
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

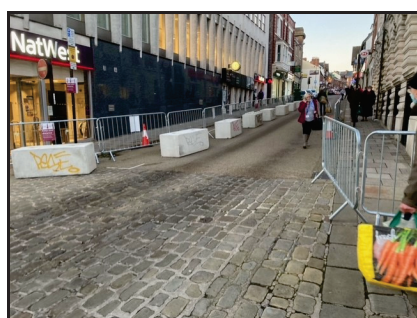
NEWSLETTER

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



CLOSE CROW LANE BUT REOPEN THE TOWN CENTRE

After taking soundings from members following the item in the last *Newsletter* I have written on behalf of the Civic Society to the county council asking them to consider the permanent closure of Crow Lane between the entrance to the golf course and Dobbin Clough Lane (while retaining access to both) and urging that the two street closures in the town centre (Corporation Street and South Place) be reversed, since they have achieved nothing. I also suggested that the concrete blocks and railings erected to make pavements wider and streets narrower should be removed, since they make the town centre look unsightly. The email, which is available on the society's website, has been acknowledged and I hope to receive a full reply in due course.

In the meantime the Government has announced a 'final allocation' of grants to local highway authorities

from its 'Active Travel Fund'. These total £167m., of which Derbyshire is to receive just under £1.7m. As far as I am aware, the county council has yet to indicate how it proposes to spend this money. It will doubtless find some way of disposing of this second windfall, although what it will achieve is at best questionable. I suspect many taxpayers would prefer to see a sum of this size spent on repairing potholes and other minor defects in the county's roads, rather than dubious temporary road closures and similar measures.

The handling of this scheme by local authorities continues to be heavily criticised in the national press (although not apparently locally) as causing inconvenience to residents, potential hazards to emergency vehicles and other problems, without any evidence of benefits to taxpayers.

COVID IN DECLINE BUT STILL A MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

The Sunday newspapers of 22 November included two maps of England showing the incidence of Covid infections and the level of deprivation in each local authority district.

The first showed that, on a scale of one to four, two of the three districts of north-east Derbyshire are faring

reasonably well. Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire currently have between 200 and 300 infections a week per 100,000 population (the second lowest band); Bolsover is in the next band (300–400), one below the highest. This may mean that the area escapes the worst of the pre-Christmas lockdown measures threatened for 2 December.

Less encouraging for the borough is the 'Index of Multiple Deprivation' mapped at district council level. On a scale of one to five, Chesterfield is placed in the 'most left-behind' category, along with Bolsover. Derby City and High Peak are in the second highest band, North East Derbyshire, Derbyshire Dales and Erewash in the third, Amber Valley in the fourth, and South Derbyshire is the only district in the county rated 'least left-behind'.



Data at district council level can only give a broad-brush picture of relative poverty but the map (based on information collected by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Office of Budget Responsibility) emphasises that parts of the borough, especially

those at the eastern end of the borough and areas like Grangewood in Chesterfield itself, remain as poor as neighbouring wards in Bolsover.

Despite a reasonable flow of good news about new building and new employment locally, there is clearly still a great deal of scope for the Government's promised 'levelling up' measures to be applied in Chesterfield.



SUCCESSFUL REGENERATION NEEDS BETTER SCHOOLS AS WELL

A third item from the national press is also relevant to efforts to regenerate the local economy. The *Sunday Times* of 22 November printed a league table of the 200 best non-fee-paying primary schools in England. It does not include a single school in Derbyshire (there are two in Derby City).

This is a damning indictment of the county council as an education authority, especially as Derbyshire used to be regarded (certainly in the 1950s and 1960s) as one of the best shire county LEAs, and during the same period Chesterfield, which then ran its own primary schools, was seen as an outstanding small education authority.

It is true that a proportion of primary schools in the county are now run by academy trusts, none of them evidently very successfully, but all those schools were once the responsibility of the county council, which must take some of the blame for their present condition.

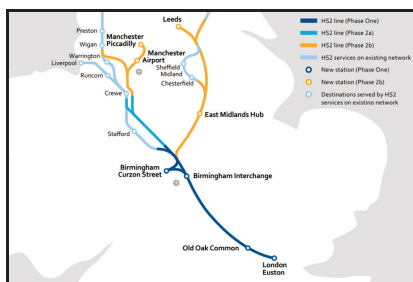
A particularly striking absentee from the list is St Mary's Catholic primary school in Chesterfield, the

main feeder to the only secondary school in the town which makes any showing in national league tables of non-fee-paying secondary schools.

Why is the poor quality of local schools relevant to regeneration? For the simple reason that for companies considering moving to the area, one of the first questions their senior staff will ask before agreeing to move is 'What are the local schools like?', which for many will be more important than the other traditional one, 'What about house prices?'.

The Borough Council's efforts to attract high quality employment to the town is bound to be undermined as long as Chesterfield can no longer boast a network of good quality LEA schools of the sort which local people took for granted two generations ago.

Is there a silver lining to this cloud? There is, but with a bill of around £10,000 a year attached. In a parallel table of the 70 best fee-paying primary schools in England, Chesterfield has two entries: St Peter & St Paul in the town itself (admittedly with a score based on a small entry), and Barlborough Hall, the prep for Mount St Mary's.



HS2 TO MISS CHESTERFIELD?

The weekend press also contained discouraging news of the project on which the Borough Council has staked a good deal of hope for the future. There now appears to be a significant risk that the Government will either abandon, or postpone for an indefinite period, the building of the eastern leg of HS2 between Birmingham and Leeds, which is to include a loop serving Chesterfield and Sheffield.

The dissenting deputy chairman of the committee appointed to review the project, Lord Berkeley, is quoted as saying that dropping the eastern leg would save around £40bn and would be a 'good thing'. His view is that the region does not need HS2, since it has access to either the East Coast or Midland main lines, of which the latter could be electrified at much less cost.

Another possibility is that the eastern leg is built only as far as the planned East Midlands Parkway station on the site of the old Toton locos shed. This can be described as either conveniently midway between Derby and Nottingham or inconveniently too far from either to be of much use.

No-one seems to have published a figure for the saving in journey time between Chesterfield and St Pancras if the existing line was electrified, how much it would cost, or how long it would take to build. The answer to all three questions is presumably 'less than HS2'. If the answer to the third is that 'it could be finished (or at least started) before the next General Election' the idea might have considerable attractions for a government looking for quick wins on the levelling up front, even if it was a disappointment for the Borough Council.



CHESTERFIELD HOTEL: PROGRESS AT LAST

Our wish expressed in the last *Newsletter* has been granted. The Borough Council has announced that it has secured ownership of the Chesterfield Hotel (although, oddly, in part on a leasehold basis, rather than entirely freehold) from the improbably named Prestige Hotels

(Midlands) Ltd, and has taken immediate action to begin demolition.

For the moment this seems merely to involve employing two men to throw fixtures and fittings through upstairs windows into large skips below; the building itself will be demolished early in 2021 and the site levelled to become a temporary car-park.

The work will also include demolishing what remains of the car-park wall fronting Malkin Street, part of which collapsed onto the pavement earlier in November. In fairness to the county council as the highway authority, it should be said that it secured the removal of the rubble from the pavement by the demolition contractors as quickly as possible.

Hopefully, once cleared the site can be redeveloped sooner rather than later, irrespective of whether HS2 goes ahead, as part of a comprehensive scheme to improve the approach to the station.



GRAFFITI AND LITTER: IT'S EVERYWHERE AND ITS GETTING WORSE

Several members responded to the item in the last *Newsletter* about what appears to be the growing problem of graffiti in the borough.

Rod Auton of the Chesterfield Canal Trust points out that railway bridges and other structures on the canal near Staveley have been attacked in recent months, and Philip Cousins has commented that one particular individual seems to 'signing' the

concrete blocks installed by the county council as traffic barriers in the town centre. This is arguably another reason for removing them.

Darrell Clark has taken up the problem with the Borough Council. Their officer's reply points out that the council will remove graffiti from its own property (as presumably does the county council) but is not responsible for taking similar action in the case of privately owned property. All the council can (and does) do is to encourage private owners to remove graffiti, especially where it is offensive in content.

Darrell also complained about the problem of litter, specifically on roads between Chatsworth Road and Ashgate Road. Here again, all the officer could say is that the council carries out regular litter picks on highways and other council-owned land, adding that council staff will respond as quickly as possible to residents' complaints about specific problems. These can be made by phone or by completing a form on the council's website. The best advice seems to be to use the website where possible.

Some voluntary groups carry out litter picks in their immediate locality, with council support, and in other towns civic societies undertake this work. This is something we could think about doing in Chesterfield, if there was sufficient support from members.

Darrell has assembled an impressive series of photographs of graffiti in the town centre, two of which are included here. The whole set can be found on the society's website.



SLOWLY DOES IT AT STONE EDGE

We have also to thank Darrell for his efforts to get the county council to make good damage to the highway at the junction of the Matlock and Darley roads at Stone Edge. In a reply dated 10 November to his letter to the highways cabinet member of 31 September, an officer has advised him that the county has asked North East Derbyshire (as its agent) to cut back the vegetation at the junction to improve visibility for drivers turning from Darley Road onto Matlock Road, and will be repairing the damage to signage caused by a collision. Darrell points out that the letter makes no mention of the problem of flyposting on the sign-posts, which he also raised.

ROUGH SLEEPERS SHAME TOWN

At the beginning of the first lockdown the Government asked local authorities to do all they could to provide safe accommodation for rough sleepers, who by definition were more likely than most to be vulnerable to a fatal attack of Coronavirus. In Chesterfield the Borough Council has in the past stated that all rough sleepers have been offered accommodation of some sort.

Despite its effort a specific problem which has occurred in the past has arisen again, and is particularly distressing because of the onset of colder weather and a renewed wave of Covid.

It would infringe the privacy of the person concerned to go into detail here; suffice it to say that a letter sent to Ms Helen Jones, the county's council's executive director for adult social care and health, on 29 October remained unanswered three weeks later, and a letter sent on 16 November to County Councillor Mrs Jean Wharmby, the cabinet member to whom Ms Jones reports, asking her to ensure that her officer attends to this matter within the following seven

days, has also been ignored.

This lack of response to the legitimate concerns of a taxpayer will lead inexorably to a complaint to the Care Quality Commission. Dealing with that complaint will in turn involve the avoidable expenditure of public funds by the Commission and by the county council. In the meantime, no effort has been made to help the individual concerned.

Chesterfield, as we have pointed out elsewhere, is far from being a wealthy community, but it should surely be possible for the local authority responsible for the relief of poverty in the town to prevent someone from freezing to death.



home for many years of John Gratton, the canal agent (i.e. general manager). This is the only building still standing in Chesterfield directly connected with the canal.

Having been saved from demolition a few years ago, thanks in part to the efforts of the Civic Society, Thornfield is currently part of a redevelopment scheme which will see it converted into four flats. Unfortunately work has not progressed sufficiently for a blue plaque to be installed at present, and we are trying to think of other ideas. Any suggestions from members welcome.



orary 'winter igloos' in the grounds.

Neither of these schemes will permanently affect the listed buildings in question, although a long-term plan for the conservation of the entire Brampton Manor site, which also contains a Grade II* listed gazebo and a scheduled monument (a cruck-framed barn of c.1600) is in our view urgently needed.

Finally, we have written in support of an application for retrospective listed building consent by the owner of 6 Cannon Court, off Beetwell Street, to cover some additional internal work not included in her earlier application.



TRUST TO CELEBRATE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF CANAL OPENING

In 2027 the Chesterfield Canal Trust will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of the completion of the canal between Chesterfield and the Trent at West Stockwith. The trust is planning to hold a series of events to mark steps up to that momentous event, starting with one in March 2021, which will be the 250th anniversary of the passing of the Act of Parliament under which the canal was built.

The trust has consulted the Civic Society for ideas about how this occasion, which was celebrated in the town at the time, should be marked. Our initial idea was to install a blue plaque on Thornfield House, the

SOME ROUTINE PLANNING ITEMS

It has not been a month of spectacular planning issues but the Borough Council has sought the Civic Society's views on various small schemes.

We have raised no objection to internal alterations to enable 57 Low Pavement, which is currently empty, to reopen as a betting office, or the insertion of a replacement front window and new side window at 33 Holywell Street (Greenwoods estate agents).

Similarly, we were happy to support listed building applications by the owners of 391 Ashgate Road, which contains a cruck frame concealed within later stone walling, to replace a time-expired conservatory, and by the proprietor of Brampton Manor on Old Road to erect temp-

TAPTON HOUSE

Some members may have noticed that temporary barriers have been erected closing off a small single-storey outbuilding attached to the north (car-park) end of Tapton House. This has been done because the Borough Council has detected subsidence in the building (but not the mansion itself) and may seek to demolish it. It is not part of the original House but was added between 1838 (when George Stephenson leased the property) and 1877, when the building appears on the 1st edition of the large-scale Ordnance Survey map. It seems most likely to have been built for Charles Markham after he bought the estate in 1871.

The building, which is rather clumsily attached to the main House, opens off the kitchen and was probably always used as a pantry or store.