
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



STEPHENSON MEMORIAL HALL SCHEME TO GO AHEAD

AT THE VERY END of February the Borough Council's planning committee held a special meeting to consider its own application for the refurbishment of the Stephenson Memorial Hall. The project is being funded by a grant of £17m. from the Government.

The application was approved and so the work can now go ahead. The plans for alterations to the building were in general welcomed by those who commented on them, apart from the question of access, particularly by the less mobile, and the drawings have been altered to meet some of these objections.

The Civic Society's committee supports the proposed alterations to the building, apart from some doubts about access, but remains vehemently

opposed to the planned changes to the museum displays. These were included in the planning application, although planning consent is not normally needed to reorganise the contents of a Grade II listed building (as opposed to its structure).

We hope that when the time comes the council will take into account the serious objections we have raised concerning the plans for the museum, and will devise a scheme that ensures that the displays explain the history of Chesterfield using material evidence, which we consider to be the proper function of a local museum.

Civic Society members who would like to read more about the application, the thinking behind it, and the comments made by others, will find an exceptionally full and detailed report by the council's head of planning, Paul Staniforth, on its planning website under the reference CHE/21/00801/FUL.

Mr Staniforth's report shows that he and other officers have fully considered all the points made by consultees. This is important, so to avoid suggestions that the council is 'marking its own homework' in deciding an application that it has made to itself as a local planning authority. No-one could seriously complain that the application has not been properly considered.

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

IN THE LAST Newsletter we published a provisional list of buildings in Chesterfield which we hope can be opened during Heritage

Week in September. One of our members, John Boulton, suggested some additions and so the list we are now working on is as follows:

The Parish Church
Holy Trinity, Newbold Road
St Thomas's, Chatsworth Road
St Leonard's Mission, Spital
St John's, Newbold
SS Augustine, Derby Road
Eyre Chapel, Newbold

United Reformed Church, Rose Hill
Elder Yard Meeting House
Central Methodist Church
Ragged School
Catholic Church of the Annunciation
The Mosque, Newbold Road

Town Hall
Winding Wheel
Market Hall
Peacock, Low Pavement
Spital Cemetery
Revolution House, Old Whittington
Tapton House

Masonic Hall, Saltergate
Old Court House, Brimington Road
Barnett Observatory, Newbold
Nissen Hut off New Square
St Helena Building, Sheffield Road
West Studios (former Grammar School), Sheffield Road

Clayton's Tannery
Brampton Brewery
Chesterfield Football Club

As we said in the January Newsletter, some of these buildings are normally open to the public anyway, but our hope is to get at least some of the others open as well, and publicise the fact that this lengthy list of buildings

of interest are all open at the same time to mark a national event.



Some of the buildings are surprisingly little known, even to local residents. For example, when the Eyre Chapel in Newbold was the venue recently for a small model railway exhibition, quite a few visitors said they had no idea it was there.

It would not be practicable to get all these buildings open for the whole ten days of Heritage Week, and it may be better to concentrate energy on getting as many as possible open on (say) the first Saturday. This will depend on the response of owners and custodians of the buildings in question.

The Civic Society committee will now begin approaching owners to seek their cooperation, but if any other members have personal connections with any of the places listed here, we would be very glad to hear from them, since using contacts in this way may be more productive than sending off letters into the blue.

DUNSTON HALL AGAIN



THE OWNER of Dunston Hall, who recently obtained consent to change its use to a wedding venue with overnight accommodation, and carried out alterations at the property before obtaining planning consent and listed building consent to do so, has submitted a further application to restore to beneficial use a range of derelict outbuildings be-

hind the mansion.

We will say more about this in the March Newsletter, after the committee have had time to consider the plans, but members who enjoy reading fantasy local history may like to study the opening pages of the 'Heritage Statement' which has been submitted as part of the application (CHE/22/00111/FUL). It is amazing what some people will pay good money for!

GRAFFITI AT TAPTON HOUSE

ONE OF OUR members who lives nearby, Ian Scott, recently reported finding spray-painted graffiti on the main front of Tipton House, which remains empty. This activity is objectionable in any context and especially so in the case of a Grade II* listed building with exceptionally fine brickwork.

We have written to the Borough Council asking them to extend the wire-mesh ('Heras') fencing currently erected around the main entrance to the whole building, so as to keep all but the most determined vandals at least 2 metres away from the ground floor walls and windows. If anyone succeeded in breaking into the property the consequences could be disastrous for one of the most important listed buildings in Chesterfield.

We hope also that the council will take immediate steps to remove the paint, so as to discourage imitation and if possible avoid permanent damage to the fabric. This may not be an easy or cheap task, given the nature of the brickwork, and may require listed building consent.

Incidents of this sort emphasise that a long-term future must be found for Tipton House as soon as possible, preferably one that involves the building once again being occupied.

CROW LANE: NO FURTHER NEWS

NOTHING more has been heard of the county council's plans to close part of Crow Lane permanently to motor traffic. At pres-

ent it remains open, but does not appear to be heavily used by either motor vehicles, cyclists or pedestrians. As we have said before, reasonable people can differ on the question of whether it is a good idea to close the road, but it must be done in the correct way, with proper consultation. The process will presumably begin with a notice in the local press, and those interested in this issue (including the 711 people who a year ago signed a petition opposing the closure) should keep a careful eye on the Public Notices column of the *Derbyshire Times*.

CYCLE SUPER HIGHWAY UPDATE



THERE is a limited amount of further news about our attempts to prevent the county council making Chatsworth Road in Brookside look like the road on Merseyside illustrated above.

We understand that three complaints from local residents (all of them members of the Civic Society) have been accepted for investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman. A fourth (the complaint made to the county council by the Civic Society in October last year) is being considered for investigation.

In addition, three individual members have jointly prepared a further complaint, which the Civic Society has submitted to the county council on their behalf. This is currently awaiting a response from the county council. If there is no response within 28 days, or the response is unsatisfactory, we shall lay that complaint before the Ombudsman as well.

One of the main thrusts of this latest complaint concerns the financing of the project. A very detailed forensic analysis of the county coun-

cil's own figures shows that, even on the most optimistic assumptions, the project cannot be executed within the award of £1.68m. from the Government. It appears that at least £37,000 of additional expenditure will fall on local taxpayers.

Apart from the question of finance, all the complaints so far accepted by the Ombudsman for investigation, and others which are at any earlier stage in the process, focus on the fatally flawed 'consultation' carried out almost a year ago by the county council. It is now clear beyond reasonable doubt that most, if not all, local residents, especially at the Brookside end of the route, did not receive any notice of the consultation.

Despite the overwhelming evidence put to first the county council and now the Ombudsman, the council continues simply to repeat the figures from its consultants' report that two-thirds of those who responded to the consultation were in favour of the scheme (about 1,200 people out of 1,800). We have repeatedly shown that these figures (and any conclusion drawn from them) are meaningless, since at least 500 households in Brookside were not sent the notice which the county council claim they were sent, and 711 people petitioned against closing Crow Lane.

The county council now seems to have given up arguing its case to those who oppose the scheme, and is in effect telling objectors to write to the Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.

We obviously hope that the Ombudsman will rule that there has been gross maladministration by the county council and that it is unsafe for the authority to proceed with this scheme. We consider it a hopeful sign that the Ombudsman has already accepted three separate complaints for investigation. This suggests that he believes there is a case to answer. For a major local authority to be the subject of at least three Ombudsman's investigation over one issue seems to us to suggest that the scheme is seriously flawed.



A WARNING FOR THE FUTURE?

There is perhaps a more general point to be made here, concerning the corporate attitude of the county council, certainly at chief officer level, and presumably also among members of the majority party.

All local authorities make decisions with which some of their voters disagree. Often the objections are ill-informed or based on misunderstanding. But in this case the sheer arrogance of chief officers in refusing to engage with people of similar professional and intellectual standing to themselves, who have taken the trouble to put forward detailed, reasoned statements opposing what the county council is doing, undermines confidence in, and respect for, local government among those who should be its natural supporters.

This attitude may owe something to the Conservatives' current very large majority on the county council, which appears to have bred (or accentuated) the idea that they can ignore the views of the public, especially in places like Chesterfield, where the Conservatives have no elected members.

Very much the same arrogance has been in evidence over the several years in which the Civic Society has been campaigning against the mismanagement by the county council of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation, a topic to which we may return in the next Newsletter.

Not only is this bad for local government as it is at present constituted

in Derbyshire, but it illustrates the danger of implementing ideas which have been circulating in recent years about the creation of a single, all-purpose authority for the county, with an elected 'mayor' or 'governor', and (quite possibly) a permanent Conservative majority.

In the opinion of many, this would be a disastrous development, threatening both the efficient administration of locally provided services and also local democracy as it has functioned reasonably well since the end of the Second World War. It is something the Civic Society would strongly oppose.

THE LATE MRS CYNTHIA BOAM

WE ARE SORRY to record the passing of a longstanding Civic Society member, Mrs Cynthia Boam of Brockwell, who died at home on 26 January, aged 94.

Born in Chesterfield and a lifelong local resident, Cynthia was a senior lecturer. Her interests were many and varied and included travel, gardening and history. She was actively involved in the restoration of the Eyre Chapel at Newbold by the Civic Society, responsibility for which has since passed to a separate body of trustees.

Cynthia was predeceased by her husband Sydney and leaves daughters Elizabeth and Rosemary, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The funeral service took place on Thursday 17 February at Chesterfield Crematorium, followed by a reception at the Ringwood Hall Hotel. Family flowers only were requested, but donations in lieu may be made to Helen's Trust Blyth House. Enquiries to the funeral directors, Birds Funeral Services, 44 Loads Road, Holymoorside, Chesterfield (01246 566592).

(Based on a notice first published in the Derbyshire Times)