
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



DESTINATION CHESTERFIELD INVESTMENT SUMMIT 2022

AS IN PREVIOUS YEARS the Civic Society was invited to the annual 'Investment Summit' organised by Destination Chesterfield. Although intended mainly as a 'networking opportunity' for business and professional people, the event is an excellent opportunity to learn more about what is going on in the town's economic life.

The most informative speaker was the Borough Council's chief executive, Huw Bowen, who spoke with his usual fluency about a wide range of initiatives which should benefit the local economy over the next few years. At the same time, he was realistic in outlining some of Chesterfield's problems, although he said little about the decline of retailing in the town centre and whether this can be reversed. He did mention the need to refurbish (and possibly partly demolish) the Pavements shopping precinct, to improve the approach to the town centre from the south.

One of the points Dr Bowen stressed, which accords with the view of the Civic Society committee, is that provision for 'town centre living' (essentially the conversion of unused upper floors into flats, with some limited new building) must be of high quality. He said that the council was 'picky' about who they would work with to ensure that only such schemes

NEW HOUSES AND FLATS FOR BRIMINGTON ROAD

WOODALL HOMES have announced plans to build about 145 houses and flats on the site formerly occupied by S. & J. Kitchen on Brimington Road, immediately to the south of a larger housing scheme currently being completed as part of Chesterfield Waterside.

Since in general we are in favour of new house-building close to the town centre (and in this case the station as well), we have supported the planning application, although we have questioned the small size of some of the flats. Some are little more than bed-sitters, with a kitchen in the living room, and we are dubious about how large the market is for this

type of housing.

It might well be better to build a smaller number of higher priced but bigger flats that would attract young business and professional people who do not wish to live somewhere that reminds them of their university accommodation.

Overall, however, the scheme is to be welcomed. Not only will it bring more housing to the town, but it will also remove a large and conspicuous area of industrial dereliction.

What would now be welcome would be proposals to redevelop the rest of this part of Brimington Road, to get rid of other eyesores such as the old court house, the remains of Eastwoods' waggon works, a tatty junk shop and a former petrol filling station now operating as a car-wash, none of which are ornaments to one of the main roads leading into Chesterfield close to the station.



STAVELEY REGENERATION CONSULTATION

AS A POSTSCRIPT to what was said at the Investment Summit about remediating the former Staveley Works site, it may be worth adding that the Harworth Group recently held a meeting to explain their plans to local people and have since set up a website for an online consultation, on which comments can be left. The website address is: <https://www.staveleyregeneration.co.uk/>.

A MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY, WHETHER WE WANT IT OR NOT

UNLESS the financial crisis threatening to engulf the Government becomes so serious that ministers do have to make a real effort to reduce public spending, the plan to create an additional layer of local government for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire appears certain to go ahead.

Both the chief executive and the leader of the Borough Council mentioned the creation of the mayor combined authority at the 'Investment Summit', emphasising that it would give the two counties the advantages already enjoyed by authorities subsumed within the Sheffield and West Midlands MCAs.

The leader of the council, Tricia Gilby, insisted that she would be following developments very closely to ensure that Chesterfield got its fair share of promised increased government funding. Nothing was said about the increased cost to the taxpayers of the two counties of establishing and maintaining the new body, or the possibility that district councils in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire will either be abolished or their responsibilities greatly reduced.

went ahead. We hope developers will take note.

Under its local plan, the council must secure the building of 240 new homes a year for the next twenty years. Last year it achieved 380, including for the first time for many years some built by the council itself. Also in the pipeline is Chesterfield's first 'build to let' scheme, opposite the Chesterfield Hotel site, which will provide 314 flats and houses. A new hotel with 140 beds was under discussion but there remained scope to encourage more visitors to stay in the town.

Dr Bowen mentioned progress on the Station Masterplan, including a multi-storey carpark and the new link road from Hollis Lane. There was interest from developers in rebuilding the Chesterfield Hotel site and 'Leveling Up' money from the Government had enabled the council to refurbish the Stephenson Memorial Hall and the town centre.

Despite the setbacks caused by the pandemic, demand for industrial and commercial premises remained strong. All the council's own units were let and overall demand exceeded supply. Markham Vale continued to develop successfully, with over 2,700 people now employed there, and there was to be a new training centre for the rail industry at Barrow Hill, in which Newcastle University would be involved.

The eastern end of the borough would also benefit from the 'Staveley Town Deal', including the canal, and the 'Staveley Growth Corridor' might be chosen as one of the 'Investment Zones' announced by the Government. The intended site of the HS2 maintenance depot was to be released

for an alternative use, and a construction skills training centre created at Staveley,

Different parts of the former Staveley works site were being redeveloped by the Harworth Group and by the Devonshire Group (i.e. the successors to the 4th earl of Devonshire who acquired the land in 1681, when there was already an ironworks there). Elsewhere in Staveley the Devonshire Group were to build houses on land at Mastin Moor which the Duke's family have also owned for centuries.

Dr Bowen stressed that the council wished to attract more higher skilled jobs to the town, an ambition in which Chesterfield College, already a very large and successful institution, had an important part to play. He also hoped that provision by the University of Derby would expand, perhaps even leading to the building of student accommodation in Chesterfield.

Later speakers from the county council and the college reiterated what Dr Bowen said about the part each had to play in the process of creating an environment in which business can flourish in Chesterfield. There was no mention of secondary education in the town.

Other matters mentioned by the county council officer included the complexity of finding an acceptable line for the Chesterfield–Staveley Regeneration Route, the equally difficult search for a way to reduce traffic congestion on the A61 south of Chesterfield, and the possibility that the new mayoral combined authority might bring with it more funding for major transport projects.

STEPHENSON PLACE FLAT CONVERSION SCHEME RESURFACES

THE DEVELOPER who wishes to convert the upper floors of the large block on the north side of Stephenson Place into flats has resubmitted a slightly revised planning application.

There is nothing seriously wrong with what he is proposing, apart from the now familiar problem of trying to squeeze too many flats into too small a space. We simply do not believe that many people in Chesterfield want to live in small single rooms and that in the long run more harm than good will be done by allowing developers to split up disused offices in this way. We have supported the application with the caveat that the very small flats should be rearranged to provide fewer, larger units.



ST ANDREW'S, BARROW HILL: UNLIKELY TO REOPEN AND FUTURE UNCERTAIN

Philip Cousins writes:

ST ANDREW'S, BARROW HILL, the unique Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin church is unlikely to be reopened after services there were suspended at the onset of Covid. The sad task of trying to find a use for the contents and secure the future of the historic organ and the stained-glass windows is already being pursued.

This historic building – the first

real outcome of collaboration between Parker and Unwin (who both later went on to greater things) – has an almost complete interior. What will happen to the building is now in some doubt, but most of the interior fittings are likely to be dispersed or sold, if closure is confirmed.

The proposal to close St Andrew's was first discussed at an open meeting in January 2019. Almost four years into the formal process, no decision has yet been made to officially close it, or about its future. If and when the process is completed, and closure is approved, it will be disposed of according to Church of England rules and could be given to a trust or community group rather than being sold.

In reality it is unlikely to reopen. Despite a sustained effort some years ago English Heritage refused to list the church. More recently efforts have been made to establish some form of multi-use heritage and community facility, but these have unfortunately failed.

Some items are destined to go to the Garden City Museum at Letchworth (the community Parker and Unwin went on to design), others will be retained locally. The latter group includes the bell (which is to go back to the school it originally came from at Barrow Hill) and the cast iron (made at Staveley Works) 'Last Supper' plaque, which will be given to Barrow Hill Memorial Hall. Efforts will be made to find a new home for the historic organ. The future of the stained glass and memorials will also be considered.

All this underlines just how much local heritage assets are at risk from changes in use, demographics and financial considerations.

Now the building is without a congregation after serving Barrow Hill since it opened in 1895. The community has also lost its remaining Methodist Church, but fortunately an active group is currently working to get the nearby Memorial Hall back up and running as a community asset. Here a Heritage Lottery funded community archive is currently being established. A small collection of more personal items has been rescued from the church. These include a few hymn books, prayer books, a kneeler and other small items relating to the

church. Some of the original floor tiles were saved during alterations to the building some years ago.

If St Andrew's is to be disposed of by the Church of England a strict procedure will be followed. There is also some hope that, as a key building in the Barrow Hill Conservation Area which has been listed by the Borough Council as a heritage asset, it will receive some protection from demolition or unsympathetic alteration.

More about St Andrew's church can be found on two websites:

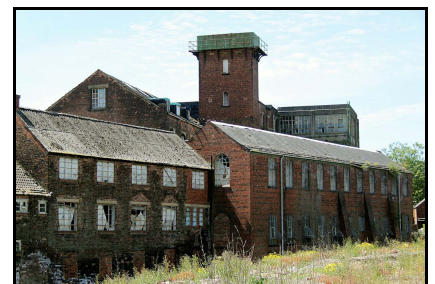
<https://www.staveleyandbarrowhill.org.uk/st-andrew-barrow-hill.html>

<https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Monument/MDR13270>

To read an article by Hugh Ellis about the possible removal of some items from the church for safe-keeping see his blog at the Town and Country Planning Association:

<https://tcpa.org.uk/icons-tears-and-hope-in-barrow-hill/>

WALTON WORKS AND CANNON MILL: A POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD?



MEMBERS who attended our recent AGM heard an excellent talk by Peter Milner of the Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust. In discussion afterwards Peter asked about the large area of derelict land he had noticed off Chatsworth Road on his way to the meeting.

We explained that this was land which had been cleared by Robinson & Son, which had once had large factories there, but had not yet been redeveloped. One of the obstacles to

redevelopment was the presence, towards the northern end of the site, of Walton Works, a cotton mill built in the 1790s using the fire-resistant construction technique then being pioneered in the industry. This is now a very rare survival and, as soon as its importance became known, was listed Grade II* by Historic England.

Adjoining the mill are some other early buildings which may have been workshops for knitting or weaving. At the south end of the site stands Cannon Mill, a foundry building dated 1816 and the only surviving remains above ground of Griffin Ironworks, developed by Ebenezer Smith and his partners from c.1775 into the largest ironmaking business in the Chesterfield area. Cannon Mill was listed Grade II many years ago.

Walton Mill cannot in any foreseeable circumstances be demolished and it would be highly regrettable if Cannon Mill was lost. Their presence on the site has, however, deterred possible developers, since it would add considerably to the cost and limit what could be built on the land.

In a brief discussion we agreed that if the DHBT could intervene and, ideally, take over the listed buildings, that might be the key to their survival and the successful redevelopment of a large area of land which ought to have great potential for residential, retail and employment use. We suggested that the DHBT contact Robinsons and see if there was any possibility of finding a solution on these lines.

In the meantime, we understand

that Robinsons have sold part of the site (not including either of the listed buildings) to a developer. It is therefore possible that proposals for new building there will be brought forward in the not too distant future.

TOWN TRAIL ALMOST READY

WE ARE PLEASED to report that a single single-sheet town trail, describing a short walk around the town centre, passing most of the more important buildings of interest to visitors, is almost ready to be printed. A longer, 32-page booklet with a more extensive tour of the town, remains in draft awaiting a decision to go ahead.

We are currently having a map drawn to accompany the text and pictures, and with luck the leaflet will be printed and available before Christmas. It will we hope be available, probably free of charge, from the Visitor Centre in Rykneld Square.

Obviously the number of visitors falls during the winter but by getting it out now we can judge how it is received and possibly modify the text and itinerary before numbers build up again from around Easter next year.

This initiative will not transform the 'visitor economy' which the Borough Council are keen to promote but will make a small contribution and will fill a gap in resources at the Visitor Centre which has been commented on.

STILL NO NEWS ...

AS WAS THE CASE last month, there is little new to report on three long-running issues with which the society has been involved: the proposed East–West Cycle Superhighway, the future of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation and Hurst House, and the fate of Tapton House.

On the first issue, the county council have made no statement as to the results of their recent 'consultation' about aspects of the cycle route. It is possible that this produced a majority opposed to the plan and that this accounts for the lack of news.

On the second, the Charity Commission recently sent a three-line reply to a carefully argued three-page letter renewing our request for them to take action over the county council's maladministration of the Schools Foundation. This is probably sufficiently insulting to justify a complaint about their performance.

On the third, the *Derbyshire Times* has recently stated that the Borough Council is understood to have received 'several' serious enquiries from potential purchasers or lessees of Tapton House, and is now considering these. In the meantime, the most recent criticism of the Civic Society's policy towards Tapton House was sufficiently inaccurate to warrant a published rejoinder in the *Derbyshire Times*, which duly appeared in the paper.