
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



TRAINS: SADLY NO PROGRESS

As members who read the *Derbyshire Times* will already have seen, it has so far proved impossible, despite the best efforts of Lee Rowley MP and Cllr Tricia Gilby, the Leader of the Borough Council, to persuade Cross Country Trains to restore a proper service to Chesterfield, or to persuade the Department for Transport, which funds the company, to require them to do so. For the moment there seems to be nothing more anyone can do.

The problem appears now to have spread to East Midland Trains, who crucially run the London service from Chesterfield. According to a disingenuously worded email sent to their 'valued customers':

It's really important to us that we deliver on our promises, that's why we are running a slightly reduced timetable which means that we can still run the trains we have said we would, even in the event of short term staff shortages.

In other words, they are reducing the number of trains they are running, no doubt particularly from smaller stations on the London route like Chesterfield. Presumably nothing can be done about this either, which is another blow to the town's claim to be exceptionally well connected in all directions by rail.

The same email also includes the cheerful news that anyone travelling without a face mask can be fined up to £6,400, which is unlikely to encourage more custom. This follows a recent item in the national press announcing that British Transport Police have been responsible for all but three of the fines issued by the police throughout England and Wales for not wearing a mask.

CROW LANE: AN OPEN OR SHUT CASE?

There have recently been noises from the Department for Transport suggesting that it now regrets allowing local highway authorities freedom of action in closing roads or making them narrower. With any luck, this may mean that some of the more pointless and unsightly steps taken in Chesterfield will be reversed, so that the town centre can get back to normal and look like a place where people might want to spend time. The DfT has not said it will meet the cost

of clearing away the obstructions, which may mean little will happen.

The change made in Chesterfield which may command general support is the stopping up of Crow Lane between the entrances to the golf course and Dobbyn Clough Farm. Although the use of large concrete blocks to achieve this is regrettable, and the alleged reason (to encourage people to cycle to the hospital)



patently absurd, the closure itself has a good deal to commend it. It has made Crow Lane a much pleasanter place to walk along, and it has virtually eliminated what was previously a serious litter problem. This, incidentally, shows that the litter was being dropped from passing cars, not by pedestrians.

The powers the county council has used enable it to close Crow Lane for

eighteen months, of which probably three or four have already elapsed. It is not too early for local people with an interest in these things to let the county council know what they feel should happen in the longer term.

We would be very glad to hear from any Civic Society members with views about whether this section of Crow Lane should be closed to vehicles permanently. The committee can then form an opinion and let the county council know. My own experience of dealing with the officer currently responsible for highways in Chesterfield is that she has an open-minded, constructive approach to her job (not a universal characteristic among highway engineers, I find) who will take notice of taxpayers' opinions.

IS GRAFFITI GETTING WORSE?

All towns suffer from graffiti but another of our members, Philip Cousins, who lives in Brimington, feels that it has got noticeably worse in recent months on the main road to Brimington and Staveley, not least on bus-shelters, which also show little sign of having been cleaned recently. Have any other members found a similar change in their part of the town? Is this a consequence of lockdown? This is another matter we could raise with the Borough Council, but it would be useful to have more evidence from different areas.

THE CHESTERFIELD HOTEL: ACT NOW OR WAIT FOR AN ARSON ATTACK?

The sorry story of this prominent building continues. Apart from suffering from graffiti, which makes it look even worse than it did already, the building has become insecure. A ground floor window on the Malkin Street frontage was recently forced open and left hanging on



one hinge for several days. Anyone of reasonable agility or with a small ladder could have got inside. Presumably anything of any value has long been removed, either by the owners or by thieves, but there remains scope for setting the building on fire, deliberately or accidentally, with a risk to life as well as property.

The window in question (to the right of the old doorway in the centre of the picture above) has now been secured but we feel that the owners should be asked to board up all those on the Malkin Street side of the ground floor to make casual breaking and entering harder. Unfortunately, as long as the building remains in private ownership, there is a limit to what the Borough Council can do.

The Civic Society committee feels that every effort should be made to get the building demolished as soon as possible. Even if the site was only used as a temporary car-park for a few years (a traditional landscape feature of this part of the town) that would be an improvement on the present position.



WOODHEAD'S CAFÉ

Members of a certain age (and affluence) will have happy memories of afternoon tea at Woodhead's Café on the first floor

of their shop at the corner of High Street and Packers Row. The building is now the subject of a planning application to reinstate two shop units on the ground floor and create studio apartments (i.e. bedsitters) on the first floor and small flats above.

The Civic Society committee is supporting this application, since it will bring the building back into beneficial use and increase the supply of reasonably priced accommodation in the town centre, but shares the reservation expressed by Cllr Sarvent about the small size of the studios. Three of the four proposed are less than 37 square metres in area, which we understand is the minimum permitted. We have suggested that the application be revised to provide for three not four bedsitters. The flats on the two upper floors are of a reasonable size.

We would also like a condition imposed to ensure the preservation of the distinctive 'carved heads' on the columns between the windows on the ground floor.



FORMER MINES RESCUE STATION, INFIRMARY ROAD

We have recently been contacted (via NEDIAS, to whom the initial approach was made) by the new owner of the former Mines Rescue Station on Infirmary Road, who intends to convert it to residential use. Depending on the final design, this seems a very good idea, added to which the owner is interested in the history of the building.

So far, the collective knowledge of the Civic Society committee only

extends as far as establishing that the plan to build the station dates from 1914, probably about the time Infirmary Road was laid out, and that the building was completed in 1917. We believe it may have been designed by Percy Houfton but have yet to confirm this. The station was built (and presumably until 1947 maintained) by an ad-hoc committee of local coalowners, quite possibly orchestrated (as most things were at that date) by C.P. Markham of the Staveley Company. We assume it passed to the NCB at vesting.

If anyone can shed more light on the Mines Rescue Station (especially if they worked there, or knew people who did) we would be very pleased to hear from them. We have approached the new owner and expressed interest in seeing the building and finding out more about his plans for it.

We obviously hope that the plans for restoration might include the installation of a Civic Society blue plaque. It is important that the significance of this building to a former mining district be permanently recorded.



WINGERWORTH HALL: THE SAGA CONTINUES

After mere seven months after receiving it, North East Derbyshire district council has rejected an application to build a large bungalow close to the surviving portions of Wingerworth Hall, one of which is shown on the extreme left on the postcard view above. Unfortunately, the case-officer's hope that the applicant would not appeal against the decision proved to be wrong. The owner of the adjoining property is maintaining his opposition

to the proposal and we understand the council is planning to protect more of the trees on or close to the site. These are relics of the planting around the Hall and therefore affect the setting of a listed building. The Civic Society committee continues to support the owner in his efforts to safeguard the landscape around his home.

WALTON WORKS: SIGNS OF PROGRESS



A short item in the *Derbyshire Times* (1 October) revealed the welcome news that there is some progress with the proposed redevelopment of the large site owned by Robinson PLC to the south of Chatsworth Road, which includes a former water-powered cotton mill of the 1790s, one of the very few surviving fire-resistant textile mills of that period. It is listed Grade II* for that reason but has been empty and deteriorating for some years. At the other end of the site is the Grade II listed Cannon Mill, the only standing structure remaining from the Smith family's Griffin Ironworks, established about 1780. There are other buildings of interest elsewhere on the site.

We hope very much that something will come of this scheme and that new uses can be found for the listed (and unlisted) buildings on the site.

SUCCESS ON CHATSWORTH ROAD

We are delighted to report almost overnight success in our effort to get weeds

growing on Chatsworth Road removed. This was despite our approaching the county council (thinking it was a highways matter) and being told that it was a borough responsibility because it was 'street cleansing'. Thanks to prompt and effective cooperation between the two councils (and some useful back-up from the *Derbyshire Times*) the offending buddleia were removed within a week of our writing.

On this subject, one of our members, Margaret Meeney, has pointed out that if householders kept trees and shrubs in their front gardens trimmed back, so that they did not overshadow the pavement, much of this problem could be avoided. Presumably the council has no power to force people to do this, but it could always remind them, for example in the notice sent out with council tax demands.

GOOD NEWS FROM WATERSIDE

Even more welcome news is that work has begun on the first office block on the Waterside development between Brimington Road and the A61 (*Derbyshire Times*, 15 October). This promises to bring new work to the area through the main contractor's policy (imposed by the Borough Council) of engaging



local subcontractors wherever possible. The scheme will put back into beneficial use another large piece of derelict land, alongside the area already being developed with houses and flats.