
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



‘REVITALISING THE HEART OF CHESTERFIELD’

SEVERAL weeks ago the Civic Society was invited to take part in a walkover of the town centre as part of a scheme to improve the ‘public realm’ between the railway station and the Market Place. The project has been given the name ‘Revitalising the Heart of Chesterfield’. The work is to be funded by the Government as part of the ‘Levelling Up’ policy.

Most of those taking part, except the consultants engaged to prepare plans for the Borough Council and an official from Historic England, have been familiar with the town centre for many years. All were aware of its recent history and the way in which

its appearance has gradually deteriorated since the redevelopment scheme of the late 1970s created the present overall street picture. All were agreed that the root of the present problem lies in the decline of town centre retailing – including the quality and variety of shops as well as the number of empty units – and that this affects virtually all towns, especially those in poorer parts of the country.

This is no longer a new problem, nor is it one which a local authority can do a great deal to solve. The Borough Council now owns the freehold of the Pavements, opened in 1981, but is not otherwise a major landlord in the town centre, and has limited scope to encourage new businesses to open, for example, by offering rent-free periods or other concessions. Nor can local authorities offer rate rebates as they once could.

The other problem, which is not

always appreciated by those who criticise the council, is that local authorities have very little control over what private owners do with their property, unless a building becomes a health hazard or a danger to public safety. If a private owner insists on seeking a rent which no prospective tenant can afford, rather than lowering the rent to the point at which a tenant will come forward, that is a matter for the owner, over which the council has no control. The refusal of some owners to offer lower rents appears to explain at least some of the voids in the town centre.

Private owners can criticise a local authority for charging what they deem to be ‘excessive’ business rates, or can blame the council for what they consider to be the unreasonably high cost of car-parking, but the council will simply say that their hands are tied by government policy and the need to balance the books.

None of this is going to be changed by public realm improvements. It may change if the economy picks up and with it demand for shops in Chesterfield, or (as is increasingly suggested) by a fundamental shift in land usage in town centre away from retailing to residential and leisure uses. It is perhaps most likely to come as a result of both factors, and possibly others which no-one has yet thought of.

That said, it is always desirable to improve the appearance of any town centre and the walkover looked at various places where there is scope for this.

The first stop was Corporation Street, which will be remodelled as

part of the redevelopment of the station approach. This will get rid of the hideous footbridge over the Inner Relief Road, universally acknowledged to have been a mistake. The Pomegranate is already closed for extensive modernisation but no-one has yet found a solution for Kilblean House, which continues to disfigure the same side of Corporation Street. According to a board outside, the owners (who appear to live in the Isle of Man) are trying to let the property, but appear to have made no progress.

We spent some time looking at Rykneld Square, which in its present form is less than thirty years old, and it was generally agreed that the existing layout works badly. Bus traffic on Church Way has created depressions in the road surface and the approach to the parish church, not least for weddings and funerals, is poor.

The question of whether the existing information centre should be converted into an interpretation centre for the church, to encourage more visitors to spend longer there, was raised. It is certainly the case that more could be done to improve the presentation of the parish church as the only major surviving medieval building in the town. Whether the church has the resources (in terms of manpower as well as money) to do much is another matter. At present there is not even a guidebook on sale in the church.

From Rykneld Square we walked down Burlington Street and noted that the conversion of the upper floors of Burlington House into flats was in progress. All present agreed that demolition would be better long-term solution for this unloved relic of the early 1960s.

Our final stopping point was the Market Place, which the Civic Society representative at the meeting tried once again to deter the consultants from calling the 'Market Square' (a name that has never been used in Chesterfield) and explained the difference between setts and cobbles (it is the former, not the latter, with which the Market Place is surfaced).

The society has in an earlier written submission stressed the need to take account of the market traders' views on the future layout of the Market Place, since without them the market has no future, and to avoid changes that cannot easily be re-

versed, in case they prove less successful in practice than they look on a drawing. Markets evolve, and what seem like a good idea at the time may be a white elephant ten or twenty years later.

We now await further proposals from the consultants as to how they envisage the 'Heart of Chesterfield' being 'revitalised', even if they cannot find a way to fill empty shops.



FURTHER WORK AT DUNSTON HALL

THE Civic Society has made a submission concerning the latest planning application by the owner of Dunston Hall, this time for the creation of a new storm water drain. This is to run across the former park which lies to the east of the mansion. The park is not part of the original layout of the property but appears to have been created in the 1820s, when the house was modernised and much enlarged.

We have raised no objection to this proposal but we have recommended that some archaeological test pits be dug on the line of the drain before it is built, in case there is any evidence of earlier settlement there. As far as can be established, there is none, but it is better to make sure before work starts, rather than have to deal with chance of discoveries at a later stage.

The application to refurbish the older farm buildings behind the mansion, some of which are cruck-framed and appear to be contemporary with the hall of c.1600, has been granted, subject (as we recommended) to stringent conditions concerning the investigation and recording of the fabric before it is altered. This includes taking samples from parts of the cruck-framing to try to establish the date at which the timber was felled, using dendrochronology ('tree-ring dating'). A suitably experienced con-

tractor has been engaged to do this work, including the preparation of a report for publication in the *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*.



BAPTIST CHAPEL TO BE RENOVATED?

THERE are welcome signs that the former Baptist chapel on Brewery Street, opened in 1895 and closed as long ago as 1928 when the present church on Cross Street was opened, is being renovated.

Within the last few weeks the portion of boundary wall which was damaged by a motor vehicle a few years ago has been carefully rebuilt, using the bricks from the wall, and railings (which appear to be those that were there before the collision) have been reinstated on top of the wall.

Nothing as yet seems to have been done to the chapel itself, for which in 2007 planning permission was obtained for conversion into a restaurant. The building had for some years before then been used as an annexe for the old Royal Hospital. The chapel became a Caribbean restaurant, which failed within a few years.

The chapel has been listed grade II since 1976. As yet no application for listed building application has been made in respect of the building, which would be needed for any alterations affecting the exterior. Hopefully the owner is intending to bring the building back into beneficial use.

BLUE PLAQUE NEWS

OUR PLAQUE for the United Reformed church at Rose Hill is now in production at Leander and we have been promised delivery in early June. As soon as we have

arranged a date for an unveiling we will let members know.

The two other plaques we currently have in hand, for North Midland House near the station and the Portland Hotel, are ready to go into production, and we are merely waiting for Wetherspoons, as the owners of the Portland, to confirm permission to install their plaque. The *Derbyshire Times* reported a few weeks ago that this would be forthcoming but we have yet to hear from the company.

The proposed text for the two railway plaques is as follows:

Midland Railway Engineers' Office

Built c.1870.

Incorporating masonry
from the former

North Midland Railway
Chesterfield station of 1840
designed by Francis Thompson.

Portland Hotel

Opened 1899.

Architect James Ragg Wigfull
(1864–1936).

To the right of this plaque stood the
Chesterfield Market Place station
of the Lancashire, Derbyshire &
East Coast Railway.

Architect Cole Alfred Adams
(1844–1909)

Opened 1897. Closed 1951.
Demolished 1973.



NO NEWS OF TAPTON HOUSE

NOTHING further has been made public concerning the Borough Council's proposed sale of a long lease of Tapton House to Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd, although those concerned with this company

appear to have rearranged their interests yet again.

On 23 February 2023 a company named Tapton House Development Ltd was registered, with a capital of £100 in £1 shares, all of which have been allotted to Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd. The two directors of the new company are Daniel Christopher Patrick and Mark Lodge.

On 27 February Mr Patrick became a director of Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd and on 2 May Joanne Elizabeth Henry ceased to be a director. Also on 27 February Ms Henry became a director of SCE-D Ltd, having become a director of SCE-B Ltd on 23 February. (There are no companies named SCE-A Ltd or SCE-C ... Z Ltd.) She remains a director of Joanne Henry Ltd but resigned as a director of SCE Property Concepts Ltd on 2 May. Her entry on the Companies House database (as at 12 May) also listed her as a director of Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd, evidently in error.

Mr Patrick remains a director of Joanne Henry Ltd, Preston Road Investments Ltd and Bright Heights Management Co. Ltd, and of two companies currently in liquidation, We are React Ltd and Fusion Agency Ltd. Until 3 April this year he was also a director of Fulwood Road Management Co. Ltd.

Mr Lodge is a director of Dapatchi Homes Ltd, SCE Property Concepts Ltd and We are React Ltd, and has in the past been a director of several recently dissolved companies: Dapatchi Developments Ltd, Dapatchi Architecture Ltd, Dapatchi Construction Ltd, Lia Leaf Ltd, Dapatchi Property Concepts Ltd and Outshine Property Services Ltd.

Most of the companies named here have their registered office at either 12 High Road, Balby, Doncaster DN4 0PL or XL Business Solutions Ltd, Premier House, Bradford Road, Cleckheaton BD19 3TT.

The first of these addresses is the home of Certax Accountants, whose office is a small converted terraced house near the centre of Doncaster, next door to BeDazzled Nails & Beauty and two doors away from Cherubs Prom. XL Business Solutions, who operate from rather more substantial premises, describe themselves as specialists in the liquidation of companies. Ms Henry and her

colleagues must have given them quite a bit of work in recent years.

There is nothing necessarily improper or unusual for property developers to register separate companies for each project they undertake, nor to use a firm of accountants whose premises can best be described as modest, but the three individuals concerned with the proposed purchase of Tapton House do seem to have spent a good deal of time setting up and dissolving companies, and being appointed and resigning as directors.

How much time they have spent pursuing the activities for which these companies have been established is less clear. The most recently filed accounts for Stone Castle Enterprise Ltd (the intended purchaser of Tapton House), a balance sheet headed 'Un-audited Filled Accounts 30 April 2022', reveal (to use the word in its loosest sense) that the company then had current assets of £188 and creditors falling due within one year of £200, leaving net liabilities of £12. The company has an issued share capital of £100, divided into 100 shares, half held by Mr Patrick and half by Mr Lodge.

All this seems a rather slender financial basis for the purchase of a three-storey Georgian mansion and the conversion of its 30 rooms into fifteen flats.

EXTERNAL CAVITY WALL INSULATION: ANOTHER CHALLENGE TO LOCAL IDENTITY

Bryan Thompson writes:

Government policy quite rightly endorses home insulation to reduce energy use and help make the UK energy independent. There are, however, consequences for older homes, which make up much of the national housing stock.

In 2014 English Heritage stated 'The drive to reduce energy use and carbon emissions is one of the greatest pressures for change in the historic environment today' (English Heritage study on external wall insu-

lation of traditional buildings). Since then, increases in domestic fuel prices, the greater need to reduce fuel poverty and more public concern over the impact of climate change have afforded strong incentives for external wall insulation on pre-1930 homes which tend to have solid wall construction. The alternative, internal wall insulation is generally less appealing for householders as it is disruptive and less convenient for landlords.



A house on Calow Lane on which external cavity wall insulation is currently being fitted.

There are historical precedents for re-cladding buildings because of fashion or practical necessity. There are Georgian frontages to medieval houses, and stone cottages which were rendered, or tile hung because the mortar was too porous. In recent decades government-led house improvement initiatives were sometimes associated with rendering weathered, smoke-stained brick terraces as it was cheaper and more obvious than to repair and repoint brickwork. Others copied, and often cement renders were painted white or in pastel colours to denote identity and cover later cracks. The character of some streets would change and not necessarily for the better.

External wall insulation is normally a render over breathable insulation and, to be effective, is likely to add 100mm or more to the wall. This can change the appearance of a building quite significantly even if it has a traditional pebbledash render. Original decorative features such as terracotta medallions, window and door surrounds, quoins, string and eaves dentil courses are affected either by being covered or left awkwardly exposed with the attendant problem of cold bridging and damp. Even door and window frames will be more recessed or need to be moved forward. Eaves, downpipes and other fittings pose problems that may force a change to the appearance of the property or compromise its insulation.

Although planning permission is often required for external insulation, beyond protected areas, or on characterful terraces, it may be hard for councils to object because there is an inertia to insulate homes better. That extends to permitted development on previously rendered houses. Consequently, as Michael Gove belatedly reins in national house builders with their generic designs, there is the prospect of another version as more existing homes gradually become covered in uniform render.

It need not happen. Smooth finishes are one of several options such as render and dash, modern or copied decorative details, contemporary pargeing and even re-cladding in brick slips, or stone slips for quoins and surrounds. There is also the possibility of hybrid solutions where the architectural walls are insulated internally. However, breathable, self-coloured, self-cleaning renders and replacement low maintenance double

or triple glazed upvc or aluminium windows have their appeal to both property owners and builders.

Recognising that there are issues to be addressed, some councils have gone beyond endorsing the principle of better insulation and have produced guides on cladding, making it clear that a diminution of urban character and local identity ought not occur. For example, 'A Bristolian's Guide to Solid Wall Insulation' offers over 90 pages of detailed advice and scale drawings. The guide also covers internal and hybrid insulation and even property management. This is a useful reminder that the work really needs to be done competently as a coherent project and that there are alternative ways of gaining insulation without unduly sacrificing architectural character. It helps to understand why Building Regulation approval is normally needed, either directly or via an 'approved competent person scheme'. For non-detached houses a party wall agreement is also required. All is to ensure there is responsible sustainable retrofit which is an obvious asset. Moreover, the property is more affordable to run, more liveable and hopefully retains or gains in architectural character.

APOLOGY

Finally, an apology for the late appearance of this newsletter, the result of pressure of other work. To catch up, we have dated this issue over two months. Hopefully, regular monthly publication will resume in June.