

Annual Review

May 2019 – April 2020

The past year has been a busy and a significant one for the Society: founded in 1959 as Epsom Protection Society, at a time when many historic and architecturally valuable buildings and houses in Epsom and Ewell were being threatened by developers, 2019 was the year when the Society celebrated its 60th birthday. Major anniversaries are a time both for reflecting on times past and looking ahead. In 1959, our primary role was to halt the destruction of Epsom's heritage and to ensure that new development was compatible with the traditional character of the town. Today, our purpose continues to be to protect the heritage of Epsom and to encourage high standards of new planning and building, as relevant now as it was 60 years ago. Our change of name in 2011 reflects the wider contemporary concerns of the Society to promote civic pride and to inspire progressive improvement in the quality of urban life for everyone. The Society's activities and projects summarised in this Review are possible only with the time, dedication and enthusiasm of my fellow committee members, our accountant and our archivists. It is a pleasure for me to record formally my own thanks to them all and to record further appreciation on behalf of all our members.

The Society's activities over the past 12 months have focused on big strategic issues for the Borough, most importantly regarding housing delivery rates, lack of a five-year housing land supply and delay with the new Local Plan, all of which leave the Borough vulnerable to speculative development. We have had meetings with senior members of the Council's Planning team, and with Chris Grayling MP. In support of the petition launched by College Ward Residents' Association, we wrote to all councillors setting out the Society's concerns together with our own ideas and proposals for an alternative approach to the Local Plan. We have provided members with regular updates via our newsletters. In January we held an open meeting at Epsom United Reformed Church to raise awareness more widely in the Borough. The Society has also provided feedback to the Council's Planning team on the draft Masterplan and revised Statement of Community Involvement.

The Society has continued its active engagement with a range of planning applications particularly where local development proposals generated local interest or concern, for example in terms of building height, adverse impacts whether on community facilities and neighbourhood well-being, or on Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. This has involved correspondence and meetings with residents, developers, councillors and our MP, in addition to submitting letters of representation to the Council. Applications have included development / redevelopment of: The Wells Community Centre in Epsom Common, WS Atkins Grounds in Woodcote Grove, 24-28 West St, (the Furniss Building) Epsom Town Centre, The Lodge, West St, Ewell, 22/24 Dorking Road, Guild Living / Legal and General Epsom Hospital residential home, 1 Higher Green, The Picturehouse in Epsom Square, 6 The Grove, 20-22 Church St, 23A – 33 Links Road, and 36 The Parade. Where the Society

considered development proposals were appropriate and well-designed, we submitted representations in support. Where we have objected but planning permission has been granted, we continue to monitor for compliance with the approved scheme.

The Society has pursued enforcement cases with the Council, including securing repair to the Grade II* Listed shopfront at the premises currently occupied by Lloyd's Pharmacy; and a reduction in fencing height in Avenue Road. We have also raised with the Council's Planning Team our concerns that three of the Borough's Conservation Areas are on Historic England's risk register.

We have maintained our links with Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators and provide updates on associated issues and activities to our members.

The Society has continued to support the Tree Advisory Board in its successful efforts to ensure the continuation of street tree planting in the Borough and has provided financial support for new trees via members' contributions to our Tree Fund. We supported last summer's Epsom Common Day. We have pledged to give £2,000 to the Emily Davison Memorial Project for a statue of Emily in the town centre.

We have organised social events for our road representatives and members, including a pre-Christmas visit to the Mill at Sonning and heritage walks with Ian West.

We attended the Civic Societies' All-Party Parliamentary Group debates on community engagement, urban design and planning organised by Civic Voice. The Society is a founder member of Civic Voice, the national charity for the civic movement in England, and shares common aims with other civic societies. In October I completed the first year of my appointment as a trustee on the Civic Voice Board.

Margaret Hollins

Chair, Epsom Civic Society