

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

NEWSLETTER No - 161 - AUTUMN 2019

CHAIR'S COMMENTARY

STOP PRESS: Transformational Change for Epsom: Current Concerns

Over the past months, the Society has kept members updated on the progress of Epsom's new Local Plan, local land supply and delivery of new homes, and the acute challenges faced by the Borough in meeting central government housing targets given the lack of a five-year housing land supply locally.

As I said in my Chair's commentary in our Spring 2019 newsletter, Epsom is facing the prospect of **massive transformational change**: "The big questions in terms of housing are undoubtedly: where will new homes go, at what heights and density, will they be well-designed and built with high quality materials, will they be energy-efficient, will they be affordable, and will they help to make places that people actually want to live in?" While the local Plan process continues, as the revised timetable sets out below, this transformational change is **starkly illustrated by the recent planning application to redevelop 24-28 West Street** (Planning Reference 19/01021/FUL).

The application proposes demolishing the distinctive, much-loved building (the Furniss Building) and replacing it with a much bigger, mixed use (commercial and residential) building going up to 13 storeys (see artists impression by the architect here). This is a proposal for a site that is both in a Conservation Area (the Town Centre Conservation Area), and abuts a second Conservation Area (the Stamford Green Conservation Area) and which, if approved, will radically change the local skyline and townscape. The Society has written a detailed letter to the Council recommending that this application be refused, and we urge members to submit their own responses via the Council's website: <http://eplanning.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/online-applications/>

Another recent planning application involving **significantly increased building heights** is the proposal to build a seven storey block on Station Approach, Stoneleigh (Planning Reference 19/00668/FUL). This has generated a large number of objections registered with the Council and the launch of a crowdfunding campaign by Stoneleigh and Auriol Residents' Association to fight the development, details at www.stoneleighandauriol.org/w/

The Society is currently considering its response to redevelopment plans for the Atkins site, Woodcote Grove (Planning Reference 19/00999/FUL), which include a sixth storey on a proposed block of flats for the site, conversion of the Grade II Listed mansion and stable block and significant change to the



landscaping, including felling of many trees. Once again, a development in an area of historical interest and situated in the Chalk Lane Conservation Area.

Members should be aware that this trend for significantly increased building heights is not solely developer-driven: following the Council's decision to relax height restrictions (Report to Licensing and Planning Policy Committee 8 May 2018, Urban Housing Capacity Study December 2018) the Borough's Planning team has suggested or required developers to increase the height and scale of their original proposals. Is this the kind of future we want for Epsom? Please send us your feedback.

The Society seeks to inspire progressive improvement in the quality of urban life for everyone in our local area. Consequently we have objected to the proposal to **demolish the Wells Community Centre**. In our view, the Council's own redevelopment proposals to replace the Centre with a four storey block of flats and much reduced community facilities is inappropriate, largely because it fails to support and promote the health, well-being and community cohesion for this relatively isolated community (Planning Reference 19/00929/FUL). Please make your own views known via the Council's website (link above). The Society has submitted its letter of objection. There is an online petition on Chris Grayling MP's website: www.epsomconservatives.org.uk/SaveTheWells



Local Plan

The Council's **Local Plan Programme** was updated as at **June 2019** with key milestones revised as follows:

- Autumn 2019 – Final Issues and Options Consultation
- Spring 2020 – Pre-submission Public Consultation
- Summer 2020 – Submission to the Secretary of State
- Winter 2020 – Public Hearing
- Winter 2021 – Estimated date of Adoption

Members will note that there has been some slippage in the timeframe as set out in our previous newsletter, which was based on last year's Local Plan Programme (June 2018).

Environmental and Climate Change Charter for Surrey

We're pleased to see that Surrey County Council will be developing an Environmental and Climate Change Charter for Surrey. This was announced in May by Tim Oliver, Leader of the Council.

Central Government Planning Reforms

There has been something of a flurry of planning reforms in June and July, on a wide range of issues. In June the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced a much

welcome boost for transparency in connection with local **developer contributions**: local authorities are now required to report on these contributions and what the money has been spent on.

Permitted development rights have been **extended**: **homeowners** will be able to build larger single-storey rear extensions on their properties without the need for a full planning application, although restrictions apply if you live in a Conservation Area. Homeowners are required to notify the Council, and size limits apply. If in doubt, contact the Planning Department. There are also extended permitted development rights for **business owners**: shops will be allowed to change to office space without the need for a full planning application. We'll be interested to see whether relaxing the rules for business owners will improve our townscape and revitalise the high street.

In July, the MHCLG published **updated Planning Practice Guidance** (MHCLG Planning Update Newsletter, July 2019). Why is this important? This guidance supports the National Planning Policy Framework (updated February 2019) which sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied in Local Plan making and development control decisions. Full details are available at GOV.UK. If you are interested in the historic environment, Historic England has published a briefing outlining the key changes on its website: historicengland.org.uk. Those of you who follow the Society on Twitter @EpsomCivicSoc will find tweeted updates.

The Society and Civic Voice

Along with many other civic societies and individuals, we responded to Civic Voice's **survey on the planning system**. Interesting findings are emerging from this latest research, details on the Civic Voice website: civicvoice.org.uk and on Twitter: [@civic_voice](https://twitter.com/civic_voice)

Members will recall I referred to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission in the last newsletter. The Commission's **interim report, 'Creating Space for Beauty'**, was published on 9 July and is accessible on the GOV.UK website. On 13 July I attended a Civic Voice briefing meeting in London on the report, where we also discussed collaborative planning and placemaking. Following up again from our summer newsletter, Grosvenor Britain and Ireland (GBI) published a **report, 'Rebuilding Trust'**, on its own research into public trust in placemaking in the UK. The report concludes that the public does not trust the planning system, nor does it trust private developers. Full details available at www.grosvenor.com What can we conclude from this? That it is important to make the planning system more transparent, and to engage in more collaborative planning. Members who attended our AGM will remember the support for community engagement in planning from the Council's Head of Planning, Ruth Ormella, and we look forward to developing the Society's constructive relationship with Ruth and her team.

On a celebratory note: Griff Rhys Jones, President of Civic Voice, was awarded OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to the National Civic Movement, charity and entertainment. Griff will visit Epsom on Sunday 17th November and we hope to organise a meeting with him.

Anniversary Celebrations

The Society is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, and consequently our summer activities have been particularly sociable, with members dropping by to say hello and new members signing up at our



displays in Epsom Square on 22 June to mark National Civic Day and in Stamford Green for Epsom Common Day on 21 July. On 11 June, I was delighted to welcome the Society's Road Representatives to their annual buffet supper at Christ Church Hall. A huge welcome to our new members and we look forward to seeing you at our future events.

Schools' Garden Project

Finally, for a number of years the Society has funded a Schools' Garden Project which has been ably administered by Liz Plumtree. Liz has devoted considerable time and effort liaising with local schools, for which we are most grateful. Our thanks go to Liz for her dedication, and we wish her well with her future plans.

Margaret Hollins

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Since taking over from Alan Baker in mid May to advise on and comment upon planning applications (except for Conservation Areas and Langley Vale), I have attended two committee meetings and various Planning sub-committee meetings. With so many planning issues for Epsom on the horizon and immediate high impact planning applications to review, the Society has been actively engaged throughout the summer and is vigorously reviewing applications and policy developments.

Planning applications seem to be gathering apace, no doubt driven by the Government's desire to achieve 300,000 new homes per annum by the mid-2020s. The continuing low interest rates and slackening after over 10 years of austerity is also playing its part too. However, questions must be raised about achieving this target on several fronts.

Infrastructure is a very frequently used planning word in connection with roads, transport, health services, schools, water supply, etc. in that will these facilities be able to cope? Very likely not. The ability of the construction industry to deliver and the ongoing demand on building materials, supplies and services pose major questions too.

It is vitally important that the planning policies currently in place are upheld especially for current applications and those forthcoming in the near future and not to allow standards to slip on the back of fulfilling housing demand projections - some of which are considered to be flawed. A very careful watch on the revisions is required for the emerging Local Plan now likely to be revealed in early 2020 and in place by the end of 2021. The Society is actively following these developments and fellow committee member Bob Hollis is keeping a close eye on planning applications and how they impact on Heritage and Conservation Areas.

24-28 West Street, Epsom Town Centre (19/01021/FUL): As referred to in the Chair's Commentary, the proposal to knock down the building by the bridge on West Street (known to many locals as the Furniss Building) and build a 13-story accommodation high-rise block is commanding the Society's attention. The Society's detailed submission is available on our website.

Wells Community Centre, Epsom Common (19/00929/FUL): The proposal to demolish the Wells Community Centre (it was closed against the wishes of residents two years ago) and build 23 residences is of concern as our Chair's Commentary sets out. Our letter has been submitted.

W S Atkins Grounds, Woodcote Grove (Reference 19/00999/FUL): A change of Company ownership has been followed by a tentative, pre-application consultation with a hastily arranged meeting at the end of



May with a limited range of nearby residents. The proposal is to provide 115 flats on the land within the grounds including conversion of the original Grade II Listed Woodcote Grove Mansion and Stable Block following demolition of the 1950's-era soon to be redundant office block. The grounds lie to the north-east side of Chalk Lane. Access would be partly from Chalk Lane but the majority from the existing site access on Ashley Road. This latest planning application, submitted by Stonegate, follows completion by Atkins of its new modern office building and the vacation of the original headquarters. The original Planning Permission for this office block included provisions for extensive external works and

landscaping prior to occupation of their new premises. This new Planning Application for the adjacent residential scheme cuts across these external works areas. Therefore permission will be required by Atkins to gain occupation without completing all of the external works or that a new external works is designed and approved to suit both sites. The Society is seeking a meeting with the applicant developer, Stonegate Homes of Dorking, to know more about their proposals before submitting its response to the application.



South Hatch, Burgh Heath Road (18/00308/FUL): The application to rebuild the stables with enabling development of residential housing comprising an apartment block of 46 units on the Green Belt, submitted last August, was due to have been considered at a special meeting of the planning committee on 1st August. This was cancelled and the proposal will now be discussed on Tuesday 17 September. As we go to press, the agenda report for this meeting recommends permitting the development subject to ministerial approval because of its departure from the policy to not build on the Green Belt. The detailed agenda report states the very special circumstances of the application outweigh the harm to the loss of Green Belt land. The Society's position is to support improved stables but opposes the development of commercial housing on this Green Belt land.



Epsom Square (formerly Derby Square): The Picturehouse (as it is to be known rather than a cinema) was passed in May for development in the corner embracing the restaurant next to the library entrance. The Society supported this as an added facility and venue - more than simply another place to watch films. A wide range of material would be shown including independent, art house and foreign language films as well as live broadcasts of opera and theatre. Work is soon likely to start including the restaurant moving to one of the vacant units in the

Square. We welcome this as enlivening Epsom Square, increasing attraction to its restaurants and revitalising the area generally. The so-called 'Green Walls' in the Square were interesting features of the changes to the Square. Sadly, they have not survived well and questions have been raised about the design in that the planting of wooden trellises are struggling due to lack of watering, space for growth and poor

soil. Added to this is litter deposited in the troughs indicating a lack of maintenance. There is a planning condition valid for five years that should any planting die it will be replaced. We have drawn attention to this condition which requires compliance with a landscaping management plan and have asked for this to be enforced.

Former Police Station, Church Street: Since our last newsletter, it appears that the ambulance station is now available in addition to the old police station. Ideally the plan is to develop both sites as one. The amended design for the redevelopment of the police station site as two residential blocks comprising 29 homes was approved. This approval for development of the police station alone now appears to be superseded by a new application for the development of both sites. McCarthy and Stone, the retirement homes developer, has announced it has acquired a stake in the sites and is holding consultation sessions this month.

Fencing in Avenue Road: We are pleased to see that following an enforcement notice the excessively high fence has been lowered. The visual is much more pleasing, exposing the green planting behind.

Planning applications approved: The old Post Office at 74 High Street has received approval for conversion to a restaurant. It is hoped that the economy can support success for these eating out establishments. The Horton Chapel development was also approved. We wish success to this project for community use. It has been an ongoing concern regarding its future use for over 15 years.

Michael Arthur

CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE

The summer period has proved to be very busy for the protection of our local Conservation Areas and heritage. Developers have started to advance their schemes, which in some cases have remained dormant for several years. The current large developer schemes are 24-28 West Street, Woodcote Grove, The Wells Centre and The Old Police Station / Ambulance Station site on Church Street. All of these developments give cause for concern and whilst they may be assisting the Council in achieving their housing targets, they may also severely affect the environment and community that the Society is concerned with protecting and, where possible, improving.

The West Street development proposal, adjacent to the railway and fronting Station Approach, has been created with the Council and could be the forerunner for other high rise glass blocks. The works, which include the demolition of the unique old Furniss Building with its interesting corner façade (pictured right), will significantly alter the character and street scene from all approaches in the Town Centre Conservation Area.



Equally, the Woodcote Grove development, including significant conversion of Grade II Listed buildings such as the Mansion House (pictured left) within the grounds as well as widespread landscaping and removal of established trees will affect the adjacent Green Belt area and impact the character of the historic Chalk Lane Conservation Area.

The Society is concerned that the new residential works and development will significantly impact on the character and tranquillity of Chalk Lane and the Conservation Area, impinge on the Green Belt to the southern boundary and the closely located access arrangements to St. Martin's School, Atkins and the proposed new dwellings.



Recent Planning Applications where we have sent letters of objection include:

The Lodge, West Street, Ewell (19/00801/FUL): The Society has objected to the application (in two parts) for 3 houses (already approved 19/00015) and a further 2 houses and 4 flats at The Lodge, part of the Gibraltar Recreation ground in the Ewell Village Conservation Area. This includes demolition of the park's lodge. Although not a historic building it is a local landmark and defines the entrance to the Gibraltar Recreation Ground. The Society is concerned by this overdevelopment and its impact on the local amenity space and environment.

1 Higher Green (19/00758/FUL): For the erection of a new 2 1/2 storey house adjacent to the existing property. The Society objected stating concerns regarding the effect on the Conservation Area and proximity to a school. A decision is awaited.

6 The Grove (19/00461/FUL): For an additional block of 4 flats in the rear garden. This is in addition to the approved conversion of the house into 5 flats (18/00647/FUL). The Society objected to the disregard for this lovely Conservation Area. This application has now been withdrawn.

20-22 Church Street (19/00384/FUL): For an additional two-storey rear extension. The Society objected to the proposed works which would trespass into the rear garden and affect the ambience of the Conservation Area. This application was refused by the Council.

We have however supported proposals for the new works at Langley Vale Woods and the clunch wall repairs alongside The Durdans on World's End. While we await news of the wall repair work project, we note that planning to create a car park and erect a visitors' centre for the new Langley Vale Memorial Wood has now been permitted. The Society also notes that the Grade II equestrian property and racing yard at The Durdans is now up for sale and the current owners are seeking new owners to take on the racing stables, also located on Chalk Lane.

Other ongoing applications being reviewed are:

8 Ladbroke Road (18/01526/REM): A retrospective application has been made for an alternative roof design and a higher boundary wall. The new condition suggests that these changes improve the external aesthetic but in our view they only further overburden the neighbours. Also we are concerned by the principle of why the builder did not comply with the approved drawings and specifications.

Times are 'a changing' in our lovely Borough. We must do everything possible to protect our beautiful Conservation Areas and historic buildings which make Epsom a special place to live whilst the Council pushes ahead with achieving its housing targets.

Bob Hollis

THE DOWNS

I was invited to attend this year's Cloud Tramp mass launch on 3 August and successfully launched an elastic band-powered model aircraft. We had 22 flyers take to the sky. Many thanks to the Epsom Downs Model Aircraft Club for organising the gathering. It was amazing to think I was in the company of enthusiasts all over the world doing the same thing at exactly the same time.



Angela Clifford

EVENTS

Our 60th Anniversary celebration display took place in Epsom Square on 22nd June and it coincided with the national Civic Voice day. Local residents were encouraged to join and many members visited the display. The free “lucky dip” for children attracted many to our photographic display, kindly collated by our former committee secretary and treasurer, Malcolm Boyd. We were joined by Mike Ford, chairman of the Tree Advisory Board, and Ian West, historian and archaeologist, who took members and friends on guided walks around the Church Road and Market areas. Thank you to all those members who helped us on the day. Our second display was in July for the Epsom Common Association Day.

Finally our dinner theatre outing on 7th December to The Mill at Sonning is now sold out.

Sheila Wadsworth

MEMBERSHIP

The Society is delighted to welcome 80 new members this year, 56 of whom joined at our displays in the summer. If you are keen to join us, please do get in touch or visit our website for more information: www.epsomcivicsociety.org.uk. For regular updates and latest news, you can also follow us on Twitter: @EpsomCivicSoc

Ishbel Kenward - Membership Secretary (01372 728570) email membership@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk

Call for New Committee Members

We have over 1850 members, an excellent number for a Society like ours. To ensure that the Society continues to thrive, we need more committee members. We would love to hear from you if you are able to join as a Minutes Secretary and we also seek a Secretary for the Society. We would also seek occasional support for publicity activities and welcome any web or publishing design expertise. Please don't hold back from volunteering! Please do contact me directly if you are interested on 01372 726469 or email me at: chairman@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk.

Margaret Hollins

Epsom Civic Society Newsletter

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All of our newsletters are available in colour online: www.epsomcivicsociety.org.uk/newsletters/

EPSOM REVUED

This report is a continuation from our recent Spring Newsletter describing a revue by John Furniss, a former PROBUS (Epsom-PROfessional and BUSiness) Club member, whose family and ancestors were born and lived in Epsom from as early as 1585. It was performed in the Epsom Playhouse in 1985.

John Furniss continued his revue with a further reference to Pepys who hears, at the King's Head, that Lord Buckhurst and Nellie Gwyn are lodged at the next house with Sir Charles Sedley. In a darkened bedroom scene Nellie is seen being pursued across the stage.

There are many references to John's ancestor, the constable of 1719 and the Dr Livingstone, who does not like history but made a purchase of land for the erection of an almshouse for widows. Dr Livingstone claims also to have brought the healing waters to the Town thereby saving 'the weary traipse to Ashtead'. He kept the old Wells open for six years but fears that people are visiting Tunbridge instead.

John Toland came to Epsom in 1711 and in 1726 his letter to a lady 'Eudoxa' was published. Toland and Eudoxa hold a discussion in which Epsom's many virtues are mentioned: 'It is but 14 miles from London Bridge in a warm even bottom near the finest downs in the world. The Downs are covered with grass finer than Persian carpets. Here the sheep walk, riding, racing, hunting, shooting and games exercise the body and recreate the mind'. A Pastoral Dance follows.

The Durdans features in the revue. Frederick, Prince of Wales lived there from 1737 to 1747 and an obelisk from there was demolished and used, in 1824, in the building of the new Parish Church. (The Durdans is a large house in the Chalk Lane area once occupied by Lord Rosebery when he was the Prime Minister in the 1880's and 1890's).

William Furniss, a coachman - 'The Frozen Coachman' - died in Ashtead after a cold drive in 1776 leaving a wife and son Thomas. Efforts to revive him at 'The Haunch and Venison' were not successful. He was a son of the Constable of 1719.

In about 1736 a grotesque figure calling herself 'Crazy Sally' performed bone-setting in Epsom and it was said her dexterity was wonderful. The people of Epsom wanted her to stay but she married a Mr Mapp in London. He left her after two weeks and she died a pauper in 1737.

Racing must feature of course and John talks of the meeting of Lord Derby and Sir Charles Bunbury. At The Oaks near Woodmansterne in the late 1770's they meet and drink and toss a coin to decide which of them should name the big race. Lord Derby won the toss with tails and so the first Derby was run in 1780 and was won by Diomed.

Harry Corben (by invitation)