
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



WHAT FUTURE FOR THE TOWN CENTRE: A CIVIC SOCIETY DISCUSSION MEETING

THE FUTURE of the town centre has become a matter of lively discussion in Chesterfield in the last few months. The *Derbyshire Times* has carried opinion pieces by its own reporters, comments by business people, and letters and vox pops from readers. All are agreed that the town centre is threatened with decline, characterised by empty shops (and other buildings) and falling support for the open market, alongside other problems of longer standing, such as graffiti and anti-social behaviour.

None of these problems is unique to Chesterfield, and some towns are in a worse position. On the other hand, there is a feeling that unless something is done, probably through the efforts of both private enterprise

and public bodies, the situation will get worse, rather than better.

In response to this interest, and to give the widest possible range of people the chance to put their point of view, the Civic Society has organised a speaker meeting, open to non-members as well as members, on Monday 27 February at 7.30 at St Thomas's Church Centre, Chatsworth Road. We have booked the main meeting hall, rather than the smaller room we have used for other meetings in recent years.

We have invited three speakers to introduce the discussion: Neil Johnson, an officer of the Borough Council responsible for the town centre; Dom Stephens of Destination Chesterfield, which speaks for the business and professional community in the town; and Lisa Hopkinson of Transition Chesterfield, which campaigns for a more sustainable future for the town.

There is no specific agenda for the meeting, but some of the issues which people may like to discuss might include:

- Can Chesterfield be sustained as a sub-regional shopping centre for north-east Derbyshire, as it has been for centuries?
- Can independent retailers fill the gap left by the decline of branches of multiple retailers?
- How can the open market be sustained?
- What else should be provided in the town centre to encourage local people to visit?
- How can the 'night time economy' be encouraged in a way that attracts rather than repels families and older people?
- Can more be done to encourage tourists to spend more time (and money) in the town?
- Should there be more housing in the town centre and, if so, what sort of housing?
- How can the town centre be made more attractive as a place to live?
- What can the local authority do to support and develop the town centre, and how can more private capital be encouraged to invest in Chesterfield?

This is by no means a complete list and those coming to the meeting may have other points they wish to raise. What we hope no-one will deny is that these are important issues facing the town, especially at a time

when the national economy is threatened with recession, and towns like Chesterfield, outside the prosperous South East or the wealthy hinterland of one of the large provincial cities, is likely to suffer more than some others. They are also ones with which the Civic Society has been concerned since it was founded in the 1960s.

We hope to see as many Civic Society members as possible at the meeting, and also non-members (or prospective members, as we would like to think of them). Members are very welcome to bring friends and to make the event known as widely as possible.

WHERE NEXT FOR TAPTON HOUSE?

ON 13 DECEMBER Chesterfield Borough Council announced that, after careful consideration of seventeen expressions of interest in taking a 999-year of Tapton House, it had agreed to treat as its preferred bidder a company named Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd. The company announced at the same time that it proposed to convert the mansion into apartments and to build new housing on the site of some or all of the former secondary school buildings erected in 1930.

This decision has attracted criticism from those who believe that Tapton House should have been retained by the Borough Council, despite frequent statements by the council explaining that it could not find the capital expenditure needed to renovate the mansion, and from those who wished to see a 'community use' for the buildings, despite their failure to demonstrate where capital and revenue funding for such a use would come from.

The Civic Society's committee has consistently supported the Borough Council's decision to sell Tapton House, since we consider that this offers the best prospect for the preservation, in good condition, of an important Grade II* listed building. We also believe that the school buildings of 1930 could, without loss, be demolished if that would facilitate the survival of the mansion.

Our views on both these questions,

together with detailed suggestions about the possible future use of the mansion, based on a close study of available floor-plans, were set out in a memorandum that has been available on the Civic Society website since September 2021. This document appears to have been ignored by those who have criticised the society's policy.

We believe that two questions now arise from the council's decision and the initial statement by Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd: the standing of the proposed purchaser and the company's plans for the building.



CAVEAT VENDOR?

Neither the council's press statement, nor the comments by the company, both published in the *Derbyshire Times* on 15 December, provided much information about the purchaser. Civic Society members may be interested in a little more detail.

Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd was incorporated on 17 May 2021 with a capital of £100. Its correspondence address is 74 Cadeby Road, Sprotborough, near Doncaster, an imposing stone-built private residence whose architectural features include a castle-like crenellated turret. The company has only one director, Joanne Elizabeth Henry. Ms Henry was born in September 1987 in the Preston & South Ribble registration district of Lancashire. In filings at Companies House in connection with the companies mentioned here Ms Henry has given her nationality as British Virgin Islander, although she has always been resident in the United Kingdom.

Ms Henry's career as a company director appears to have begun in April 2016 when she became one of the original directors of Outshine Property Solutions Ltd, an office from which she resigned in July that

year. Her address for correspondence was then 106 Mansfield Crescent, Armthorpe, a colliery village near Doncaster. In 2017 the company was renamed Dapatchi Property Concepts Ltd. It was dissolved in July 2022.

One of Ms Henry's fellow directors at Outshine Property Solutions Ltd was Daniel Christopher Patrick. She has since been a director of a number of other companies of which Mr Patrick has also been a director. In May 2017 Ms Henry was appointed a director of Dapatchi Ltd, a company incorporated in 2014 with capital of £1, whose sole director had previously been Mr Patrick of XI Business Solutions Ltd, Premier House, Bradford Road, Cleckheaton; Ms Henry's address at the time of her appointment was 57 Tickhill Road, Doncaster, which in March 2018 became the company's registered office (having previously been 106 Mansfield Crescent, Armthorpe). Ms Henry's appointment as director terminated on 1 January 2021. On 5 April 2022 steps were taken for the company to be compulsorily struck-off, action which was suspended on 15 April. The following month the company went into voluntary liquidation.

Ms Henry and Mr Patrick have also been directors of three other companies with similar names: Dapatchi Group Ltd, of which Ms Henry was a director between 2017 and 2021 and which was wound up in 2022; Dapatchi Developments Ltd, incorporated in 2018, of which Ms Henry was a director between 2018 and 2021 and which was dissolved in 2022; and Dapatchi Investments Ltd, incorporated in September 2017 and dissolved in January 2019, of which Ms Henry was a director throughout its life.

Mr Patrick has also been a director in recent years of Dapatchi Architectural Ltd, incorporated in 2018 and dissolved in August 2022; Dapatchi Broomhill Ltd, incorporated in 2018, for which a liquidator was appointed on 15 December 2022; Dapatchi Construction Ltd, incorporated in 2017 and currently in administration; Dapatchi Electrical Ltd, incorporated in 2018 and dissolved in May 2022; Dapatchi Homes Ltd, incorporated in 2018 and still active; We are React Ltd (previously Dapatchi React Ltd

and before that Hinks Hall Lane Ltd), incorporated in 2020 and currently in liquidation; Dapatchi Property Skipton Ltd, incorporated in 2018 and dissolved in 2020; and Dapatchi Fulwood Ltd, incorporated in 2017 and dissolved in 2019. In all, according to Companies House, Mr Patrick is or has been a director of eleven companies.

In addition, others associated with Mr Patrick as fellow directors of some of the companies listed in the previous paragraph are also (or have been) directors of two others with similar names: Dapatchi London Ltd, incorporated in 2018, for which a liquidator was appointed on 15 December 2022; and DN Dapatchi Ltd, incorporated in 2019 and dissolved in 2021.

On 14 March 2019 Ms Henry became a director of Touchstone Online Ltd, together with Mr Patrick, Aniko Smith and Paul Benedict David Smith. The company's authorised capital was £100, its registered office was 57 Tickhill Road, Doncaster, and its business was described as 'Other education not elsewhere classified' (i.e. in the Standard Industrial Classification). Mr Patrick, Ms Smith and Mr Smith ceased to be directors in April 2021. In May 2021 an application was made to strike-off the company, a process that was completed in August that year.

On 13 November 2019 Ms Henry became a director of Damage Agency Ltd, together with Mr Patrick and Roy Thomas Barber. The company was concerned with the development of business and domestic software. In February 2020 the company changed its name to Fusion Agency Ltd. In June 2020 Mr Barber ceased to be a director of the company, at the same time as Rbcuk Ltd ceased to be a person with significant control of the company. On 1 January 2021 Ms Henry ceased to be a director of the company. On 20 April 2021 a first notice for the compulsory striking-off of the company appeared in the *London Gazette*. This action was discontinued on 19 May 2021. On 29 June 2021 the company's members resolved to wind up the company voluntarily and appointed a liquidator. On the same day the company's registered office was changed from Tickhill Road to Premier House,

Cleckheaton, the office of the liquidator. The final meeting of the company was held on 2 February 2022 and notice of liquidation was published in the *London Gazette* on 3 May 2022.

On 17 May 2022 Ms Henry became a director of SCE Property Concepts Ltd, whose registered office was 12 High Road, Dalby, near Doncaster, whose authorised capital is £100 and its business the development of building projects. On 16 August 2022 Ms Henry was joined as a director by Mark Lodge and Mr Patrick. The company remains active.

On 10 November 2022 Ms Henry and Mr Patrick became the two directors of Joanne Henry Ltd, whose registered office is also 12 High Road, Dalby, its authorised capital likewise £100, and its business 'Management consultancy activities other than financial management'. The company remains active.

The proposed conversion of Tapton House into apartments and the development of new properties on the site of the former school buildings will clearly be the work of some years. Let us hope that the company which proposes to do this will prove rather longer-lived than some of Ms Henry's previous business ventures.

HOW MANY APARTMENTS?

Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd have announced their intention of converting Tapton House into fifteen apartments, without giving any details of how they intend to achieve this. Published plans show that, as adapted by Chesterfield Corporation in 1930 and further modified by Chesterfield College after 1991, the mansion contains about ten principal rooms on each of three floors. There are two staircases and, near the former service staircase at the northern end of the building, a passenger lift.

As a matter of elementary arithmetic it is clearly impossible to create 15 flats from 30 rooms without extensive subdivision of the existing rooms. As a minimum, each flat would require a living room, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. There may be some scope for increasing the

number of rooms by reinstating walls that were taken down in 1930 to create larger classrooms from former bedrooms, but this would not produce anywhere near 60 rooms. In any case, it is unlikely that many people who could afford to live in an apartment in Tapton House would want only one bedroom. Nor are they likely to want flats with small, misshapen rooms, possibly with limited natural light.

More seriously, the scope for the subdivision of the rooms is severely limited by the Grade II* listing status of the mansion. This protects the interior as well as the exterior, and appears to have been accorded mainly because of the fine interiors that survive in the three principal reception rooms at the southern end of the ground floor. Without these, it is unlikely that Tapton House would have merited more than Grade II listing, in which case a new owner would have had a relatively free hand in remodelling the internal layout.

Any proposal for radical internal reordering is likely to be opposed by Historic England and would certainly be opposed by the Civic Society. It seems unlikely that the Borough Council, as the local planning authority, would grant listed building consent in the face of opposition from Historic England.

There is also the question of how to provide access to the flats without extensive internal alterations. This is before the question of providing emergency exits from the upper floors is considered, without disfiguring the outside of the building with an external fire escape.

It is very difficult to see how more than six decent-sized flats (one on each floor reached from each of the two staircases) could be created without unacceptable changes to the interior of the mansion or unacceptable fire-safety risks.

Even then, it is not clear how such flats could be laid out from the existing rooms, or how attractive the result would be to prospective purchasers. Only the flat that incorporated the three original reception rooms on the ground floor would have much character to it, but with the disadvantage of having bedrooms on the ground floor.

An alternative possibility would be to create two three-storey apartments

at either end of the house, which would be much more spacious, with probably four bedrooms and bathrooms spread over the first and second floors, and two reception rooms plus a kitchen and utility room on the ground floor. Each would have its own entrance and its own staircase.

No doubt others will be able to suggest various permutations on this theme, but the number of rooms, the position of the entrances, and the arrangement of the two staircases are factors in the equation that are not going to change.

To put it bluntly, neither Stone Castle Enterprise nor anyone else is going to create 15 flats from Tapton House in a way that would be acceptable to Historic England, Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service, Chesterfield Borough Council or the Civic Society. Nothing will be gained, and potentially a good deal could be lost through the deterioration of the building, from a prolonged game of listed building consent table tennis, as unacceptable plans are batted back and forth. We hope that all concerned will realise that at the outset.

The proposed developers have given no details as to what type of new house they would like to build in the grounds of Tapton House, which we assume they intend to build on the site of the former school buildings.

We will reserve judgment until more is known, but any new buildings would have to be of a very high standard of design for Historic England or the local planning authority to allow them to be erected so close to a Grade II* listed mansion and its generally well preserved gardens and grounds. That is not usually a characteristic of house-types proposed by developers of limited means for any kind of site, and it is not clear what (if any) previous experience Stone Castle Enterprise have of either remodeling large Georgian mansions or building new houses next to them.

If they believe that standard-issue spec builders' 'Neo-Georgian' complete with plastic window-frames and porch pillars will be acceptable, they should give up now.



TWO NEW BLUE PLAQUES FUNDED

WE ARE pleased to announce that the Civic Society has been awarded a grant of £1,000 by East Midland Railway from its Community Fund to cover the cost of two new blue plaques commemorating buildings associated with Chesterfield's railway history.

One will be installed on North Midland House on Corporation Street in place of a plaque placed there some years ago which contains an inaccurate date for the building. North Midland House is not a surviving remnant of Francis Thompson's original station of 1840, as used to be believed. It appears from map and other evidence to date from the rebuilding of the station in 1870, but seems also to have been built from masonry recovered from Thompson's station. The dark grey ashlar millstone grit is quite unlike anything the Midland Railway were using in 1870, and the elaborate chimney stacks and what were once mullion and transom window frames are characteristic of Thompson's designs for the North Midland Railway. Both these features of North Midland House are very similar to those shown on Samuel Russell's well-known lithograph of the down side buildings at the original Chesterfield station.

We hope to install the other plaque at the Portland Hotel, partly to record its own construction in 1899 and also as a memorial to the Market Place station (and headquarters) of the Lancashire, Derbyshire & East Coast Railway, opened two years earlier. This was the line that famously never reached either of its intended destinations and had an independent existence of barely ten years, before being absorbed into the Great Central



Railway at an enormous loss to its shareholders.

One reason for the company's chronic financial difficulties was the amount of money it spent on unnecessarily grand station buildings, both in Chesterfield and along the line to near Lincoln. Curiously, despite the amount that has been written on the history of the railway, no-one has ever identified the architect responsible for these stations, and in particular the fine building, with mullion and transom windows and Dutch gables, at Chesterfield. This was regrettably (and needlessly) demolished in 1973 to make way for an extension to New Beetwell Street which could easily have been realigned to avoid the building. The station closed to passengers as long ago as 1951 (and to goods in 1957), having been the venue in 1948 for a memorable exhibition to mark the centenary of the death of George Stephenson.

We believe that we have identified the architect who designed the LD&ECR stations but wish to confirm this before settling the wording of the plaque. We are also awaiting the outcome of a request to J.D. Wetherspoon, the present owners of the Portland, for permission to install the plaque. Spire Insurance Services, the owners of North Midland House, have kindly given consent for us to replace the plaque on their building.

'DEVOLUTION': THE UNSTOPPABLE JUGGERNAUT?

ALL THREE district councils in north-east Derbyshire have now come out strongly against the plan to create the misnamed 'East Midlands' Combined Counties Authority, which will in fact include only two of the counties convention-

ally included in that term. On the other hand, the leader of at least one (Chesterfield Borough Council) has frankly admitted that the opposition of her authority and the other two will count for nothing, since the leaders of the two county councils are in favour of the plan (less has been heard from the two city councils) and it is their view that will prevail.

In addition, the present government appears to be determined to waste as much taxpayers' money as possible on schemes of this sort before it leaves office in 2024, and the Labour Party has said nothing about scrapping these new 'mayoral authorities', presumably because it believes that it can in the near future regain political control of most of them.

This is depressing news for people who believe in the careful use of public money, or in local democracy. In Derbyshire the existing county council is widely regarded as remote, arrogant and undemocratic (as well as incompetent in much of what it does); to remove some services it currently provides to a trans-county body run by an elected mayor who is likely to suffer from both delusions of adequacy and a tendency towards empire-building will only make things worse.

Few ideas in public administration are completely new, and in this case the historical precedents are not encouraging. Britain had little choice but to accept Regional Commissioners with dictatorial powers during the Second World War (although the

system was never activated since the central government did not break down). Before then there was the short-lived the administration of regions of England by the major-generals in the later years of the Interregnum. This was highly unpopular and probably contributed to the restoration in 1660 of the monarchy, and with it traditional local government.

The natural unit of local government in England is the county or the large town with the status of a county; there is no need for, and no demand for, larger units set between central and local government.

It is also a myth that the creation of such bodies will lead to any real 'devolution' by central government. As Harold Wilson so accurately observed, 'Whoever's in office, the Treasury's in power'. If Barry Lewis or any of his fellow campaigners really think that they are going to get their hands on more money, the delusions have already set in.

The other racing certainty is that the district councils will suffer. County councils have traditionally looked down on second-tier authorities and ignored their views when they do not agree with their own, especially where political control of the two differs. An elected 'regional mayor' is likely to consider themselves even more important and thus entitled to take no notice of any other authority.

Those who remember the old Divisional Road Engineers of the Ministry of Transport (who refused point blank

to meet members or officers of district councils because they were not highway authorities) will probably agree with this prognosis.

If anyone ever concludes that a county like Derbyshire does not need three levels of local government and decides to do something about it, it is not difficult to work out which level will be abolished or emasculated into irrelevance.

Sadly, since the Reform Party is not going to form the next government, there appears to be no escape from what promises to be an unadulterated waste of public money for little or no benefit in return, and no way to prevent serious damage to the idea of democratic accountability for public bodies.

AND FINALLY, A REMINDER OF OUR NEXT PLAQUE UNVEILING

CAN WE REMIND all members that they are warmly invited to attend the official unveiling of the blue plaque at the Winding Wheel by Coun. Tony Rogers, the Mayor of Chesterfield, at 11 a.m. on Wednesday 1 March. The Council is providing light refreshments afterwards. If you have not already done so, please email our secretary (Frank) to confirm attendance.