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# CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live

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A schematic illustration from a Department for Transport publication, showing a two-lane cycle superhighway. If something of this sort was imposed on Brookside there would be no space for such a wide pavement; there would be entrances to driveways (not a grassed area) immediately next to the pavement; and room for only one narrow carriageway in each direction for motor vehicles. The cycle track would be separated from the carriageway by unsightly plastic bollards, not a kerb as shown here. Is this what residents of Brookside want?

## NOT WANTED HERE: BROOKSIDE RESIDENTS OPPOSE CYCLE SUPER- HIGHWAY BY TEN TO ONE

Since we issued the March Newsletter we have received more evidence that large numbers of voters and taxpayers oppose the proposed extension at its western

and eastern ends of the cycle route through Chesterfield.

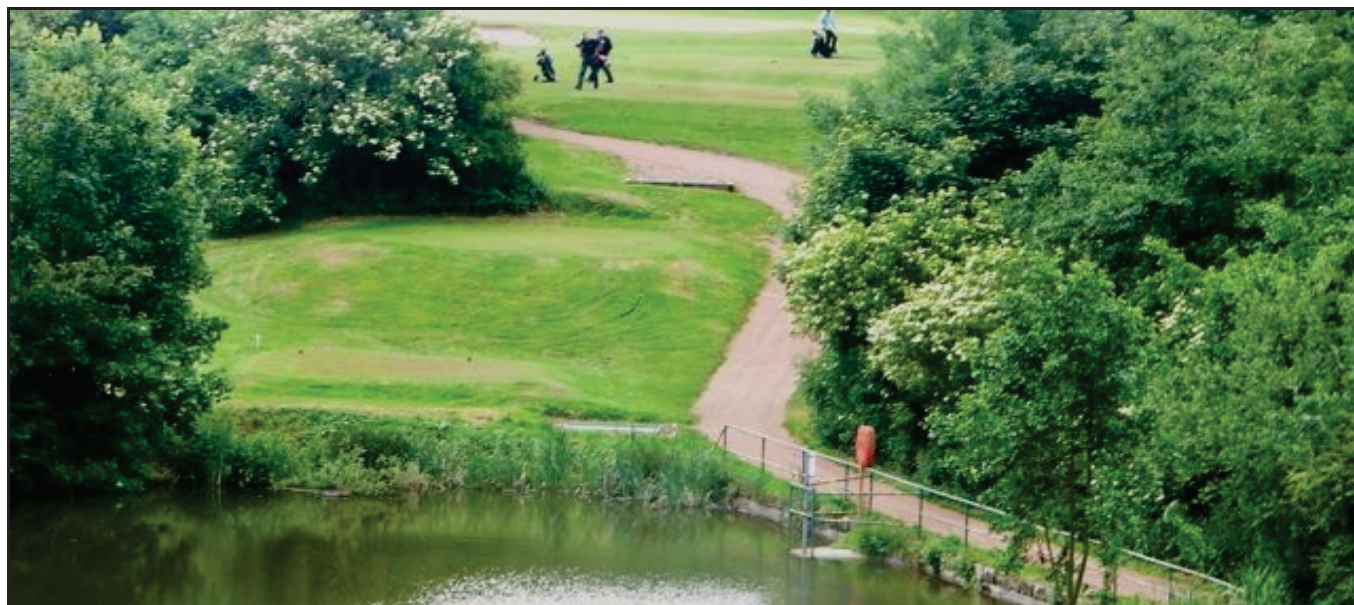
John Boulton, the Conservative county councillor for the division which includes Brookside, who is currently seeking re-election, has stated that he has so far canvassed 88 houses in Brookside, from 17 of which he received no reply. Of the remainder, 64 were opposed to the building of the superhighway along the northern side of Chatsworth Road, five were in favour and two were 'indifferent'.

This is quite a large sample and

the majority opposed to the scheme is overwhelming.

The Labour candidate in the division, Steve Lismore, despite being a cyclist himself, has issued a leaflet strongly opposing the scheme. He criticises the county council for failing to come to an agreement with the landowners to secure a route that avoided Chatsworth Road, and for a 'very low-key' consultation, which many people will have missed.

Two local Liberal Democrat borough councillors (both Civic Society members) have told us that in their



Stuart Brittain, the retiring Labour county councillor for Brimington, suggests that the new cycle superhighway be re-routed along the existing bridlepath through Tapton golf course, avoiding Crow Lane, which could then be safely reopened to motor vehicles.

canvassing in the division they have found virtually no-one who was aware of the plans to build a cycle route along Chatsworth Road.

In these circumstances it would be quite wrong for the Conservatives, who may control the county council but have no elected members on Chesterfield Borough Council, to push this scheme through against strong opposition.

The original plan was to extend the existing cycle path from Somersall Lane through fields to Greendale Avenue, off Holymoore Road. The county council says it has abandoned this idea, having failed to secure agreement with the landowners concerned.

This idea appears to have been under consideration for some time. We understand that when it was decided to build the present primary school at Holymoorside, whose catchment area includes part of Walton, an undertaking was given to connect the school with Walton via a hard-surfaced track. This later became the proposed extension of the Hipper Valley Trail. Despite the reported willingness of the landowners to accept a trail in principle, this seems to have been given up in favour of a longer, inconvenient, unsightly and (for pedestrians) dangerous route running alongside heavy traffic on Chatsworth Road.

The Civic Society strongly believes that the Chatsworth Road part

of the scheme should be abandoned, and renewed efforts made to come to an agreement with landowners to use the Somersall Lane-Greendale Avenue route.

In the meantime cyclists can reach Holymoorside and the National Park from Somersall by using Walton Back Lane and Cotton Mill Hill, although as one of our members, Ian Scott, points out, Walton Back Lane is not an ideal alternative. The road has no speed restriction on it and can be dangerous for cyclists, pedestrians and horse-riders. This problem could presumably be eased if a speed restriction was introduced.

## NOT WANTED IN BRIMINGTON EITHER

**T**here is equally strong opposition in Brimington and Tapton to the proposal to close Crow Lane as part of the creation of the cycle superhighway.

Coun. Stuart Brittain, who is standing down as the Labour county councillor for Brimington, in conjunction with Toby Perkins MP, has canvassed local opinion, which is overwhelmingly in favour of reopening Crow Lane as an essential route between south Brimington and both the railway station and town centre.

In addition a local pressure group

led by Kathleen Carlile has been formed to press for the reopening of the lane. This group has 150 members on Facebook and 700 signatures on a petition in favour of reopening.

The Civic Society committee's view is that ideally Crow Lane should remain closed. The hedgerows on either side of the lane are an important habitat for nesting birds and this would be ruined by speeding motor vehicles, especially if any attempt was made to widen the road. There is also a very steep drop, with no barrier protection, at the side of Crow Lane opposite Dobbin Clough Farm. If a vehicle left the road at this point it would fall 50 feet into the valley below.

On the other hand, we also believe in democracy in local government, and it is clear that a large number of those directly affected by the present closure wish to see the decision reversed.

An argument in favour of reopening Crow Lane is that, since it closed, traffic has increased on the other short-cut between Calow and Tapton, via Dark Lane and Pettyclose Lane, which are also narrow. The most radical solution would be to close both routes and force motorists to use the main roads (A619 and A632), which, as everyone agrees, are heavily congested at certain times of the day.

This approach is probably too extreme, and Coun. Brittain favours encouraging cyclists to use the exist-



ing bridlepath through the golf course between Crow Lane and Wheathill Lane to get to the Royal Hospital. If the surface was upgraded throughout this might be a viable alternative. This would avoid inconveniencing local residents and would presumably be cheaper than closing Crow Lane permanently.

The Civic Society committee has made a further submission to the county council about the eastern end of the proposed cycle superhighway, setting out in more detail the points summarised here, and urging (against its own previously stated view, it must be said) that the widely expressed wishes of local residents should be taken into account. This second paper is available on the society's website.

The Civic Society strongly supports sustainable transport but any changes made to the existing road layout need to be inclusive and carefully integrated to enhance, not harm, the vitality and character of our neighbourhoods. Instead, at both Brookside and Tapton, we have a very public example of virtue signalling at the expense of other modes of transport and other road users. The society will continue to oppose the building of the cycle superhighway along Chatsworth Road.

## DID THE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULT PROPERLY?

**A**fter being told anecdotally that a number of residents on the route of the cycle superhighway were not sent notices advising them of the proposals, the Civic Society asked the county council, under the Freedom of Information Act, for a list of all the streets where circulars were delivered.

In their reply the county council stated that the notice was delivered to some or all of the residents of 117 streets extending from Holymoore Road in the west to Lodge Close (off Manor Road, Brimington) in the east. The delivery (to a total of 4,041 properties) was made by Letterbox Distribution.com on 8 March.

The county council added that 'When a local councillor suggested that some properties along Chatsworth Road between Storrs Road and Brookside Glen had not received a letter, our consultants [i.e. Local Transport Projects] checked with Letterbox Distribution who confirmed that they distributed to these areas without any reported issues'. The full text of the county council's letter is available on the Civic Society website.

Since receiving this letter we have made our own enquiries among residents of Brookside and at the same time the group campaigning for the reopening of Crow Lane has canvassed door-to-door on streets in Brimington. The result is that we have evidence that the circular was not delivered to at least sixteen streets at both the western and eastern ends of the route of the proposed superhighway, or about 14 per cent of those on the county council's list. Most crucially, we have incontrovertible evidence that the circular was not delivered to houses on the affected section of Chatsworth Road. Coun. Boulton has also stated that virtually no-one he has canvassed had heard of the notice.

It is a fundamental principle of any exercise of this sort that it must be done evenhandedly. All householders likely to be affected by a new development must be given an equal opportunity to comment. In this case, 'an equal opportunity' means being sent the same circular.

Our enquiries strongly suggest that the distribution of this leaflet was not done correctly. This failure may well be sufficient grounds for a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman should the county council, despite strong local opposition, decide to go ahead with the cycle superhighway in its present form.

There is also the question of exercising proper care in the disbursement of public funds. When a local councillor suggested that the leaflet had not been properly distributed, all that seems to have happened is that the county council asked Local Transport Projects to check with their subcontractors, who assured them that they had done their

job properly. It was presumably on this basis that their invoice was paid, either by the county council or (rechargeably) by Local Transport Projects. Why, after it had been alerted to a possible problem, did the county council not do some back-checking, or instruct Local Transport Projects to do so?

Letterbox Distribution.com (not to be confused with Letterbox Distribution Ltd (company no. 07932329), formerly of 555-557 Cranbrook Road, Ilford IG2 6HE, which was incorporated in 2012 and dissolved in 2018) appears to be an unincorporated entity trading from Unit 65, Lancaster Road Industrial Estate, Barnet EN4 8AS. A business based in north London was perhaps not the best choice to supervise a large leaflet distribution in a town 150 miles away, even if they quoted the lowest price. It is, of course, the taxpayer who has paid for this exercise.

The county council's letter to the Civic Society stressed that it also publicised the proposals through a project website, social media and a press release, as well as contacting 65 district councillors and four parish councils. Emails were sent to some 80 'wider stakeholders', including businesses, schools, leisure facilities, emergency services and 'transport groups'.

This is all well and good, although the letter also names as consultees Transition Chesterfield and the Chesterfield Cycle Campaign, both of which have campaigned for additional facilities for cyclists in the town and so are hardly disinterested parties. This tends to support the criticism made of the consultation that it was designed from the start to obtain replies in favour of the scheme.

The Civic Society was not one of the local organisations sent details, even though it has been in existence since 1964.

We look forward to hearing the county council's conclusions after they have digested the response from their consultation, and we hope also have taken into account the very extensive criticism of the present proposals.



The former Chesterfield Rural District Council offices on Saltergate of 1938, with the post-1974 extension beyond.

## WHAT FUTURE FOR NORTH EAST DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES?

There has been publicity in the *Derbyshire Times* recently concerning the unsightly state of the former North East Derbyshire District Council offices on Saltergate and opposition to the demolition of the older part of the building, opened in 1938. This was designed by the local firm of Houfton & Kington for Chesterfield Rural District Council. In 2018 McCarthy & Stone obtained planning permission to demolish the whole of the offices and build a large block of assisted living apartments on the site.

It now turns out, after we asked McCarthy & Stone whether they still had plans to do this, that the company never completed the purchase of the land. The owner remains Heathcotes Care Ltd, a local business which provides services for adults with learning difficulties and currently occupies 37 Station Road, the former *Derbyshire Times* offices.

It is generally agreed that, whether or not the 1938 building merits retention, the site in its present state is an eyesore. For this reason the Civic Society has asked Heathcotes what their plans are, adding that we would support any redevelopment scheme that brings the land back into beneficial use and improves the appearance of Saltergate.

## BRAMPTON MANOR: STILL NO DECISION

The Borough Council's planning committee has still not decided the application to convert the pub at Brampton Manor into flats. This saga has now been running for over a year, and leaves the two unoccupied buildings on the site, the cruck-framed barn of c.1600 (a scheduled monument) and the later gazebo (a II\* listed building), at risk. We continue to share the view of Historic England that, before any redevelopment takes place, a comprehensive plan for the future of all three protected buildings should be prepared after a full historical and architectural survey of the site.

## NEW HOUSING AT HASLAND GREEN REJECTED

The planning committee has, however, turned down the application mentioned in the last Newsletter to build seven houses off Seagrave Drive, to the rear of what has come to be called (not strictly accurately) Hasland Green Manor. The main reason for the decision was the impact of the scheme on the setting of this house, which is listed grade II. Reasonable people might differ as to how much of a 'setting' there is left to protect, but the decision has the merit of putting a stop to the gradual spread of the built-up area in this part of Hasland.

## WINGERWORTH HALL: IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED ...

Apparently undeterred by the Planning Inspectorate's firm rejection of his appeal against North East Derbyshire's refusal to grant permission to build a large bun-

galow close to the surviving south range of Wingerworth Hall, the owner of the land is trying again.

His first step after the rejection of the appeal was to re-market the portion of the south range which he also owns. This comprises several virtually derelict rooms backing onto the northern half of the building, to which a small house (which appears to be habitable) was attached in the 1920s. Locally, this unusual (not to say very expensive) refurbishment opportunity is rumoured to have gone under offer almost at once.

He has followed this success up by applying to North East Derbyshire for the determination of 'reserved matters' that were left undecided when he obtained outline planning permission for a 'modest, well-designed' bungalow on the adjoining land in 2018. The Civic Society, as well as the adjoining property owner, pointed out that the drawings submitted last year for full planning permission to go ahead with this dwelling were for a semi-bungalow that was neither modest nor well-designed. The Planning Inspector appears to have taken the same view.

The latest application includes drawings showing what appears to be virtually the same bungalow as the one in the rejected application. An accompanying statement claims that it has been designed to look like a stables conversion and will be finished in either natural or reconstituted sandstone to blend in with the adjoining portion of Wingerworth Hall.

The elevation drawings in fact show a structure that continues to look like an immodest, badly designed timber-framed semi-bungalow. It bears no resemblance to either a converted or unconverted stable block: the real stables for Wingerworth Hall survive nearby and were converted into small dwellings some years ago. There is no indication as to how the imitation sandstone finish (it seems very unlikely that anyone building a bungalow of this sort would be able to afford real stone) is to be treated in detail.

We have urged North East Derbyshire to reject this new application.





An artist's impression (courtesy Whittam Cox Architects) of the two blocks of flats to be built at Waterside, as seen from Brimington Road (on the left), looking towards the parish church. The new canal basin is on the extreme right.

## WATERSIDE: DETAILED DESIGNS FOR MULTI-STOREY CAR-PARK AND FLATS RELEASED

**W**e have been invited to comment on two rather complex planning applications made by Bolsterstone plc as the developers of the Waterside scheme. One is for the multi-storey car-park to be built on the western edge of the site (close to the Rother Way bypass) and the other is for two large blocks of flats on the Brimington Road side, including those which will stand alongside the new canal basin.

The plans can be found on the Borough Council's planning website, under the references CHE/21/00184 and CHE/21/00186.

The drawings are accompanied by lengthy explanations of how the designs have been arrived at prepared by the architects responsible for the two schemes. These documents are lavishly produced, with numerous illustrations, but the text would have benefited from more careful editing and proof-reading. Why spend thous-

ands on artwork and still tell readers that drawings are being forwarded to the council 'seperately'?

Most of what is said will probably be welcomed by those looking forward to the transformation of this large derelict area, although the use of expanded aluminium mesh as cladding for the car-park may not find favour. This appears to be the same material as used for the new Saltergate multi-storey car-park, which has been heavily criticised. The argument is that it enables the car-park to be ventilated naturally (i.e. the wind blows through the gaps in the mesh and takes away car exhaust fumes), avoiding the need for expensive plant.

The flats are to be built on a 'buy-to-rent' basis for investors, rather than for individual leaseholders. This being the case, one aspect of the scheme which might merit reconsideration is the fairly high proportion (about a third) of one-bedroom, as opposed to two-bedroom, flats.

Most of the occupiers will probably be single young professionals or couples without children. Both groups generally want a second bedroom, not so much for occasional guests as for regular use as a home office. It might be better to include more two-

bedroom flats in the scheme to avoid the risk of having one-bedroom flats left unlet.

As the drawing reproduced here shows, the two blocks of flats will transform the approach to Chesterfield from the motorway along Brimington Road. It is impossible to get rid of the retaining wall alongside the railway on one side, but at least on the other there will be eye-catching new buildings that show that Chesterfield is on the up.

Who would have thought only a few years ago that you could live in a brand-new flat in Chesterfield overlooking a working canal? And be within five minutes' walk of a main-line railway station from where it is possible to get into central London in two hours?

## BLUE PLAQUE PROGRESS

**T**hanks to the continuing efforts of our secretary, Frank Gorman, we are making some progress on this front. A design for the plaque at the former St Helena School on Sheffield Road is now with

our suppliers, Leander Architectural of Doveholes, and a listed building application has been submitted to the Borough Council for its erection.

We have drafted text for plaques for the Winding Wheel and the Pomegranate Theatre and hope shortly to submit applications for these. The text we plan to use is as follows (suggestions for amendments welcome):

#### THE PICTURE HOUSE

Opened 1923.

Ballroom, restaurant and shops added 1930.

Architect: Harold Joseph Shepherd (1888–1961) of Sheffield.

Renamed the Odeon 1937.

Closed 1981.

Reopened 1987 as the Winding Wheel Theatre

#### POMEGRANATE THEATRE

Opened 1904 as the

Corporation Theatre.

Later used as a cinema.

Reopened as the Civic Theatre 1949

The first local authority repertory theatre in England

Closed 1981

Reopened 1982 as the Pomegranate

The United Reformed Church on Soresby Street is sympathetic to having a plaque, but have suggested postponing its installation until the church celebrates the 200th anniversary of its opening in 2023. Our efforts to install a plaque on the Central Methodist Church on Saltergate have come to a halt, since the Methodist Church headquarters in Manchester has failed to reply to our emails on the subject. The local society was quite happy with the idea.

## LAND OF PROMISE

*Graeme Challands outlines plans for the adaptive re-use of St Andrew's, Barrow Hill, which is to close as an Anglican place of worship.*

Land of Promise is a social enterprise dedicated to heritage-led regeneration in north Derbyshire. Our first focus is to promote a new use for the parish church of St Andrew, Barrow Hill, as the hub of a network of utopian working-class communities in Derbyshire. St Andrew's was the first building designed jointly by the local architects Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker.

Unwin and Parker were part of a group who in 1895, when the church was completed, met at the home of Edward Carpenter in north Derbyshire and planned to change the world, with ideas for garden cities, poetry, novels, gay rights, socialism, clean air, naturism, vegetarianism, arts and crafts, women's suffrage, recycling, prison reform, pacifism, the trade union movement, council housing, allotments, the simple life, capital punishment, vivisection the right to ramble and much more. They believed in a new kind of cooperative society in which art, science and politics came together.

The Church of England has begun the process of closing St Andrew's and is looking for a new use for this building, which is of great historic importance. The parish of Staveley has given its support to the proposals of Land of Promise.

We plan first to carry out a survey of the building and deal, for example, with any damp. We may install a floating mezzanine floor which respects the existing windows and other features. This could become an art gallery, displaying items from the Borough Council's collection.

The Holt organ will be removed from the balcony, restored and returned to its original position, where it will be available for recitals. If possible we will reuse the wooden balcony to form the east end of a mezzanine floor overlooking the chancel. Access would be via a new staircase and a lift. The west window will be revealed again.

An office/storeroom will be created at the west end at ground level,

with a counter in front.

Disabled access will be improved and work done to allow deaf and visually impaired people to visit the building.

The pews will be removed to create a display space for arts and crafts. The cabinets and displays will be designed to be moved to the sides and ends to create room for an audience for performance events held in the chancel, with a proposed capacity of 120.

We plan an exhibition to tell the story of Utopian communities in north Derbyshire.

At the east end we propose an single-storey extension, connected to the vestry by a glass corridor. This will be energy efficient, Arts and Crafts inspired, with a green roof, a green wall and a west-facing veranda. It will house lavatories, a plant room for a new heating system (biomass or ground source heat pump), a kitchen, storeroom, staffroom and a tea-room. The tea-room will be walker and cyclist friendly, with dog ties and bowls on the veranda, free Wi-Fi, USB charging points, newspapers and a wood burner.

We will provide blankets/throws on the veranda, which will also have a community noticeboard, leaflet dispenser and a book exchange.

We will fit PV slates on the south facing roof of the main building and solar hot water on the extension. Rainwater harvesting will be installed to provide grey water for the lavatories. Gas will not be used. There will be induction hobs for cooking, an EV charging point in the car park, a covered cycle shelter with EBike charging point, and another for buggies and mobility scooters

We propose establishing a Charitable Incorporated Organisation to deal with the building itself and a wholly owned Community Interest Company to act as a trading arm to deal with the events and activities within the building.