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The Leamington Society Newsletter

November 2014

Chairman's Notes

Is WDC failing us?

Yet another planning committee (11th November) is told that the Council cannot demonstrate a five year supply of housing land – so the Europa Way Consortium is granted outline permission for 735 dwellings, over and above the 1000 granted in August. The 5 year housing supply is crucial for planning control. This depends on detailed, up to date logging of progress on multiple sites and our Council has failed to do its homework and keep on top of this assessment in spite of independent and carefully researched and detailed evidence given to Riverside House over the past year.

Meantime Warwick District edges slowly towards the public examination of its Local Plan by an Inspector – possibly in March or April 2015. A rational observer might assume the purpose of this would be a blue print for the extent and location of future developments. In the Alice in Wonderland logic of current planning the Inspector will eventually be invited to rubber stamp a *fait accompli* with all the large controversial applications granted.

The Inspector will hear widely varying evidence, including the latest population projections from the ONS (Office of National Statistics). The ONS suggests Coventry will grow at an increasing rate, while growth of population in Warwick and other neighbouring districts is set to be much slower than assumed by the draft Plan. Are these major sites south of Warwick and Leamington with outline planning permission to be dormitories for Coventry?

Quite apart from the doubtful quantity, what about the quality of the planned housing? Of course no developer ever puts in a “low quality” application, describing the best of layout and design in the very best of worlds. Never has the meaning of English been so traduced as in the use of “sustainable” – drizzled like a planning garnish over multiple pages of justification. I hope that Councillor Alan Rhead, chairman of the council planning committee, does not mind my reporting his heartfelt plea at a recent planning forum: “currently we are not being serious about the need to build energy efficient housing.”

Talks

Coventry Cathedral

Sarah Hosking

Tuesday, December 2nd, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

St George's Chapel and Windsor Castle

Dr Charles Brown

Thursday, January 15th, 2015
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Bread

Steve Burnett

Thursday, February 12th
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Bandstands

Paul Rabbitts

Thursday, March 12th
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

How big a land supply the district needs depends on how fast our population is projected to grow and on the projected change in household size. The population figures are those of the Office of National Statistics. For the household size WDC relies on figures from the consultants GL Hearn. In 2013 these inputs led WDC to conclude that number of new homes needed for our district would be 12,860 over the period from 2011 to 2029 or about 714 a year.

Does WDC have a five year supply? WDC reckons not. However Cllr Ray Bullen of Bishops Tachbrook Parish Council, and previously of the Coventry City Planning Department, has done his own independent and meticulous calculations and concluded the district has more than a five year supply. He has presented his calculations to the WDC both at public and private meetings with senior council officers. One officer told Mr Bullen that the council does not have the resources to do the assessments to the same level of precision. WDC is sticking to its point of view.

When given planning permission, the number of homes granted permission contributes to WDC's five year supply figure. Once granted, planning permissions cannot be withdrawn.

Where should all these houses be built? The government requirement is first to use brownfield sites. Then, if we are to avoid green belt (up to 80% of the district), we must look to the remaining 20%. This is primarily in the area south of Leamington and Warwick in Bishops Tachbrook, Whitnash, south of Myton Road and east of Banbury Road. This quality agricultural land will be developed and lost for ever.

Why it matters, and hugely. Where are the residents of the new homes going to work and how will they travel there? Many will commute to Coventry by car through Leamington and Warwick increasing the congestion there. The Highways Authority at WCC proposes "mitigation work", which is code for dualing Europa Way, putting in traffic lights and so on. This cannot solve the problem and is unlikely to even mitigate it – the bottlenecks will merely be moved along to different pinch-points.

And now. In May 2014 the ONS reduced its predicted populations for our district, and for the neighbouring districts of Stratford, Rugby and Solihull, each by 29%. The figure for Coventry was increased, perhaps because the previous population trends due to the influx of overseas students were expected to continue for the next 15 years. WDC senior officers and councillors have steadfastly refused to adjust the projected population figures or household size for our district accordingly. Why?

Using more realistic population projections would ensure the district met its five year housing figure with even more spare capacity. Why was this opportunity not seized – as it was in Stratford and other areas?

The final straw. As long as we do not have an approved Local Plan in place our Planning Committee is powerless to refuse applications; the Committee is told that any application it dares to refuse is would be lost at appeal. This is why so many large applications have been approved recently. The developers have the whip-hand. Of course land-owners are delighted to realise huge capital gains that arise from the change of use of their land.

It was reported in the Leamington Courier (November 7, page3) that the Chief Executive of WDC had taken exceptional powers to delay the submission of the draft Local Plan for approval, giving developers even more time to have their applications approved. And for yet more land owners to profit.

No wonder many people in Warwick district are furious. Sadly the majority do not appreciate the

Leamington in Bloom

The town is seeking volunteers to join the Leamington in Bloom Committee to help prepare an entry for the Britain in Bloom 2015 completion.

Gardening skills are not needed, just enthusiasm for a floral Leamington. Contact Robert Nash at the Town Hall 01926 450 906 or by email clerk@leamingtonspatowncouncil.gov.uk

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National award for conversion of Old Library

TateHindle, a national firm of architects, was the winner of a prestigious award for Retrofit Architecture from the national *Architects Journal*. This award was granted to the architects for their stylish and innovative conversion of an old space for which there was no economically realistic demand in the present straitened times. The building now has a useful and well-designed function, in this case modern new apartments which were all quickly snapped up by purchasers. The town must be grateful for the architect and developers (TAG Exclusive Properties) for saving a building which had been deteriorating for ten or more years.



Old Library, Avenue Road

While many are saddened by the building no longer having a public function, there can be no denying that its restoration is an uplifting sight to anyone passing along Avenue Road.

Congratulations to all concerned.

Archie Pitts

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The King under the car park; Mathew Morris, Archaeologist from University of Leicester

Truth is often stranger than fiction.

Richard III’s corpse was taken from Bosworth battlefield to Leicester for a lying in state before burial, important to demonstrate that he was dead and no one could claim his identity. The body was believed to have been thrown into the river Soar and there is a plaque on King Richard Bridge to commemorate this non-event. Other rumours and local history located the bones in Grey Friars Priory, demolished in the Reformation. Only the approximate position of the Priory was known (by the street name and previous archaeology) and a council car park lay above the best guess location, which made excavation possible. As churches are built East West, with the altar at the East end, Mathew and his team dug two parallel tranches North South, to cross as many identifying walls and structures as possible.

The first set of bones encountered "Skeleton number 1" were left uncovered for a week as the dig progressed. The original geographic guess turned out correct: they were digging across the church choir. Skeleton number 1 had clear curvature of the spine and had been hastily crammed into too small a grave for his height. The bones are identified as Richard III beyond reasonable doubt: by radio-carbon dating, bone analysis of the diet, forensic investigation and mitochondrial DNA from

