

although the figure falls short of our initial target. We hope that it may be possible to build on this year's achievement in the future.

The Civic Society continues to be affiliated to Destination Chesterfield and our chairman has attended several meetings organised by that body. This helps to make the society better known among the business and professional community in Chesterfield and enables the society to find out what is going on in the business world. In 2021 the Civic Society became a member of Civic Voice, the national representative body for the civic movement, and on 14 October 2021 our chairman was elected a trustee of Civic Voice (and a director of the associated company limited by guarantee). He resigned from both offices on 15 February 2022 after failing to obtain sufficient information concerning the financial position and management of the organisation to enable him to discharge his fiduciary obligations to members of the charity and the company. In July 2022 the acting chairman of Civic Voice stated that a large sum of money had been stolen from the organisation's bank account and that approximately £80,000 had to be raised to ensure its continued existence. Civic Voice is appealing to its member societies to supply that sum by donations or loans. The Chesterfield Civic Society did not renew its membership of Civic Voice in April 2022 and will not be contributing to this appeal.

The society's committee has met every two months throughout the year and has sent a newsletter to members once a month. It also issues news and comments via its website and Facebook, and makes regular statements to the local press. We have not re-established a monthly programme of speaker meetings (which have attracted limited support in the recent past) but will convene meetings when we feel that there is an issue affecting Chesterfield worth discussing. We will of course continue to hold annual general meetings every autumn. Membership of the society remains around 80 and the committee is very grateful for everyone's support. Needless to say, we would welcome an increase in membership and also offers from members to join the committee. The larger our membership the louder our voice will be.

CHESTERFIELD AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

Report of the Committee, 2021–22

We very much regret to record the death, on 11 January 2022, of Ian Thomason, who since 2016 had been a valuable member of the Civic Society committee and a very efficient and industrious IT officer. Ian continued to do this work for as long he could, despite increasingly serious health problems, and will be sadly missed. We are very grateful to Philip Cousins for taking over and further developing this aspect of our work, including the creation of a Facebook page.

During the year under review (April 2021–March 2022) the most important planning issue with which we have been concerned has been the proposed 'Cycle Super Highway' which the county council intends to build along the north side of Chatsworth Road between its junctions with Holymoore Road and Storrs Road. This is part of a larger scheme that also includes upgrading an existing cycle route between Storrs Road and the railway station, and closing to motor traffic a section of Crow Lane between the entrance to Tapton golf course and Dobbin Clough farm. The western portion of this route has been very strongly opposed by local residents, not least because of the failure of the county council to consult them as it claimed to have done. The Civic Society has supported their opposition and complained about the lack of consultation to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman found that, on the balance of probabilities, the county council did not distribute a circular to 4,041 households living on 117 streets on or near the route, as it claimed to have done, although he also found that this defect did not invalidate the consultation as whole. In addition he ruled that the county council had not dealt properly with the Civic Society's complaint on this matter and ordered the council to pay the society compensation of £100, which it has done.

As part of our campaign, we convened a public meeting at Brookfield School on 11 November 2021, addressed by Toby Perkins MP, which was attended by about 350 people. This was probably one of the largest meetings of its kind held in Chesterfield for many years. The county council has ignored this widespread opposition and appears to be determined to execute the scheme at a cost to the taxpayer that is likely to approach £2 million.

Our other long-running campaign, which has continued throughout the year, concerns the failure of Derbyshire County Council, as sole trustee of the charity, to administer the Chesterfield Schools Foundation in accordance with its governing Scheme of 2002. It is now over two years since the Charity Commission asked the county council to transfer its trusteeship to the Derbyshire Community Foundation, which it has failed to do. The charity owns two pieces of real property, namely Hurst House and land forming the greater part of the site of Brookfield School. Foundation Derbyshire has asked the county council to sell Hurst House by auction and remit the proceeds to it, rather than transfer the property itself. This the county council has failed to do. The obstacle to transferring the land at Brookside is that, some years ago, the county council registered itself as owner of the property at HM Land Registry, whereas in fact the land belongs to the Chesterfield Schools Foundation. The county council has since failed to secure an amendment to the Land Registry record. The net result of these two failings is that Hurst House, a listed building in a conservation area, remains a building at risk, and not a single young person in Chesterfield has benefited from the charity as intended under the Scheme of 2002.

The Civic Society has on several occasions since 2017 laid complaints before the Charity Commission concerning the county council's performance as sole trustee of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation. On each occasion the Charity Commission has found reasons to take no action. We will continue to apply what pressure we can on the Commission to change this policy.

During the year the Civic Society committee has been consulted by Chesterfield Borough Council on a number of planning and listed building applications, on which it has submitted observations. The buildings involved include 20–22 Abercrombie Street, Brampton Manor, Burlington House, Dunston Hall, the former North East Derbyshire District Council offices on Saltergate, the former Primitive Methodist church on Holywell Street, and Ringwood Hall. We were also consulted about the refurbishment of the Stephenson Memorial Hall, where we supported the proposed structural changes to the building but condemned the scheme devised by consultants for a new permanent museum exhibition, since this displayed a complete lack of understanding of the history of Chesterfield.

We have also supported the Borough Council's plans for the redevelopment of the area around the railway station. In the case of the council's proposed

alterations to the Market Place, we have suggested that any changes should be readily reversible, since they may prove less successful in practice than originally believed.

We have supported the Borough Council's policy of disposing of Tapton House on a long lease to a new occupier with the resources to refurbish and maintain the mansion and grounds, with either the retention or demolition of the adjoining school buildings of 1930. We consider that this policy offers the best chance of securing the future of probably the most important of the handful of grade II* listed buildings in the borough. We have not supported proposals for the 'community use' of the buildings because we fail to see how adequate revenue funding for such a use could be obtained.

During the year, thanks to a generous grant from the Borough Council and a very kind donation from one of our members, we were able to commission three new blue plaques. One of these was unveiled at the entrance to the former Girls' High School on Sheffield Road on 7 March 2022 at what proved to be a very enjoyable occasion, thanks to the generous hospitality of the University of Derby, the present owners of the building, and the enthusiastic support of former pupils of St Helena School. We hope that a plaque recording the history of what is now the Winding Wheel Theatre will be unveiled by the Mayor in the fairly near future. The third plaque, destined for the Pomegranate Theatre, cannot be installed until building work at the Stephenson Memorial Hall is completed. We continue to investigate other possible locations for blue plaques, and funding for their manufacture.

We have also been preparing new 'town trails', including both a single-sheet folded leaflet and a longer booklet, which will provide a guided walk round the town centre drawing attention to buildings of interest. The society's last publication of this sort appeared about twenty years ago. We hope the first of these will be available very soon.

Early in 2022 we decided that the Civic Society should act as the coordinating body in the borough for Heritage Open Days, a national event held each year in September. Since then we have tried to encourage both places of worship and secular buildings not usually open to the public to take part, with mixed success. Eleven buildings will be open this year, a larger number than in previous years,