercise their powers with due regard to the legal framework. While courts present judgements with a review of evidence and reasons it is disappointing that his letter has no review of the evidence.

On this hangs the fate of our environment: no-one ever "undevelops" suburbs

The inspector's focus was the total for the whole Coventry and Warwickshire area, plus some discussion of Birmingham and Solihull's overspill. Remarkably, his letter states that there is no evidence of constraints to prevent the whole sub-regional housing need being met in full, which sounds very bold, when he did not consider any site locations or the major factor of the Green Belt. Later on he says "It is not the case that the Local Plan should necessarily accommodate all of the residual unmet need from the rest of the HMA (area)", but this is followed by a clear statement of the decisive failure of the WDC Plan - "the absence of a clear strategy" to meet the overall need in full. Logically all our neighbours are also failures.

3. The Supply and Delivery of Housing Land

This day was also all about numbers, with particular concentration on "windfall" sites. The letter concludes that there had been double counting and the windfall numbers in the WDC plan are optimistic. Further, it considers there has been persistent under delivery of housing in the last five years so a 20% buffer is applied on top of the planned figures (in accordance with NPPF rules). The result of all this number crunching is that WDC falls well short on its required five year supply of housing land.

This assertion on the 5 year land supply is grim, leaving WDC critically exposed to rampant demands from developers which will be hard to resist. Local groups have protested at the delay in up-dating this vital measure; we believe that WDC's information and analysis are incomplete.

Further Thoughts

The draft Plan was pushed through in April 2014, as a defence against new applications. The submitted Plan then stuck to 720 houses per annum, even though later projections had indicated a need for only 600. The extra 120 was a gesture towards Coventry's needs.

The inspector failed them on Housing Need anyway and also failed them on Land Supply for the 720 figure. A new Plan may have to wait for years while a sub-regional strategy is agreed. Not only does this seem rough justice, it is undoubtedly bad planning.

Small shifts in household size are acknowledged as a critical factor in calculating housing need. Logically the number of houses per hectare is equally critical for land requirements, but the inspector did not question WDC's low density "garden suburbs" policy when considering land supply.

If there is not enough land then how can this be sound policy? Especially as the inspector's NPPF remit is for "sustainable development" and the planned suburban sprawl pushes the meaning of the misused word "sustainable" to the limit, in both environmental and economic terms.

Planning law is rather like grasping blancmange, so the wish to start with a shopping list of numbers is understandable. But if the predictions are so changeable they provide a very shaky foundation on which to plan for 15 or 20 years. I am tempted to ask the rhetorical question: is the current procedure justified and effective, is it sound?

Richard Ashworth

AGM 2015

The 60th AGM was held at Christchurch, Priory Terrace on Thursday 14th May 2015. Our chairman welcomed over 40 members.

Apologies were received; the minutes of the previous AGM were accepted and signed.

The Chairman's Report and Sub-Committee Reports, which had been circulated, were then presented. The Chairman warmly thanked the executive committee and sub-committees members for their support and hard work during the year, as well as numerous other members, such as our newsletter deliverers.

The Treasurer reported a continuing healthy financial position. The Chairman's Report and Committee Reports were adopted. Copies are available from the Chairman.

Nominations for Leamington Society

Dorothy Clark was not standing for re-election; the committee was delighted to welcome the candidature of Barbara Lynn.

Officers for 2014-15:

Chairman: Richard Ashworth Vice-Chairmen: Marianne Pitts, Richard Ward

Hon. Secretary: Margaret Begg Hon. Treasurer: Clive Engwell

Executive Committee members for 2015-2016:

Rodney King, Barbara Lynn, Geoffrey Renshaw, Jef Tuyn

As there were no other nominations, these were unanimously declared elected.

Paul Edwards agreed to continue to serve as our Planning Representative on the Conservation Area Forum (CAF). Richard Ward and Archie Pitts are also members of CAF. Archie Pitts agreed to remain on the committee in the ex-officio role as immediate past chairman. It was proposed that Ian Salvin be re-appointed as Independent Examiner. A unanimous vote of thanks was carried for his meticulous work in examining the accounts for 2014-15.

Margaret Begg proposed that Alan Mayes, very recently retired Conservation Architect for Warwick District Council, be awarded Life Membership in recognition of his unstinting work over 28 years to protect the heritage of Warwick District. This was unanimously approved. A small presentation was made to Alan with the heartfelt wish that he keeps in touch with us and the town.

At the conclusion of the AGM, Richard Ashworth warmly thanked all members for their work on

behalf of the Society. Richard Ashworth was enthusiastically thanked for all his work.

There was a break to enjoy the excellent sandwiches and snacks prepared by Dorothy Clark and Ruth Bennion.

After the break Archie Pitts gave an update on the progress of the Pump Room Gardens bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. More on this below.

Pump Rooms Garden project – in bullet points

The preparation of the bid for almost £900,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund is reaching its final stages and is on course to be submitted in August.

- If the bid is successful, the money from HLF will be supplemented by matched funding of £100,000 from Warwick District Council and £100,000 raised by the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens (a group under the aegis of the Leamington Society).
- The Friends have now fulfilled their commitment thanks to many generous pledges and particularly that from the Royal Leamington Spa Building Conservation Trust.
- There will be the opportunity to add embellishments to the project if the partnership can raise extra funds from external grant making bodies.
- Restoration will include a full overhaul of the Grade II listed bandstand, including opening up the long-sealed undercroft to be used again for storage, including seating for bands.
- The bandstand is the focal point of the gardens, visually and for community events. Regretably it is also the focal point for disruptive behaviour. The plans propose up-lighting in the ground around the base and CCTV targeted on the bandstand.
- There will also be restoration of the paths and clearing the riverbank to open up views of the river.
- A new drainage system is needed to alleviate the waterlogging of the gardens, particularly at the west end.
- Tree works and new trees are included.
- The general layout of the gardens will be largely unchanged; events should continue much as they do at present.
- The project will include a five year programme of events and activities with a Community Engagement Officer to oversee the programme. The CEO will aim to make these events self-sustaining like the Peace Festival (now in its 37th year).
- WDC will commit to a maintaining the gardens to the new standard including seeking Green Flag Award status for the gardens.

Archie Pitts, Chairman, Friends of the Pump Room Gardens



Railway matters

- The Harbury land slip is now, thankfully for most of us, only a memory although the enormous
 mountain of soil cleared by working around the clock can still be seen in nearby fields. The line
 from Leamington to Banbury was reopened three weeks ahead of schedule to the relief of
 travellers and Chiltern Railways.
- The new running-in-boards to replace the previous ones, which had seriously rotted in only seven years, are in place, gleaming. The new ones are in Western Red Cedar and should last much longer.
- The station gardens, including the planters, will be part of the Leamington in Bloom circuit to be judged in early July. The Friends have also entered, as usual, for the It's Your Neighbourhood scheme run by the Royal Horticultural Society.
- Chiltern have just been granted planning permission to restore the refreshment room on Platform 3 on Leamington Station. Let us hope work starts soon so passengers waiting for their London bound trains in the depth of winter will have somewhere warm to drink their tea or coffee.

Archie Pitts

The falcons are back

Willes Bridge, Grade II listed, was completed in 1827. It was commissioned by Edward Willes of the Newbold Comyn Estate as the Newbold Bridge and is the first of four road bridges over the Leam as it flows through the town. Its design is attributed to the renowned architect John Nash and his partner James Morgan. The bridge was improved in 1876 when its title was changed to Willes Bridge; it was crowned on each side by a bronze falcon, the badge of the house of Willes. The original falcons were removed by Warwickshire County Council in the 1980s following a spate of vandalism and are stored at the council offices in Warwick.

Warwickshire County Council has extensively repaired the heavily eroded stone masonry parapets and balustrading, replacing the worst affected sections with new Clipsham stone to match the





original. Replicas of the original bronze falcons have been made from cold cast bronze resin. The replicas look identical to the original falcons but have no scrap value and this is advertised on their pedestals. The falcons are fixed into the central parapet pedestals using stainless steel dowels in a configuration to avoid any alterations to the existing structure.

It would be great to see the original falcons in a secure public place; one could be in the Warwickshire County Record Office and the other in Leamington Art Gallery and Museum - or perhaps in Leamington Town Hall?

Good to see the falcons back on a bridge which looks perfect. Congratulations to the Bridges department at WCC.

Archie Pitts

From dereliction to splendour in a year





66 Upper Holly Walk: transformed in a year

Roger Charters. Marianne Pitts

In the May 2014 issue, we were pleased to report that TAG Properties was restoring the ruins of this fine regency style large house in Upper Holly Walk, next to the Episode hotel. The building work is now completed although landscaping the front garden is not. The new owner has moved in with his family. Another triumph for TAG.

The Sensory Garden 2015

The garden has been completely remodelled and replanted this year. Four of the five senses: sight, taste, touch and smell, but not sound, are represented botanically with edible and aromatic plants, herbs, teasels, lambs' ears, bright bulbs and annuals. For sound, and to supplement the local birdsong, there is a sonorous xylophone. Winding footpaths are textured with gravel, setts, paving and tarmac and the entry is through a circular arch lined with mirror glass.

Many trees were cut down and been recycled into statues, fencing and trellises for climbing plants. A lot of care, thought and hard work has been put into this by WDC and the contractor. The whole effect is a real triumph.





Bandstands

Paul Rabbitts showed pictures of a large array of bandstands from all over Britain, many beautifully restored in recent years, often with Heritage Lottery Fund grants. He also had postcards of others long lost, many in the belief that they could be used for WWII armaments. They could not and were dumped at sea.

British manufactured bandstands were exported to the colonies, like cricket.

He explained the Victorian drive for parks and gardens, frequently with a bandstand to provide a stage for bands playing to thousands, if not tens of thousands. Their aim was to improve the lot of the growing number of urban factory worker with nowhere to go but the public house: a movement referred to as *rational recreation*.

We heard about the great Victorian manufacturers including the Walter McFarlane Saracen factory in Glasgow and the Sun factory.

He named and shamed many bandstands which, in his eyes, are bad, either because they are so dilapidated to be beyond salvation, or are modern ones of bad design. Paul was not afraid to dismiss the Bexhill award winning design "more like a handkerchief flying in the wind". He advocates vibrant and exciting colours; apparently English Heritage is tolerant of



Spa Strummers, Pump Room Gardens

changes of colour schemes that enhance delicate cast iron features – but we would need to make the case carefully when the time comes for ours.

Today there are many bands keen to play on bandstands, often for free. Paul Rabbitts is passionate about keeping bandstands used for their purpose. This will go a long way to discourage vandalism.

As we hoped, the talk was tailored to his audience so he showed us pictures of some long gone local bandstands, like those in Jephson Gardens, Victoria Park, the Rec, and pictures of surviving ones like Rugby's.

Paul talked about the ups and downs of public parks and bandstands; the last 25 years have been good, largely due to HLF; coming years will be much harder due to the increasing squeeze on local authority funds.

He is a self-confessed bandstand geek. Go to www.paulrabbitts.co.uk to discover more.

Archie Pitts

Bread

Everyone who came to the meeting enjoyed it. The bread samples with dips, made by Steve and Michele Burnett, were delicious and the story told by this enterprising and attractive couple of Australians was captivating. For some reason, both feel more at home in England than in Australia and that is definitely our gain. Their local business began in a solar-powered coffee van at the first Leamington Food Fair, where customers could see the coffee being made, and they have, by degrees, expanded to two premises in central Leamington (Regent Street and Warwick Street) and a double set of premises in Smith Street, Warwick. They live "above the shop".

The emphasis is on local produce: local flour, jam, milk ... and local employment. Their range of good artisan breads is baked in their ovens at Budbrooke, by a team including a local boy, trained at their expense. "French bread can only be made by a Frenchman": their supplier is Monsieur Thierry of Tewkesbury. Cakes are baked by local ladies, not for money, but for exchange. *Bread's* gluten free cakes taste as good as the others, and they are hoping to achieve the same for gluten-free bread. Students and school children employees come and go; most of the older staff are loyal and stay.

They must be fun to work for and their produce and shops are a delight.

Marianne Pitts

Police and Crime Commissioner

Joint meeting with the Warwick Society

Ron Ball was elected on an independent ticket as our very first County Police and Crime Commissioner in November 2012. Government wanted to put an individual rather than a faceless "Police Authority" committee in charge (and there is the possibility of "ordinary" complaints being added to his remit). His style is collegiate, working with politicians, police staff and local groups for key appointments (Chief Constable), distributing grants and listening to the public. Early on three issues were identified: business people and remote rural communities felt under-protected and cybercrime is a growing issue for everyone.

To save money Warwickshire and West Mercia have – not merged – but gone into partnership, sharing departments such as IT, Human Resources and dog handling. To avoid staff cuts, the Police Precept has been raised as far as it can without prompting a referendum: Ron finds that his audience is prepared to spend an extra few pennies a week for Police. He took over a well-run local force with

sound finances and falling crime rates and the sharing agreement has been held up nationally as an example to other Police authorities on saving money, short of merging. He believes that Scotland's policy, where 12 authorities have been knocked into just one, appointed by the government, bodes ill for remote rural areas in that country – resources will be sucked into the central belt.

He spent 40 years of his working life flying jet engines but claims to enjoy this even more. Old fashioned crime: theft, burglary, assault is falling. Cybercrime is proving intractable – partly because there are no physical traces such as foot or finger prints and the criminal could be anywhere in the world. The public protects property with keys and burglar alarms but have not learnt electronic protection (changing and varying passwords) and cyber thieves take advantage of this. If the Conservatives form the new government he will face an election in May 2016; the Labour party have abolished the elections but not the post – leaving him in charge indefinitely! We could do much worse.

Marianne Pitts

William Allan Jeffery, 1930 - 2015

Allan was born and educated in the North East (and in Penrith as an evacuee) and took great pride in his heritage, even though he never made it back "home" permanently. After school, Allan studied Chemical Engineering at Sheffield University, where he met Mavis. He was a keen photographer and tennis player all his life. Through his membership of the Leamington Real Tennis club, he organised several memorable dinners for the Leamington Society.

After his degree, Allan completed his National Service in the UK. He then joined the National Coal Board in County Durham as a technical officer. Mining was in the blood: Allan's father was a coke plant manager and his family had been Cornish tin miners. Allan and Mavis were married in May 1957. In 1962, Allan was posted to the National Coal Board Head Office in Buckingham Palace Road. They bought a house in Gerrard's Cross, where their daughter Janet and son Richard were born.

In 1967, Allan was posted to the pilot Keresley coke processing plant. Allan's job was to resolve the productivity and pollution issues, which he achieved, although he was always very cautious about admitting where he worked when talking with fellow conservationists.

Having bought a house in Allesley, Mavis and the children joined Allan in 1968. Allan expected this posting to be only for a couple of years. However the UK coal industry was changing and Allan, realising that he would be in the Midlands for longer, took the opportunity to see what he could contribute to the local community.

Over the next 46 years Allan's interests included pedestrian and cyclist road safety; chairmanship of the Allesley and Coundon Wedge Conservation Society from 1973 - 1998; supporting the Allesley Twinning society and supporting the Leamington Society, serving on the committee and as Vice-Chairman. He fought hard to save the Regent Hotel and was frustrated by our failure.

We knew Allan as a kind and generous man, who would stand up for what he believed in.

Richard Jeffery and Marianne Pitts

New members

We welcome to our Society

Michael Ian Crawshaw and Catherine Fiona Smith

Mr Clifford and Mrs Carol Veasey

Adrian Gains and Mary Paterson

Graham and Maggie Williams

Leamington Society Newsletters on-line

Members are reminded that all our newsletters since August 2004 are available in colour on our website www.LeamingtonSociety.org.uk

All members who have provided the society with an up-to-date email address should receive reminders of any coming talk or event. The reminders are sent out approximately a week before the occasion and again the day or so before. If you do not receive these reminders but would like to, please let a member of the committee know.

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

Richard Ward, 3 Bell Court, The Maltings, CV32 5FH, 01926 422750

Hon. Secretary: Margaret Begg, The Garden House, Clarendon Crescent, CV32 5NR, 01926 423822 **Hon. Treasurer:** Clive Engwell, Clarendon Lodge, Clarendon Square, CV32 5QT, 01926 420454

Other Committee Members:

Rodney King 01926 334053 Barbara Lynn 01926 831414

Archie Pitts 01926 885532 Geoffrey Renshaw 01926 770600

Jef Tuyn 01926 339085

Newsletter Distribution: Dorothy Clark

The Learnington 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 Learnington Spa and to encourage high standards of planning and architecture Charity No. 516078

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