



www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

The Leamington Society Newsletter

February 2012

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Regeneration in the centre of Leamington. I recently attended a District Planning Forum, which meets every six months. The Forum brings together Councillors and a wide range of community groups from around the District to receive feedback and briefings from Council Officers. On this occasion there was a timely comment from an independent and experienced Councillor. Referring to the government's "Localism" policy he remarked that in the past local people largely received whatever Warwick District Council said. In future, he remarked, there would have to be a shift: less top-down and more bottom-up.

I also observed a recent Overview & Scrutiny meeting of the Council, soon after the rejection of the Clarendon Arcade application. During the discussion one Councillor called for a mature public debate about the future of retailing in Leamington town centre. This is why the Leamington Society set up a recent open meeting about regeneration of the Chandos Street car park area. There is a full report and articles in this Newsletter (pages 3 - 8) and I very much hope that dialogue will continue.

Meeting Places. An important part of our Society is the programme of talks. We are much indebted to the organisers, who select and book speakers on a wide range of topics. This needs to be planned far ahead, with dates and venues published in our annual Programme card and widely advertised.

Some of you will have wondered why there was a last minute change of place for a recent talk. The answer is that Marianne Pitts was invited to meet the new contractors for the Pump Rooms. She was dismayed

The March meeting, our Annual Joint Meeting with the Warwick Society, will be held at the Lord Leycester, Warwick

Dates for your Diary

*Joint meeting with Warwick Society
The Great Fire of Warwick, speaker
Gillian White*

Tuesday, March 6th, 7.30

*Lord Leycester Hospital
Warwick*

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Mike Bunney

Thursday, April 26th, 7.30

Pump Room Annexe

AGM

Thursday, May 10th, 7.30

Pump Room Annexe

*Followed by refreshments and
Short presentation by Severn Trent
on their recent work in Leamington*

*Leamington Society Biennial Awards,
2012*

Thursday, July 12th, 7.15 for 7.30

*Conference Centre, St Peter's Church,
Dormer Place*

For details see page 15 of Newsletter

to be confronted by a huge increase in the hiring rate, many times the fee at which we had booked, to start immediately. There followed a lively exchange of e-mails and I am glad to say that our dates up to and

Redevelopment of Chandos Street car park

**Public Meeting arranged by the Leamington Society,
8th February 2012, Pump Rooms, Royal Leamington Spa,**

Town councillors, District councillors representing Leamington wards, Warwick District officers, members of the Leamington Society, the Chamber of Trade, the local press and interested parties were invited to an open discussion of possible alternatives to the plans for the Clarendon Arcade. About 90 came. It was a lively meeting.



Photograph by Roger Charters

The discussion

All of us want the same end: Leamington Spa to be a thriving, busy, prosperous and attractive town; but there was substantial disagreement about the means. Some were in favour of the proposal as it stands; some think Old Town would be a better site for retail development; some wish the car park to remain an open space and development limited to the outside edges of the present site, preserving the existing street pattern. Most of us accepted that regeneration of the site is now inevitable but were concerned that the Clarendon Arcade scheme was clumsy and ugly, much meaner and more crowded than Royal Priors, designed by the same architects (Chapman Taylor) 30 years ago.

Do we need to develop at all? If so, why? Does Leamington Spa need substantial capital investment to compete with our near neighbours, Coventry, Solihull and Banbury? Traditionally such investment has taken the form of large shopping malls, which are successful abroad and should be successful here. Our experience has been varied. Royal Priors is rated a success, but Regency Arcade is being converted to a hotel and Livery Street (the latest development and not strictly a mall) is struggling. Others felt that shopping malls were passé and out of date and that the redevelopment should be mixed and adaptable to include housing and leisure as well as retail.



Development area with Chandos Street car park shown as inner rectangle

The inexorable rise of e-tailing in various forms means that shops will surely become less necessary and town centre shops are struggling to compete with out of town shopping centres and their free parking. We need a critical mass of attractions, not necessarily shops, in the town centre to bring in the public. The statement that the proposed development is based on an outdated economic model aroused a spontaneous

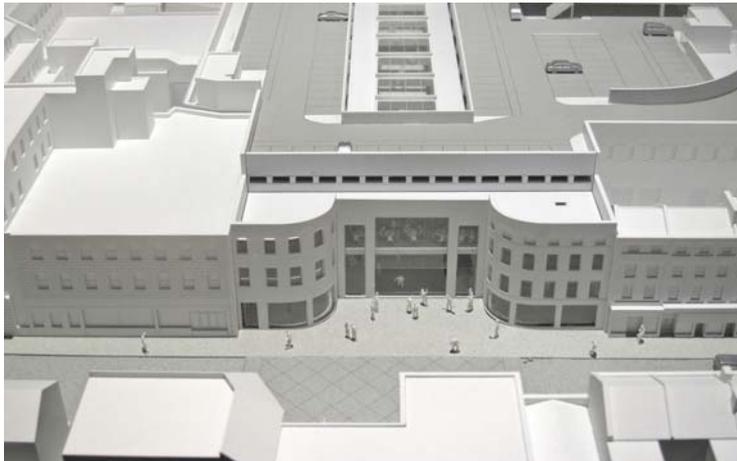
round of applause! Opposition is not only on aesthetic grounds.

We were reminded of the reasons given by the Planning Committee when they surprisingly rejected Wilson Bowden's application in November 2011 in the face of political support and recommendation by officers. They were

- The bulk and mass of the development

- The adverse effect on neighbours
- Damage to the Conservation Area
- The excessive provision for car parking and the absence of any public transport provision
- Loss of existing street pattern

The bulk and mass of the building, with car parking and plant on the roof, makes it look like a factory or a prison. Its large expanses of featureless brickwork are not in keeping with local buildings: look at Boots or Waterstones.



Warwick Street entrance to Clarendon Arcade

Does it need so many car parking places when national and local policy is to “reduce the need for car travel”? With underground car parking as well as underground lorry unloading areas, the roof line would be lowered *by a third*. The building would then cast a smaller shadow on neighbours and improve the view from north, south and east. It would also eliminate ramps to higher levels freeing space for retail use.

Reducing the height would reduce the cost of construction, currently estimated at £90 million, all from private finance, such as a pension fund or an insurance company (as far as we know, not yet arranged). WDC as a “partner” of Wilson Bowden and freeholder of the site expects to earn money from the development but is not expecting to invest its own/our money in the construction. The exact terms of the partnership are commercially sensitive and not public.

To preserve the existing street pattern, the “anchor store” should occupy only the Chandos Street car park on three levels: basement, ground, first. A roof garden (with café?) to hide the necessary but ugly plant was another suggestion.

The token and unattractive terraced housing stuck on the Chandos Street facade should be abandoned to give the store more space. Instead, housing in flats and maisonettes could be built at the first and second floors levels along Guy Street at the back of the Parade, an area adjoining other housing which needs redevelopment. Warwick District needs more dwellings. The Chandos Street car park occupies an area once covered by streets of terraced houses,



Proposed development with two floors of car parking and plant deck above

demolished in the 1970s.

Even if development is necessary, does it have to be a mall? English Heritage's case studies of successful developments (one designed by Chapman Taylor) in historic towns and cities are *all* open air, with trees and pedestrianised areas. See *Retail Development in Historic Areas*, December 2005

http://www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/Retail_Development_in_Historic_Areas.pdf

For hard copy contact English Heritage at 0870 333 1181, or customers@english-heritage.org.uk

Such streets are open round-the-clock for access, leisure and enjoyment whereas the Clarendon Arcade "Mall", like Royal Priors, would be closed and locked at 7 p.m. No one likes that, but compelling malls to stay open in the evening is "too prescriptive". Making the whole length of Guy Street, Guy Place West and Oxford Row pedestrianised, linked to the Parade by a passage, would enable the whole area to contribute to the evening economy and attract a wider range of businesses.

A good "anchor store" is considered essential for financial success. Who is it to be? There never was an anchor store in Livery Street and when Woodward's closed in 2004, it closed for good, although the national economy was then prosperous. John Lewis and Waitrose apparently are not interested and Marks and Spencer's would leave large vacancies on the Parade and in Royal Priors. The planned arcade has a very large number of units, most of them long and narrow with small shop fronts, not ideal for retailers. The profitability of the whole venture is very much in doubt. To attract good tenants Clarendon Arcade will have to offer better terms than its competitors, which will cause "churning" and reduce rents in the town. Unless new traders move in, there will be yet more empty shops. At present few chains are expanding and many are reducing their number of outlets. This proposal seems both too large and too small: too large for Leamington town centre and too small to succeed.

The mixture of housing, parks and interesting local shops is what makes Leamington Spa attractive and successful, punching far above its weight in the retail league tables. The majority believed that we should build on our strength and that any redevelopment on this attractive and well-loved open space should be both flexible and imaginative.

The way forward

The meeting agreed that redevelopment of the area was desirable and inevitable. But it must be better and more imaginative than the scheme proposed by Wilson Bowden in 2011. To summarise

- The anchor store to be built on the car park site, but to extend no further. The anchor store to be on three levels (basement, ground and first floor).
- The original street pattern to be retained.
- Car parking, deliveries and servicing to be *underground*. Without rooftop car parks the building is *one third lower* and much less obtrusive when viewed from north, south, and east. The development would



Whitefriars, Canterbury
Architects, Chapman Taylor

The Clarendon Arcade: An exciting new opportunity – or more of the same?

The Clarendon Arcade development proposed by Wilson Bowden has created considerable debate, with arguments both for and against the proposal. However, there does appear to be a consensus, on both sides of the debate, that doing nothing is not an option. Economic reality is such that the town has to generate revenue if we want to have the quality of facilities and services we have come to expect. Having attended and listened to the debate at the open meeting to consider alternative proposals held on the 8th February I offer the following three points which I believe should be taken into consideration with regard to any new proposal.

1. The nature of retailing is changing rapidly. One obvious change is the increase in internet shopping driven by convenience and competitive pricing. Internet shopping will not necessarily cause the death of the physical shop because thankfully, we are naturally gregarious and enjoy social interaction, traits with which the internet cannot compete. However, it is apparent that shopping today is just one element in a much broader mix of attractions in which aspects of leisure and entertainment play an increasingly important role. On one level, a good example can be found around the waterfront in Bristol where shopping sits alongside heritage displays, entertainment and a wide variety of attractions. On another level, and closer to home, the Leamington Peace Festival achieves a similar result. The essential ingredient in both examples is the creation of a vibrant and attractive environment conducive to pleasure and business.
2. Independent shops are what differentiates Leamington from other towns and constitute one of its main assets. National chain stores can be found in shopping malls throughout the country whereas the independents bring colour, variety and uniqueness. Time and again visitors will state that their reason for choosing Leamington is because of the independents. But if Leamington wishes to attract a broader range independent shops it needs to set rents at a competitive level that allow a profit to be made and shops to be presented attractively. Again, a good example of an area working well is the east end of Leamington's Regent Street.
3. The concentration of development in the north of the town is creating problems for development lower down the Parade. Livery Street is struggling whilst the attractive small units on Regent Grove are mostly empty despite the regeneration leading to Lantern Corner. Hopefully the development of a hotel and mini supermarket in what was the Regency Arcade will be of benefit. But how will more development in the north of the town help spread visitor footfall to those areas in decline? When asked, Wilson Bowden said that the increase in visitors to Clarendon Arcade would eventually permeate to all parts of the town. The question is whether the planned development is capable of attracting the increase in visitors required to benefit all parts of the town. This is a big ask.

So, judged against the above points, does the current Wilson Bowden plan meet the future shopping needs of Leamington? In my view it falls far short, not necessarily for the reasons of scale and height, but more for its mediocrity, lack of vision and outdatedness. The site provides a unique opportunity for an exciting and forward thinking development that dares to be different, meets the new retail agenda, provides an unforgettable experience and is capable of delivering the increase in visitors that the town needs.

Quite simply, Leamington deserves better than the current plan and Warwick District Council's Planning Committee should, on our behalf, demand better. If the current developers are unable to deliver the goods, then we should challenge the market and find a developer that can. Far better that

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Newsletter Distribution

Jo Clark

The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is a member of 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.

EVENTS to May 2012

Joint meeting with Warwick Society

The Great Fire of Warwick

Tuesday, March 6th, 7.30, **Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwick**

Gillian White

Note the change of venue

The Great Fire of Warwick of 5 September 1694 destroyed many of the town's mediæval streets. Their inhabitants were left homeless, their livelihoods in ruins. The streets were rebuilt in the elegant, contemporary style that we now know as Georgian. Dr White tells the story of the fire, the people, and the transformation of the town.

Dr Gillian White has worked at the Warwickshire Museum and for the National Trust. She now works at Leicester University and teaches at Oxford University; she is a most entertaining speaker.

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Thursday, April 26th, 7.30, Pump Room Annexe

Mike Bunney

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust is one of 47 Wildlife Trusts in Britain which, collectively, are celebrating their movement's centenary this year (WWT was first registered 50 years ago).

This talk will review briefly the development of the movement; and then explore the issues that will affect everyone in the future and how these can be managed, highlighting local examples.

Mike Bunney has been Chair of the WWT for over 3 years, and a member since 1983

AGM

Thursday, May 10th, 7.30, Pump Room Annexe

The formal business of our AGM will be followed at 8.30 by refreshments and a short presentation by Severn Trent on their works in Leamington as well as their future plans for our town.

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We welcome as new members of the Society:

- Nicholas and Cheryl Hunnisett
- Alasdair MacKay
- David Blower
- Richard Piggott

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**Subscriptions for 2012 -13 are due on April 1st.
The subscription remains £10 per household and
£7 for single person.**



February 2012

Notice is hereby given that the Fifty-sixth **Annual General Meeting** of the Leamington Society will be held on **Thursday 10th of May 2012**, starting at 7.30, in the **Pump Room Annexe, Leamington Spa**.

Richard Ashworth, Chairman

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 56th Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 12th of May 2011
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 2011 - 2012
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 19th, April 2012**. 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 **not** 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 Geoff Hancock, from Severn Trent, will tell us about the conclusion of Phases 1 and 2 of their works in Leamington and what they will be doing next.