



Newsletter – number 49 – summer 2024

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN – HOWARD BORRELL



A warm welcome to your latest civic society newsletter. As highlighted in this edition, we had a successful members’ meeting on 18 April, with some very good feedback afterwards. Our committee met in May – details on some of the subjects discussed are within.

I’m pleased to say that we are coping satisfactorily with the interim arrangements for not having a secretary. Drop me an email or give me call if you are interested in assisting with this or indeed joining our committee. Not having enough active committee members means that we can’t do everything we would like. For example, we are not going to be able to support the Heritage Open Day activities this year.

It’s not all bad news though. There’s movement to report on our plaques scheme and we’ve continued to receive some good publicity in the Derbyshire Times. ‘On the ground’ there’s progress on the Stephenson Memorial Hall project and with the near £20 million granted ‘Long Term Plan for Towns’ which sees creation of a ‘town board’ – more about the latter within this newsletter.

As always, please get in touch if you have any thoughts on how we can continue our work in making the area a better place to live and increasing our membership. Contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

Society News

1- Successful members’ meeting



Part of our members’ meeting audience.

Chesterfield and wider area initiatives, issues, problems and opportunities were discussed with Chesterfield Borough Council’s Economic Development Chief, Neil Johnson, at our members’ meeting on 18 April. The meeting was judged to have been a success, with members suggesting further topics that we might like to explore.

We also received some suggestions about the future format of meetings such as this, which we discussed at our May committee meeting. Your committee think it would be useful to have a yearly catch-up with the borough council on the same lines as discussed at the April meeting, plus another guest speaker – on some other topic of interest at our autumn AGM.

Our thanks to those who attended and to Mr Johnson in particular.

Chesterfield & District Civic Society is a registered charity – number 507548

Website - www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100079777451157>

2 – Christmas tree festival

We are hoping to have a tree at the very popular Chesterfield Parish Church Christmas Tree Festival, which is towards the end of November. Our theme, if we are successful in our application, will be blue plaques. We hope that participation in this event will help increase awareness of the society amongst those that attend.

3 – Society visit to Wirksworth

Our planned visit to Wirksworth, (on Thursday 18 July 2024) is fully booked. We first publicised the visit to members by email with the 15 spaces available being rapidly filled, so much so that we were unable to send out letters by post before the places were taken. Our apologies to those of you who were not able to gain a place. The visit has two objectives – firstly a tour around the town led by members of Wirksworth Civic Society and secondly to find out what things the society does in the town. The group will be travelling to Wirksworth by service bus.

We will be arranging a reciprocal visit from the Wirksworth society to Chesterfield. We will let members know details of this when set.

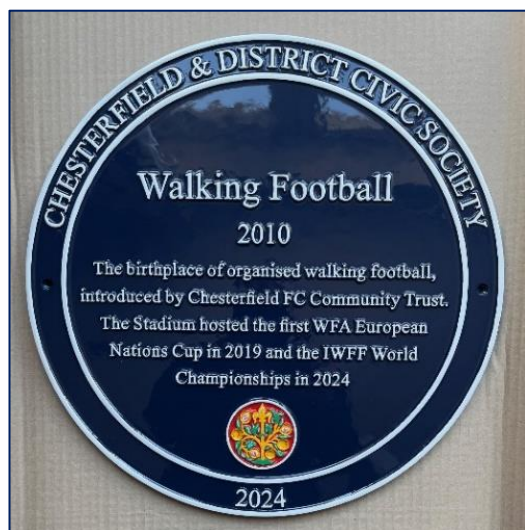
4 – Eyre Chapel

In an effort to support Eyre Chapel, Newbold, the society is to hold all its future committee meetings there. The normal venue of our member meetings is not scheduled to change – ‘The Suite’ at St Thomas Church Centre, Chatsworth Road. As we have previously reported, the Eyre Chapel has a declining membership of its management committee and needs assistance. The future of the chapel was discussed at some length during our May committee meeting. Unfortunately, it was concluded that the civic society could not itself take over management of the chapel, as we are currently somewhat deficient ourselves – not having a permanent secretary. If you can help Eyre Chapel in any way, please email either the chairman or the interim secretary (details on last page).

Blue plaques: society members invited to the latest unveilings in July

We have arranged for the unveiling of two plaques – both in July – and we hope as many members as possible will be able to attend both events.

Fitting of the long-awaited plaques for North Midland House (a replacement – the present plaque being inaccurate) and the Portland Hotel (new) will be commemorated at an informal ceremony on Tuesday 23 July, commencing at 10.30 am at the Portland Hotel. After the usual short speeches tea and coffee will be served in the hotel itself. We have outlined the background to this plaque (and that on North Midland House) in previous newsletters – more recently in number 48. It is not possible, due to logistical reasons, to have an unveiling of the North Midland House plaque, but this will be fitted just prior to the Portland plaque unveiling. East Midlands Railway Community Fund has sponsored the cost of both plaques. We are grateful to them and Wetherspoons and Spire Insurance Agency for permission to site the plaques.



The plaque destined for the Chesterfield Football Club stadium – marking the origination of the now world-wide game of ‘walking football’ (shown left) is to be unveiled on Wednesday 17 July at 6 pm at the club. The club’s community trust has sponsored production of this plaque.

We will be sending out further details, in due course, for both events. There is no need to pre-book.

Our next planned blue plaque, on Cutthorpe Old Hall, is currently still delayed awaiting the results of historical research which has revealed issues around the supposed original builder and occupier of the hall. We are still hopeful that this may be resolved before the owners of the house move, but we will not proceed until we are sure of the historical details.

As others in recent times, the plaques have been manufactured by Leander Architectural, who are based at Buxton.

‘Long Term Plan for Towns’

Alluded to by Neil Johnson at our member meeting on 18 April, is the news that the borough council has agreed to be part of the ‘Long Term Plan for Towns’ (LTPfT) scheme. This should bring into the town £19.5m of government funding over the next ten years. This requires the setting up of a ‘town board’ to oversee the project elements which are expected to be around supporting housing, transport, regeneration, licensing, restaurants and shops. There needs to be an initial three-year investment plan from the council and the board, and a 10-year ‘vision statement’. The board chairman is Dominic Staniforth of chartered accounts Barber, Harrison and Platt. Its first meeting was held on 29 April.

It will be interesting to see just how this scheme will dovetail with what schemes the borough council is already developing. The council is to be responsible for the financial management of the LTPfT’s funding. We will certainly be keeping an eye on developments.

Our Chairman, Howard Borrell, had a zoom chat in early June with one of the consultants employed to interview a cross-section of people who could provide useful input into a document that they will submit to the town board. Howard talked through the ‘Rethinking Chesterfield Town Centre’ resource available to view on our website. He also stressed the need to accept that the town centre must become more than just retail. For some time the society has thought it vital to add family attractions (such as water features and play areas), plus landscaping that would enhance the general feel of the town and attract footfall. Howard also indicated the need to be inventive and work with the, often exiled, property landlords to explore new ideas. Our rethinking resource can be viewed at <http://www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk/rethinking-chesterfield-town-centre/>.

Residents are being given an initial say on priorities via a short on-line survey which closes mid-day on 24 June. We would encourage you to take part - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Chesterfieldonlinesurvey>.

Arts for Chesterfield town centre and Staveley

Beam Arts UK have been appointed by the borough council to look into arts and community initiatives as part of the already planned town centre regeneration works and those at Staveley. Our chairman met Kate Watson from Beam at the beginning of June. He offered our thoughts on Chesterfield town centre, in line with that documented on our website. We had previously pointed out to Beam various resources available on the history of the town, via such local organisations as the Chesterfield and District Local History Society. We also have a couple of committee members willing to contribute further to whatever transpires from Beam. The two-year project is being badged as ‘Animate’ and will include an artist in residence. Further information is available via the website here - <https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/latest-news/new-public-art-project-aims-to-animate-chesterfield/>.

Empty shops plans addressed

Our Chairman contributed to an article in the Derbyshire Times at the end of May looking at the possible opportunities and downsides of a new power for local authorities, designed to combat high street vacancies. High Street Rental Auctions is designed to help them take control of empty properties, renting them out to local businesses. But as you might expect there are issues with the new powers, particularly as councils are somewhat cash strapped.

Read the full article by following the link below:

<https://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/news/politics/new-powers-to-revive-town-centre-shops-that-have-sat-empty-for-over-12-months-as-civic-leaders-express-hopes-for-more-leisure-options-in-chesterfield-4641946>

Buildings at risk list revised

Members may remember that at our March 7th committee meeting, we agreed our revised list of unloved and heritage buildings at risk. This list – which appears on-line at <http://www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk/unloved-buildings/>.

This has been the subject of some small revisions but has not yet been publicised. We intend to do this over the summer months.

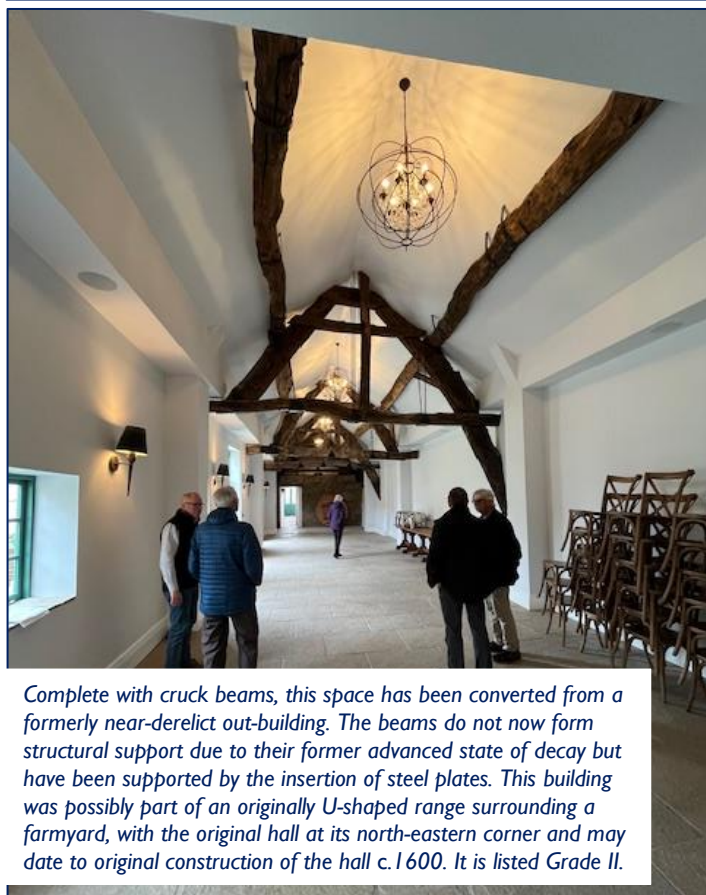
Tourism and Chesterfield

The committee looked at the provision of tourist information in and about Chesterfield at its May 16 meeting. The general conclusion was that the provision and availability was not as good as it should be. This is being made worse by the closure of the Visitor Information Centre. Availability of information about the town's own attractions (as opposed to those such as Chatsworth) is non-existent at Chesterfield railway station, with nothing at the coach station. Some digitally available information has errors in it. Clearly there is room for improvement. The society is hoping to open dialogue with the responsible officer at the borough council to try and address and assist with the current poor provision. Just what impact the new East Midland Mayor's plans for a tourism campaign in the region may have (promised during her election campaign), is not yet known.

Dunston Hall visit



Dunston Hall's east front.



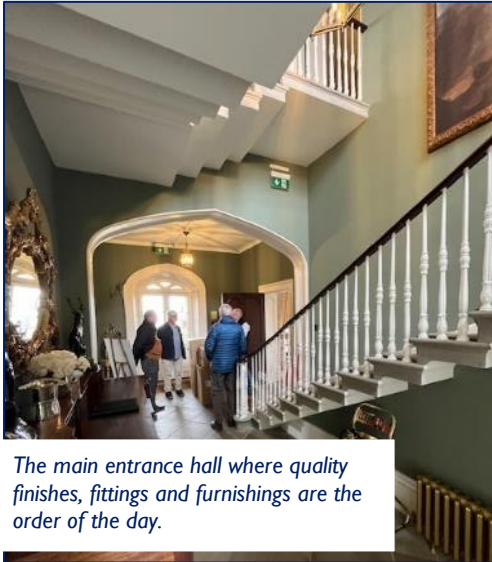
Complete with cruck beams, this space has been converted from a formerly near-derelict out-building. The beams do not now form structural support due to their former advanced state of decay but have been supported by the insertion of steel plates. This building was possibly part of an originally U-shaped range surrounding a farmyard, with the original hall at its north-eastern corner and may date to original construction of the hall c.1600. It is listed Grade II.

The society has previously expressed its concern about various aspects of recent works at Dunston Hall, but has been reassured following a committee visit to the premises made in late April.

Members saw at first hand the considerable and high-quality work that has been carried out on the Grade II listed house itself, into a high-quality bespoke events and wedding venue. This was alongside the conversion of outbuildings into a wedding and events location, including one with architecturally important cruck beams. At the date of our visit conversion works were taking place on a number of other former farm buildings, some also Grade II listed, into a high-class food-hall, due to open later in the year. The committee were able to see all this work and hear first-hand about it from Mark Lancashire, Dunston Hall's Operations Director.

Civic society chairman Howard Borrell commented: 'A considerable amount of time and money – perhaps well in excess of £2 million – has been spent on the various recent schemes that have helped not only guarantee the future of the Dunston Hall, but its important outbuildings. Many of the latter, even those listed Grade II, were in serious decay, but have been put back into use as a wonderful venue for things like weddings. The work is high-class and sympathetic to the historic environment. It has also injected money into the local economy through construction work and employment in the various aspects of the Dunston Hall business.'

David and Lynsey Harrison have owned the hall and garden centre since late 2020. It was formerly more widely known only for the latter. Phased work was carried out on restoring the house and estate to its former glory and the garden centre now has a popular bistro. Another recent move has included purchasing



The main entrance hall where quality finishes, fittings and furnishings are the order of the day.



A sitting room in Dunston Hall.

what is described as the ‘deer park’ to the front of the house. This possibly dates to the 1820s update and additions to the hall. Here there are plans for tree-planting, other habitat improvements and better public access. Members of the committee were keen to discuss issues such as car parking and noise generation. They heard about arrangements made for overflow parking and that marquee events had now ended, alongside other event noise reduction measures employed.

Buildings and sites update

1 – Hurst House

A report was presented to the Derbyshire County Council’s Cabinet on 4 July seeking approval to market the property. The meeting papers included a valuation report, prepared on 19 December 2023, valuing the property at £450,000. The report also highlighted issues with water ingress from the roof ‘... as Hurst House is deteriorating fairly rapidly now...’ and break-ins. After issue of a notice to dispose, a formal agreement to market is now expected to be made at the council’s cabinet meeting on 10 July. This hopefully, at last, marks the beginning of the end to the very sorry story of Hurst House. This has included what the society has considered, for many years, as gross mismanagement of the property by the county council, in its capacity of the sole trustee of the Chesterfield School Foundation charity.

2 – Former Rural Council House

Homes by Holmes, the owners of this property, fixed signboards on it towards the end of April advertising its availability for sale. Unfortunately, the building now appears less secure than at any time in its chequered past. The 1930s original build has recently been added to our buildings at risk list, but now has some broken windows. The 1970s extension has suffered a graffiti attack on its windows and so-call urban explorers have made access. We have previously reported on the removal of the majority (presumably stolen) of the copper roof to the 1970s block.

3 – Chesterfield town centre properties and regeneration news

The multi-million pound revitalising the heart of Chesterfield project is due to start ‘on the ground’ on 1 July. There has been some recent positive news on the future of various individual Chesterfield town centre properties including tenants for some of the former cooperative department store units, and a proposed refit for what many still recognise as the long-empty and listed ‘White’s Bar’ property on High Street. There is also some funding news for the stalled Chesterfield-Staveley Regeneration Route, (formerly known as the Brimington/Staveley by-pass) which we will more fully report on in our next newsletter. It remains to be seen what the result of the current general election will have on planning issues or, indeed, the regeneration route itself. Presumably the general election has also delayed any announcements on initiatives from the new East Midlands Mayor.

Contact us

Please get in touch with us if you have any news to share, want to comment on the Civic Society’s activities or have any concerns that you think we should be pursuing.

Email: chairman@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk or secretary@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

Write to us: Howard Borrell, 1 West Lea, Brampton, Chesterfield, S40 3SL.