
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 39

www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

March 2023

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



Yard meeting house in 1694. Its origins can be traced from the early seventeenth century and the cause was well established by the time its members were granted a measure of freedom of worship by the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672.

The strength of the Independent congregation in Chesterfield in the early nineteenth century is well illustrated by the building opened in 1823 as part of the development of Soresby Street. The road itself was laid out about ten years earlier on the site of Soresby House (on New Square) and its gardens.

The meeting house, larger and more impressive than either Elder Yard or the Wesleyan Methodist chapel that then stood on the site of the Central Methodist church on Saltergate, reflects the character of the congregation that built it: well proportioned, dignified, plain and solid, prominent without being pretentious. Internally, the building has excellent acoustics and a fine organ.

Its setting was enhanced with the opening of Rose Hill in the 1930s, which meant that for the first time the main south front looked onto a street.

In 1956 an extensive suite of school- and meeting-rooms was added on the west and north sides, thanks to the munificence of Blanche Eastwood, whose family had long been associated with the church.

The building has been well looked after during the two centuries in which it has been the main focus of Congregationalism in Chesterfield. Only a few years ago the interior was reordered to make it more flexible for both church and secular events.

A SAD END TO A LONG HISTORY

WITHIN the last few weeks has come the very sad news that the United Reformed Church on Rose Hill is to close. Serious defects have been discovered in the roof, which the congregation lack the resources to tackle.

Like most churches, Rose Hill has an ageing congregation which is declining in numbers, and its members feel that a major campaign of fundraising and building work is beyond them.

The last services at the church will be held in late May, on or close to the 200th anniversary of the opening of the meeting house in May 1823, which will give the event particular

poignancy. The congregation will move to worship at other URC churches in the neighbourhood, of which three remain open (St Andrew's, Newbold, Holymoorside and Calow).

Rose Hill is a former Congregational church which traces its direct history from the opening in 1778 of a meeting house in Froggatt's Yard, one of the yards behind Low Pavement towards its western end.

Before then Congregationalists in Chesterfield shared the meeting house in Elder Yard with a Presbyterian meeting, before the two went their separate ways and Elder Yard soon afterwards became the home of a Unitarian meeting, as it remains today.

The history of Independency in Chesterfield, however, goes back further than the building of the Elder

It is critically important for several reasons that an appropriate new use is found for the building, and not merely because it is listed Grade II. Rose Hill is the second oldest surviving nonconformist place of worship in Chesterfield. It is an impressive monument to an important strand in the religious history of a town in which Congregationalism was arguably more influential than Wesleyan Methodist during the nineteenth-century heyday of the Free Churches, a reversal of the situation found in other towns. It is an attractive building in a prominent position and makes a major contribution to the street picture.

If the problem of the roof can be overcome, possibly with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it should not be difficult to find a new use for the chapel which will not involve any alteration to its external appearance or damage to the interior.

It is possible that the theatre company which currently leases the Eastwood Rooms from the URC could absorb the meeting house into its estate and acquire the freehold of the entire block. This would be the simplest solution and the church should be a good fit with the company's existing activities.

Alternatively, the building could become a valuable community resource as a meeting-room close to the town centre, easily accessible by public transport and with ample parking nearby. Because of the quality of the acoustics and the organ (which must not be removed) it would be ideal as a venue for small chamber concerts or choral events.

The congregation at Rose Hill have faced the very sad loss of their church with commendable fortitude and realism. It is now for others to respond equally positively and devise a new use for the building that will assure its future for another two centuries.

A BLUE PLAQUE FOR ROSE HILL

A PARTICULARLY touching aspect of the closure of the church was the decision by the congregation to ask the Civic Society to install a blue plaque on the

building to commemorate its history. The congregation has generously agreed to meet the cost.

As it happens, we drafted a possible form of words for a plaque at Rose Hill a couple of years ago, when we were looking at doing the same for several nonconformist places of worship in the town.

We were therefore able to respond immediately and, having secured agreement to the text from the Church Elders, have commissioned a plaque from our suppliers, Leander of Dove Holes. We hope that it will be possible to install the plaque before the church closes or, if not, very soon afterwards. Because the building is a place of worship, we do not have to apply for listed building consent, which will save some time.

This is the text we have agreed for the plaque (on which it will fit into fewer lines than it does here):

INDEPENDENT CHAPEL
Congregation founded c.1772.
Foundation stone laid
September 1822.
Opened May 1823. Extended 1860.
Eastwood Rooms opened 1956
to commemorate the
long association
of the Eastwood family
with the church.

We will obviously let Civic Society members know as soon as we have a date for the unveiling of the plaque.



... NO THEY DON'T

IN MARKED CONTRAST to our dealings with the congregation at Rose Hill, our attempts to install a plaque at the Portland Hotel to commemorate the former Market Place station of the Lancashire, Derbyshire & East Coast Railway have hit the

buffers.

Letters and emails sent to J.D. Wetherpoon, the owners of the Portland, at various dates since January this year, asking for permission to go ahead, including one marked for the personal attention of Tim Martin, the company's chairman, have all gone unanswered. This is despite our explaining that we are not asking Wetherspoons to contribute to the cost, which has been entirely covered by a grant from East Midland Railway Community Fund.

We are now faced with the embarrassment of having to return part of this grant, unless EMR will agree to the money being used for a plaque that does not have any connection with Chesterfield's railway history.

There is no other suitable building to which we can attach a plaque for the LD&EC station, and we have failed to identify a location for a plaque commemorating the Central station built by the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway station. In any case, the LD&EC station was more important, since it was also the company's headquarters.

This saga illustrates a general point about why erecting blue plaques, which at first sight looks like a straightforward activity long pursued by civic societies, is more difficult than it might seem.

Even after we have identified a suitable building (which tends to be more difficult in the case of plaques commemorating individuals rather than buildings) we have to secure the permission of the owner. In some cases we have met with a blank refusal to cooperate; more commonly our approaches have been ignored.

We have for several years had a list of buildings on which we would like to install plaques, and of people whom we wish to commemorate. In every case there has been a good reason, for which we are not responsible, why there is no plaque on a particular building or why some worthy individual does not have a plaque.

We will continue to look for suitable sites for plaques, and seek to replace some older plaques which have not worn well or whose text contains serious errors, but it is not an aspect of Civic Society work which can always be done quickly.



ANOTHER CLOSURE, ANOTHER PLAQUE?

NEWS of another break with the past has also come within the last week. The long-established firm of Shipton Hallewell & Co. has been absorbed by Andersons, who will continue to practice from their existing office in The Terrace on Saltergate and have instructed W.T. Parker to let or sell Shipton's former office at 23 West Bars.

The house on West Bars is Chesterfield's only purpose-built attorney's office. It may have been built by John Charge after he became clerk of the peace in 1830, and was certainly in existence by 1836.

23 West Bars was an office from the start: Charge's home was Spital House, the seventeenth-century building at the northern end of Spital Lane, some of whose outbuildings survive across the road from the Co-op (the former Spital Hotel). This is reflected in the internal layout of No. 23 (which can be seen from plans on Parker's website). The building also has a strongroom and pigeonholes in the basement which appear to be an original feature.

None of this would prevent the building being converted into a private residence, as the sales particulars suggest, but it was not built as such.

The building stands on a plot that also includes 19–21 West Bars (to the right of the entrance to No. 23). The history of the plot can be traced with reasonable confidence from a purchase in 1599 by Bess of Hardwick and her son William Cavendish from Hercules Foljambe, the colourful but insolvent head of a junior branch of the family that lived at Walton Hall.

No. 23 was still owned by the Cavendish estate in 1803 but was later sold and in 1849 the entire plot (including Nos. 19 and 21) was

owned by Charge (the details can be found in *Chesterfield Streets and Houses*, pp. 101–2).

The history of Shipton Hallewell and its predecessors in practice has yet to be worked out in full but some of the dates that have been quoted in connection with the sale of No. 23 are wrong.

John Charge came to Chesterfield in 1795 as an articled clerk to Bernard Lucas and appears to have succeeded to his practice. In 1844 Charge appointed Joseph Shipton as his managing clerk, who succeeded to the practice when Charge died in 1849 (although by that date he was no longer clerk of the peace). The modern firm came into existence in 1851, when Shipton entered into partnership with John Hallewell, who had been articled to Charge.

Shipton died in 1880 and Hallewell in 1892; neither had any direct descendants to succeed him and the firm afterwards had several members who were unrelated to either of the founders.

Although never a large practice, Shipton Hallewell were important locally in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth as clerks to a number of public bodies. These include, over a long period, the two main trusts established in 1837 when charities in Chesterfield were reformed.

One is the charity which continues today as Chesterfield United charities and (among other things) maintains St Helen's Lodge off Newbold Road.

The other is the Grammar School charity, now known as the Chesterfield Schools Foundation, whose administration was transferred to the county council in 1940. This is the charity whose maladministration by the county council since Chesterfield School closed in 1991 amounts to a scandalous breach of trust, as the Civic Society has pointed out on numerous occasions over the last six years.

Given the importance of Shipton Hallewell & Co. in Chesterfield's recent history, and the architectural significance of 23 West Bars as the town's only purpose-built attorney's office, we feel that there is a strong case for installing a blue plaque, perhaps on one of the gate-piers on the street frontage.



REFLECTIONS ON THE CYCLE ROUTE HARDLY ANYONE WANTS

THE Transport Secretary, Mark Harper, recently made a statement about the scope for reducing the rate of increase in expenditure in his department in coming years. Most attention has been focused on what he said about HS2 but he also mentioned the possibility of cutting the budget for the Active Travel Programme. Locally, this raised hopes that the Chatsworth Road section of the east–west cycle route, which is almost universally opposed by local residents, might be scrapped. As yet there is no sign of that happening.

Meanwhile, Bryan Thompson, the former chairman of the Civic Society, who has been extremely active in his opposition to the scheme as proposed, has brought together his thoughts on how much damage it will do, not least when exceptionally heavy loads such as the one illustrated above try to negotiate a much narrower Chatsworth Road through Brookside.

Chesterfield's East-West Walking and Cycle Route: imposed whatever you may think

After his meeting in 2021 with County Councillor Athwal Singh, the cabinet member for highways (who sits for a Long Eaton division), Toby Perkins MP commented: 'he made it clear that he did not care about the concerns and objections being raised by the people of Chesterfield and that DCC were proceeding whether local people agreed or not.' Under Coun. Singh's leadership the walking and cycling route was approved in October 2021 and the requisite Traffic Regulation Order in November 2022.

This was the affirmation of a pro-

cess engineered to deliver a controversial 8 km walking, wheeling and cycling route across Chesterfield to its rural edges. A great idea in principle, but a significant variation on approved routes that will lead to conflicts for walkers, wheelers and drivers, as well as a significant loss of amenity and functionality mainly along the superhighway route at the western entrance to Chesterfield.

The problem started with the government's prescriptive grants, which seek 'bold' decisions to provide cycle and walking routes. To qualify, the expectation is to include an on-road segregated cycle route, such as a cycle superhighway, and a road closure for motor traffic. Failure to deliver brings clawback and is likely to deny access to further grants, but success is likely to be rewarded with more grant-aided projects. For cash-strapped councils, this is an added incentive to deliver sustainable transport, even though they would have to fund any landscaping, and that is notably absent here.

There is strong national guidance on safer walking and cycling. Although most people walk, the emphasis here is on cycling promotion (see *Gear Change: a bold vision for cycling and walking* (DfT 2020)). The guidance dwells on stakeholder consultation (e.g. with the police and beneficiaries) to gain understanding and endorsement but without recognising that, conventionally, 'key stakeholders' are those who are directly affected.

Elsewhere, there is very good professional advice on walking and cycling; and on the overriding legal consequences of ignoring early meaningful public consultation before the public body has made up its mind (Gunning Principles), or not taking decisions with an open mind, as expressed the Nolan principles, which are normally incorporated into council codes of conduct.

Here is a challenge: deliver the project through open, inclusive democratic local government or ignore the spirit of the law and play the system.

The former affords a sense of community ownership through early refinement, yet risks rejection through involvement. In the long term it gives more confidence that the county council is locally sensitive to its elec-

torate. The latter approach can deliver the project but risks challenge and the project is more likely to be unrefined, benefiting a single interest needlessly at the expense of others. Moreover, it can bring mistrust, disdain for local governance and potential opposition to future projects however well designed.

It seems that DCC chose the latter course of action, and it was clear to our MP in 2021 that all decisions were made far in advance of public engagement.

Rather than allow 'intelligent consideration' of proposals, as sought in the Gunning Principles, DCC treated public consultation as a public relations exercise. The consultation was biased towards support, was too late to incorporate amendments, and omitted those directly affected in Brookside by the cycle superhighway and in Brimington by the road closure, but included a wider area where responses would not be critical. Plans were so well developed that they are little different to the final version.

The county council refused to re-consult. Instead, it took the overall support from others as an endorsement. The council was predetermined to approve the scheme and it did so in October 2021, ignoring complaints over bias, non-consultation, relevant case law and showing little regard to the Nolan Principles. At a big public meeting at Brookfield School, there was an outcry at this injustice. DCC chose not to send representatives. Toby Perkins MP described the process as gerrymandering, which is deeply undemocratic and alien to British local government.

The requisite Traffic Regulation Orders were advertised on site in June 2022. The council chose to re-notify the wider areas not affected by the scheme and eventually those directly affected. In Brookside 80 per cent of those directly affected by the superhighway objected. That went down to 78 per cent when nearby properties were included. Overall, it was 35 per cent when all representations were included. However, a Freedom of Information request revealed for the postal areas for the cycle route there was overall 55 per cent opposition. The council had received support from Derbyshire, parts of UK and beyond. A simple head-count of representa-

tions including petitions for and against was for approval.

The report listed but did not discuss numerous safety concerns from those directly affected. Apart from a dubious claim that a majority of the public were in support, the reasons for the recommendation were not really to do with the merits of the Orders. Instead, the controversial sections of the route mattered, for they were the 'bold' elements that helped to gain funding and their loss would mean potential clawback of the grant, some of which had been spent and the risk of not gaining future funding. It was approved by Coun. Athwal.

Later the Civic Society discovered that the council had commissioned its first independent safety audit but only in March 2022. For Brookside, which has the most controversial section, the audit expressed similar strong underlying concerns about safety:

The proposed reduction in traffic lane widths at various locations to facilitate the provision of cycle facilities along the northern side may result in an increased risk of collisions between opposing vehicles, particularly among those sections where traffic speeds are likely to be higher due to the downhill gradient.

It concluded for the superhighway that there had to be trade-offs to enable it:

The proposed scheme would, however, reduce pedestrian accessibility over a 750m stretch of Chatsworth Road and be likely to increase the risk of pedestrian/ vehicle collisions as pedestrians have to negotiate two traffic lanes.

The trade-offs include loss of the safer pedestrian refuges and the likelihood of driver conflict.

The audit failed to comment on several issues including:

- A. how people would be expected to cross safely when traffic is backing up at the eastern end of the superhighway.
- B. the most popular of the footways would inevitably have to be used

as an overrun for emergency vehicles and parking/delivery space clear of the narrower roadway. Pedestrians and wheelchairs need 1.5m clearance and this cannot always be provided.

- C. the lack of clarity where cycles discharge onto Somersall Lane from the Toucan crossing. The corner is almost blind, and the footway along the lane is too narrow for people to pass safely, let alone meet cyclists.
- D. the lack of improvement to the footpath at the western side of Somersall Lane junction, where intervisibility between Somersall Lane and Chatsworth Road is very poor.
- E. clarification on the extent of difficulties drivers will experience entering narrow drives on the south side of the road. ('the desirability of securing and maintaining reasonable access to premises must be considered': Section 122a of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984). A compact car needs at least 6m to make a right-angle turn.

At the very least, the safety audit ought to have been discussed in the council's TRO report. It was not referred to in the report or listed on the council's website. The council has since stated that 'the scheme, including pedestrian crossings, has been designed to be compliant with national standards.'

That does not equate to good plan-

ning. Chatsworth Road is designated for wide loads and takes around 11,000 traffic movements/day with a high proportion of large goods vehicles. It serves a large school, and many homes, and gives access to a popular rural footpath network, shops, a medical centre and a nearby park. Standards can become outdated (e.g. many car parks) or are inconvenient (e.g. the additional traffic light controlled pedestrian crossing) and cumulatively are not necessarily locally compatible with pleasant walking (e.g. the crossing points deter) and cycling and living environment that should be sought.

Section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 also states that it shall be the duty of every local authority exercising the functions in that Act, so far as practicable, having regard to the 'effect on the amenities of any locality affected and the importance of regulating and restricting the use of roads by heavy commercial vehicles, so as to preserve or improve the amenities of the areas through which the roads run'.

'Amenity' is taken to be the quality or character of an area and includes elements that contribute to its overall enjoyment. The superhighway is a facility that will have questionable amenity value because of the proximity and nature of the road traffic.

Brookside is a very attractive transitional zone between the end of the town and the start of the countryside. There are two conservation areas and two listed buildings whose setting will be affected. When considering the superhighway there is no

evidence that this really mattered to the council. Instead, it is a standard city centre 'deemed to satisfy' design, with extensive signage, toucan crossings and a bright green cycle lane at junctions.

This is just the sort of thing that led to Iain Nairn's Outrage campaign over fifty years ago, which in turn led to the creation of the Civic Trust.

Today, despite abundant design guidance on conserving local distinctiveness, nobody in authority here cares enough. The Department of Transport have another box to tick, Derbyshire County Council has demonstrated its worthiness, so it can repeat this vandalism elsewhere, and a small group of cyclists have their trophy. Locally affected people, who really are key stakeholders, will just have to put up with a significant loss of amenity and the other issues or move.

In essence, when the safety omissions are included, and with the police indicating a limited ability to enforce speed limits, it is difficult not to conclude that any benefits of the superhighway are more than offset by the harm to public safety and transport functionality of this section of the project. In particular walking, a co-aim, is severely compromised for safety, both actual and perceived, connectivity and amenity. That is wholly contrary to the aim of national and professional guidance. Like the uninvited cuckoo, the cycle superhighway sounds good, but a high price is imposed on its nestlings. Public involvement at the outset could have led to a better outcome.