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The Leamington Society Newsletter

November 2013

Chairman's Notes

Leamington and the University

Is Leamington a university town without a campus? It is home for much of the year to a very large community of students, not to mention the many university staff who live here. Past newsletters have written about District Council policy on HMOs (houses in multiple occupation): on the shortage of affordable housing, as well as the vexed issue of parking spaces, and some complaints about rubbish or late parties.

This may suggest the easy assumption that students are a problem. On the contrary, Leamington would be much the poorer without a university on its doorstep. And not just financially poorer. We welcome the huge benefit to our town.

However there has to be mutual respect for the different life styles of the long term residents of the town and the occupants of the HMOs, whether they be students or not.

Debate over housing numbers

In the course of a year countless meetings and committees take place in the Town Hall. Among these, the six-monthly "Planning Forum" is usually uneventful: amenity society and local interest groups are invited, along with parish and district councillors, for an update from officers followed by a few questions.

Suddenly a recent Forum in mid-October sprang to life, buzzing with urgent debate. The unlikely trigger was the calculation of Warwick District's 5 year Housing Land Supply. This matters because the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) says to local councils in effect: provide 5 year's supply of land for house building or lose control of planning.

At the Forum we were presented with two parallel sets of calculations: one from a retired professional planning officer from Coventry City Council, the other by the WDC officer running the Local Plan process. There was no complex mathematics, just simple arithmetic but calculated over quite a number of steps, several of which required assumptions on the input of numbers. The

Talks

Cutting Edge IT in Leamington Spa

John Cooke

Tuesday, December 10th, 7.30

St Peter's Conference Centre,
Dormer Place, CV32 5AA

2014

Smallpeice Trust & British Manufacture

**Chris White MP and Dr Andrew
Cave**

Thursday, January 16th, 7.30
Conference Centre,
Dormer Place

Dudley, Elizabeth I and Kenilworth Gillian White

Tuesday, February 18th, 7.30

Conference Centre,
Dormer Place

outcomes were striking. Either the District has only 2.8 years of available housing land or it has 5.1 years supply. This stark difference arises – not from incompetence or cooking the books – but from a series of differing numbers and assumptions.

We are often told that a local plan must arise from a foundation of robust evidence. You can read in this newsletter a report of Ian Dove's recent talk. With all due respect, it occurs to me that if the evidence in these matters were incontrovertible there would be no career available to a planning QC. The recent Planning Forum was a vivid illustration that selection and judgement comes hugely into play. At that event the chair of the planning committee called for urgent discussion to try and reconcile the differing interpretations, to be followed by a further forum in a matter of weeks.

Bath Place Community Venture

The group had to leave its original site after the Victorian school building caught fire in September 2009.

While that derelict building is up for sale, BPCV is in discussion with Warwickshire County Council, the owners, about the possible purchase by BPCV. The group has recently received grants from SIB (Social Investment Business) and from Royal Leamington Spa Building Conservation Trust to explore the feasibility of buying and restoring the site to house BPCV's community work. It will be a challenging task, but we wish it luck.

Sex Club Licence Renewal

At a recent hearing of the District Regulatory Committee, an SEV (Sexual Entertainment Venue) licence for "Shades" at 6a The High Street was granted for another year. The Committee divided 5 votes for and 5 against, with the chairman casting his vote in favour: a similar outcome to last year's initial grant of the licence. The Leamington Society had, along with considerable numbers, objected to the renewal – on grounds of the regeneration of Old Town, and the proximity of residential property, places of worship, shops and community facilities – as referred to in the Council's policy guidelines.

Richard Ashworth

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

Cutting Edge IT in Leamington Spa, John Cooke

Leamington Spa is a hotbed of cutting edge IT, not only for the numerous computer games firms in the area, but also for more fundamental applications. John Cooke, a graduate in computer sciences from Warwick University, founded his firm Black Pepper here which serves firms around the world like Xerox, IBM, Ford and TUI travel. John will explain the reasons why Leamington is so attractive to IT personnel and how it is likely to be a location for high tech industry for years to come.

Smallpeice Trust & British Manufacture, Chris White MP and Dr Andrew Cave

True wealth in Britain was and is generated by design, engineering and manufacturing. The Smallpeice Trust is a Leamington based educational charity dedicated to encouraging young people into engineering. It promotes STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to 10-18 year olds nationwide. In 2013 over 20,000 students will have participated in its events.

Third party support has grown very strongly in the recent past. Dr Andrew Cave, Chief Executive, will talk about the Trust and the reasons for its recent success.

Chris White MP, also an engineer, is co-chair of the Associate Parliamentary Manufacturing Group. He will tell us how manufacturing will play a key role in rebalancing our economy away from dependence on London and financial services and towards other regions and a revival of manufacturing industry, with special reference to Leamington.

Dudley, Elizabeth I and Kenilworth, Gillian White

In July 1575 Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, made one last attempt to persuade Queen Elizabeth I to marry him. He staged a lavish entertainment for her at Kenilworth Castle, which combined poetry, music, dancing, fireworks, hunting and feasting in the romantic and chivalrous setting of one of medieval England's finest castles. Gillian White will look at the way in which the whole of the castle and its land was brought into play and discusses the controversial relationship between Elizabeth and Dudley.

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“Leave your common sense at home: Planning Law today” with Ian Dove

Ian Dove is a very successful Planning barrister and after this talk it is easy to see why. He is learned, competent and very articulate. His summary of the history and present state of English Planning Law was both a model of clarity and tough going for most of us. The entertaining quiz questions woven into the talk made us aware of our ignorance of facts, figures and trends.

One of the main pillars of his title was that “Localism” does not mean what you might assume: it does *not* mean that local people’s preferences have priority in planning regulation. “Localism”, since the abolition of Regional Strategies, means that local authorities must consult and agree with neighbouring local authorities over housing and infrastructure and other planning issues. [Our immediate neighbours are Coventry, Solihull, Rugby and Stratford]. Coventry’s proposed Local Plan was rejected by the Planning Inspector on the grounds of non-consultation earlier this year.

One of the by-products (and casualties) of the Localism Bill was the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan: to reflect the views of the local population; be consistent with the prevailing Local Plan *and* be approved in a local referendum. Ian could think of only one completion so far. He was clear that Neighbourhood Plans “are arguably a hopeless waste of time”.

The present coalition have made a clean sweep of the muddle of planning guidelines and recommendations (PPS / PPG) which have accrued since the 1990 Town and County Planning Act Consolidation. Pages of guidance on (say) noise, were reduced to a single page, or even a single sentence. Having thrown out the baby with the bathwater, the Taylor Review (available only on the internet) is now restoring some essential guidelines to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). One of the *new* requirements of any Local Plan is that the Local Authority hold a 5 year stock of building land, with a 5% safety margin. The current figure of 12,000 dwellings for WDC seems acceptable to Ian, as it has been arrived at by many independent research bodies and consultants. [The fact that all these have been modelled on the same assumptions may explain their unanimity – but when Ian was asked to consider that the assumption of a cumulative 2½% growth rate over 20 years may be unrealistic and optimistic and lead to an excessive land requirement he declined to comment. He is a lawyer, not a planner.]

Eric Pickles’ idea of “muscular localism” is one where the Local Plan meets all the requirements of central government through the Inspectorate. If and when the Local Plan is out of date and / or non-existent, the balance of power in the decision-making process swings towards the developers. They are then entitled to develop as they wish, with scant consideration for previously sacrosanct policies

such as Town Centre priority for retail development, Conservation Areas and so on. It is not clear whether even the Green Belt remains protected, although apparently cultural wellbeing is still an objective in planning policy. In the absence of a valid Local Plan – or even if it is present - there is a “golden thread” in favour of *sustainable development*, a phrase which has not yet been legally defined.

There is help available on the internet: www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/, which provides free and independent advice to individuals and civic societies. Ian advised that there are local representatives who can help us. He has also made the slides of his talk available to us, although what he said and how he said it cannot be appreciated from them. We are dismayed by the message that planning has become so much more centralised and we are grateful to him for his generous and carefully prepared talk.

Marianne Pitts

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Implications for Warwick District Council of Ian Dove’s presentation

In his excellent presentation Ian did not have time to mention the *Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013* which has emasculated the much vaunted localism of the Localism Act 2011. This new Act provides the option to make planning applications directly to the Secretary of State, when a local planning authority has been *designated* as not performing adequately in determining planning applications, which will (for example) enable applicants to avoid delays in local decision-making. WDC is second bottom in the statistics on planning applications for dealing with ‘other’ planning applications, with only 35% of such applications being dealt with in the appropriate time. (Coventry is top in all three categories). WDC is not yet on any list of possible designated local planning authorities but it clearly has to get its act together to avoid a possible designation.

The second half of Ian’s presentation highlighted the lamentable performance of the District Council’s plan-making performance. The District Council has *no* up-to-date plan. It has *no* five year land supply for housing and *no* town centre retail policy or plan and therefore WDC is vulnerable to planning applications by developers where there is a presumption in favour of “sustainable development”: permission should be granted where the Plan is absent, silent or out of date and the harms do not substantially and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Given that there has been a very rapid population increase within the district during the last census period (almost twice the national average) it would clearly be very difficult for the council or any objector to argue on any such planning application that harms would substantially and demonstrably outweigh benefits.

If any such case were advanced by objectors, however, the new Act broadens the powers of the Secretary of State *to award costs between the parties at planning appeals* – a further disincentive to object. Thirdly, the new Act places limits on the powers that local planning authorities have to require information with planning applications and allows for the reconsideration of economically unviable affordable housing requirements contained in agreements made under section 106 of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*. While the regional strategies of the last government were arguably a rather blunt instrument to ensure that local planning authorities were compelled to provide enough housing and other developments to meet regionally determined needs, the effect of this new Act and the application of the Localism Act has created a more centralised and “unappealable against” system of planning than existed under the old law.

My own view is that we should welcome and encourage properly planned growth in the district. A more vibrant district will provide better housing, better shopping facilities, better education and better employment opportunities for all of us but particularly for our children and grandchildren who may wish to live here. We should offer wholehearted co-operation with Coventry in bringing this about.

Patrick McAuslan

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State Ceremonial II, with Lt. Col. Gerald Lesinski

Most people like ceremony (ask any husband who has forgotten an anniversary) but reasonably enough they suspect politicians who want to be stars.

We have more and better ceremony than any other nation, organic with our history and with politicians reduced to bit-parts. It is ceremony humanised, offering unity.

Never spit on your luck.

We learnt from Lt. Col. Lesinski how to distinguish one regiment of guards from another, which made me feel closer to people who risk their lives on my behalf. The two State Visits we host each year may be irrelevant, but you never know, they may help the world to run more smoothly even when the guests are people we dislike or whose acquaintance with responsibility has made them jittery.

I am easily pleased. My life is brightened by knowing that the Order of the Garter began as a mark of respect to an embarrassed woman. When Black Rod hammers on the door of the Commons to remind us of freedom I like to imagine a distant trumpet, which seems better than taking freedom for granted. Nor is humour out of place. I can think of countries where guardsmen might be eliminated if they ran a sweepstake on the length of the Head of State’s speech from the platform.

This was an altogether first-rate evening. Lt. Col. Lesinski has the priceless gift of imparting enjoyment as well as information.

Robin Taylor

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Sir William McAlpine on “My Life in Railways”

“Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking” Sir William was so impressed by the restored Leamington Spa station waiting rooms that he could not refuse our request to talk to the Friends of Leamington Station – more than a year later. A full house of 120 people came to his talk and were invited to ask him questions – so the talk became a series of discussions of railway issues, such as the costs and benefits of HS2; his role in the preservation of railway lines and paddle steamers; the foundation and significance of the Railway Heritage Trust; his private passion for railways and so on.

He is a modest and generous man – well aware of his luck in being born into an eminent family with a great engineering tradition and with the means to indulge this obsession. It is part of his DNA and his earliest memories. Possession of saloons, both royal and functional, at a time when he could traverse the country in his private train (somehow more impressive than a private jet) to inspect stations and railway structures, enabled him to review our railways in a way which is no longer possible. A train carriage with a balcony and fully functioning bathrooms sounds such fun! It had

Underground Coal Gasification

Warwickshire is threatened by Underground Coal Gasification, which involves setting fire to unmineable coal. Two wells are drilled vertically and then horizontally along the coal seam. Oxygen and steam are pumped down one well and “syngas”, a mixture of carbon monoxide, hydrogen and methane, is extracted from the other.

The upper Leam, from which our drinking water is obtained, flows through this idyllic rural area. The plan is to pepper it with multiple wells linked by pipelines and roads, and there would probably be a large chemical plant. There would be dust and noise pollution and possibly gas flaring. For every tonne of coal burnt, one cubic metre of toxic “produced water” would have to be disposed of.

Similar projects abroad have been associated with subsidence, explosions, and contamination of land, water and grazing animals with poisonous hydrocarbons. Contamination can also occur years later as the abandoned wells degrade. Underground fires cannot always be controlled, and the coal seams extend under Leamington and Coventry.

UCG also creates vast amounts of CO₂, and if adopted globally would cause runaway climate change.

WCC Regulatory Committee has to approve this development. If you are concerned, write to your county councillor. ALSO sign this petition – <http://you.38degrees.org.uk/p/NoUCGWarks> – to influence WCC's new minerals policy.

There must be enough sane and articulate people in Warwickshire to stop this.

Gitta Ashworth

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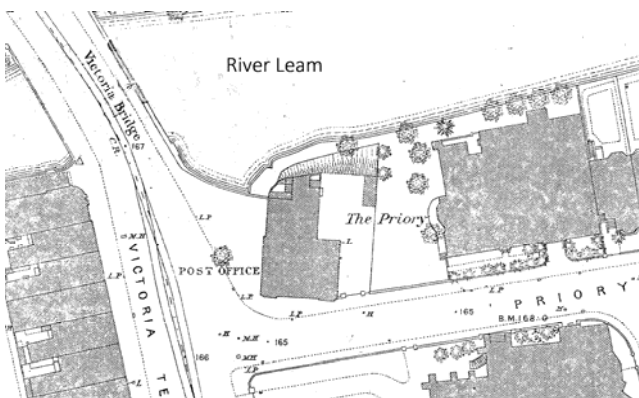
Leamington Post Office ...

... is closing to the public at 16:00 on December 14 to reopen at 13:00 on December 16 at the back of the Spar shop in Bath Street. The original PO will be on the market soon after.

Most of the buildings around it (All Saints Church, Victoria Terrace and Bridge, the Royal Pump Rooms) are listed Grade II, but the Post Office building is not, and it should be. It is central to the town’s landscape and conservation area.

An application for spot listing was sent to English Heritage on 18 October, with a request that this be treated as urgent. It would be good if the building had statutory protection of listing before it is sold.

As most of us are aware, the original was opened in 1870 as a prestige building on land sold by the



Ordnance Survey map 1887, and the building now

©Photo Richard Croft

First workshop of Sir Frank Whittle

The workshop where Sir Frank helped his father Moses as a boy almost a century ago has lain empty for a number of years. Young Frank had his first hands-on engineering experience here. Despite efforts to find other uses for the building, none has been found. Earlier this year the building became perilously close to being demolished when AC Lloyd applied to develop its site in Chapel



Workshop of Moses Whittle: The building at present and proposed conversion to small home Street into a residential block for 70+ students. While the workshop is not of any architectural merit, it has very significant historical interest. The Leamington Society is pleased that it has been saved (by a member of the Society) and will be converted to a small two bedroom home. So while it will no longer be a workshop, its survival is assured.

Archie Pitts

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What has Leamington Spa to do with twinning?

This question was asked during a recent flower festival at All Saints. Only a week later a coach filled with our mayor, town councillors, musical children from Myton School, as well as members of Leamington Spa International Twinning Society (LITS) travelled to our twin town of Bruehl south of Cologne. Here celebrations of 40 years of town twinning were taking place with French, Polish, Dutch, and Greek twinning people joining.

In 1973 it was still unusual to travel and to experience life as it was lived within the family circle of other nations. But friendships were forged. Twinning was found to be one way of reaching out to one another after the painful experiences of the war and the frugal years that followed. It was healing to find that ordinary people twinned with Leamington Spa had the same fundamental requirements concomitant with the will to achieve these in Europe: Peace, Freedom, Prosperity, and Security. All our twinning friends have been working towards that ideal.

Proudly showing each other our world heritage sites and all that we treasure in our own towns helps us to appreciate each other's difference and so to value our common bonds. For example, did you know that the precondition to building Cologne Cathedral in 1248 was to house the bones of the three Magi? Or can you believe the shock of finding that our French guests knew corners of Warwickshire better after decades of twinning than their hosts? Perhaps our twinning aims remain the same as they were 40 years ago, creating understanding and bonds across national boundaries in a spirit of celebration.

therefore targeting specific areas of the town. Work is about to start in Binswood and Beauchamp Avenues. Non-essential tree maintenance will be on-hold for some time.

For more details contact Ken Simons on 01926 736491 or kensimons@warwickshire.gov.uk.

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New life members

This Society recognises outstanding contributions by its members.

For nearly ten years Roger Charters has been our “official” photographer for the Society’s biennial awards and numerous other events, often rising early in the day when traffic is less, or the sun is at the right angle in the sky. He has also masterminded and executed a variety of projects for the Friends of Leamington Station. As we all know, behind any good man stands a great woman. The Society’s Executive Committee were unanimous that Roger and Bridget Charters should be life members.

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Ian Benjamin

We are sad to report the recent death of a valued member Ian Benjamin.

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New members

We welcome to the Society

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|---------------------------|--|
| Professor Richard Beacham | Elizabeth Ballantine & Professor Nigel Dimmock |
| Mrs Anne Eccles | Barbara Lynn and Michael Heath |
| Robin & Sue Wensley | Mrs Marie Willington |
| Roy Laskey | |

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Please note that Geoff Renshaw’s address. It is **19** Willes Terrace, and not as previously given

Chairman: Richard Ashworth, 32 Willes Road, CV31 1BN 01926 316703	
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<i>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</i>	
<i>Charity No. 516078</i>	
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