

# Trust News



Issue 129 - August 2012

## Chairman's Report

Elsewhere in this Newsletter is a report on the death of Patrick Norton, a former Chairman of the Trust. As well as his work for the Trust he left a permanent memorial, the excellent triangular feature in Albion Place, which is a fitting quieter corner of the Devizes street scene.

Despite objections from the Trust and others, Wiltshire Council accepted a planning officer's recommendation to approve the plan from McCarthy and Stone for yet another retirement home at the Wharf. In our view, that recommendation was very one-sided and gave reasons for the development but failed to properly consider some good reasons against it. This appalling barracks-like structure will import older people to Devizes when our inadequate health services are under strain and it will do little or nothing to meet real local needs for young and old.

As this edition goes to print we are awaiting a Planning Inspector's decision on the appeal by Merchant Venturers (MV) against the refusal of planning permission for the Quakers Walk Care Home proposal. In addition to the detailed submission to the Inspector from the Trust, we had the benefit of an independent traffic consultant's report which was commissioned by the CPRE, a body with deeper pockets than the Trust. That report demonstrated how the MV traffic consultant had misled the planners by using incorrect data, which significantly underestimated the effects of their proposal on the traffic situation. We are concerned that the Wiltshire Highways officer, supposedly someone who has some

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## Fighting for breath!

**Tony Sedgwick** argues that we must fight to improve the air quality in Devizes



*Holdups at Brewery Corner*

Merchant Venturers, the owners of a great deal of land around Devizes and Roundway, have applied to complete the urbanisation of Quakers Walk by building a Care Village on the land between the canal and the new housing estate. The Trust opposed the application and the Council rejected it. Predictably Merchant Venturers appealed and, alarmingly, the Council did a "volte face" by deciding not to oppose that appeal.

The Trust, working closely with Devizes Community Area Partnership, the Campaign to Protect Rural England and Devizes Health Matters, decided to take over the Council's role and defend the decision to reject the application.

Members may wonder why we should oppose something that, on the face of it, Devizes should welcome. 139 extra-care apartments and a 60 bed care home is surely a good thing. Not necessarily!

As we all know, Devizes has an air pollution problem; and it is getting worse. Right now we have an Air Quality Management Area at Shanes Castle. In the light of last year's measurements that is going to have to be expanded to cover virtually the whole of the town centre. The most congested road is the A361 and that is where nearly all major housing developments have taken place in the last few years and, indeed, are still being built. Every extra car added to the queue makes the pollution worse. Whilst the Council may play down the harmful effects to our health, the Trust's own Medical Advisor is in no doubt. He states quite categorically that the pollution levels we are experiencing are harmful to everyone, shortening life

expectancy and of particular danger to young children and to those with pulmonary and cardiac problems.

The Trust has been quite clear – no more houses should be built until there is a viable policy to bring air quality back below the legal limit imposed by both the UK Government and the EU. No such policy exists. Everyone living on or visiting the proposed care village will have to use London Road and the new junction with Quakers Road. In addition there are still around 100 homes on that estate to be finished and the new school will increase its roll by another 300 pupils. Every developer argues that they will only increase traffic "a little bit", but, as with the camel, the day of the last straw will come and traffic delays will soar, as will air pollution.

In the Trust's view, we need to fight for cleaner air and that is what we are doing!

Field by field, the green areas of our town have been disappearing under tons of concrete. Green areas are the lungs of a town. We need open space for many reasons, to enjoy the tranquillity, to walk the dogs, for the children to play and to encourage people to take healthy exercise. Green space in towns is recognised as being good for people's wellbeing. Yet, in Devizes, one after another they are being picked off by developers whose sole concern is to make a profit.

So we continue to oppose any major development that threatens the quality of the air we breathe, or removes another acre of our urban lungs.

## Chairman's Report

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knowledge of these matters, may have failed to properly consider the MV report and accepted it at face value or did not understand it. Fortunately, Tony Sedgwick showed more capability and exposed the error.

Whatever the case, there are questions to be answered by Wiltshire Council officers about how they manage planning applications and if they will continue to run away from planning appeals, giving a green light to a developers' free-for-all. For that reason the three organisations that appealed against MV have requested a special meeting of the Devizes Area Board to debate the Wiltshire planning system in public. There is some resistance to a public debate, Wiltshire Council is not as transparent as it ought to be, but we will not go away quietly.

On day to day, more routine, planning matters, the Trust regularly comments on all local planning applications that have a significant effect on the local built environment. Not all comments are critical; it is pleasing when we can support good proposals. I wish to thank one of our committee members, John Baumber, who watches local planning applications and advises on comments for the Trust.

One recent proposal which has caused controversy is the arrival of Cafe Nero in the Brittox. We would like to see the variety and local nature of the shopping scene maintained, and some people are concerned about large national coffee bar chains. On the other hand, it is a vote of confidence in Devizes and preferable to some other possibilities. On balance the Trust Committee is not opposed, but we will look carefully at the detailed plans for the listed building when they are published.

**Ted East**

## Obituary - Patrick Norton



Patrick Norton, who died on June 8th, was Chairman of the Trust for 13 years. Patrick will live on in the town through his generous gift of the sculpture in Albion Place which he designed and donated to the town in 1997. This photograph from the Gazette and Herald shows Patrick and his wife Joan with

our Honorary President, Michael Ancram, admiring the statue.

In 1992, as Chairman of the Trust, Patrick presented E R Breach, Mayor of Devizes, with a new notice board containing the town trail.



## Obituary - John Leech



The Trust has lost a staunch supporter and friend with the recent passing of John Leech. John was a contributor to Trust News and regularly attended the socials, where many will remember his quiet but

infectious chuckle.

His love of Devizes is best illustrated by the fact that he never sought to leave the town. His journalistic talents were such that, had he chosen, he could have had a significant career in any of the Fleet Street broadsheets which flourished during his working life. Certainly his style and wit could have graced the pages of Punch or The Spectator. And who knows, maybe they did, for he was a modest man and any such success would have been known only to close friends. Instead he spent his entire working life at the Wiltshire Gazette reporting and commenting on local events with an élan for which, nowadays, there is not the space to indulge even if there were those with the ability to emulate it. John rose to be Features Editor at the Gazette but some would say that his influence was much greater and that for some years he was the de facto editor.

Like all good writers John made use of poetic licence; emphasising a fact to create interest without changing the story. On the day I wrote this, as part of their recognition of his abilities, the Gazette published his report, unfortunately in barely discernable print, of a particularly contentious planning committee meeting concerning an application to site large satellite dishes at the edge of Etchilhampton.

To accommodate the expected large audience the meeting was held in the ballroom of The Bear Hotel, I was the chairman. "Cllr. Duck elbowed his way through the crowd carrying a pipe and his personal ashtray, only to be confronted by a No Smoking notice". Why I was carrying a pipe and an ashtray I do not recall, but John would have known that smoking was not allowed at any Kennet District Council meeting. He had spotted an irrelevant detail and turned it into a point of humour to draw in his reader.

John had a great respect for, and love of the English language. He was invariably accurate in its use whether written or spoken. The same issue of the Gazette bore, above the front-page title, in bold red print, "Canal café back open". That would not have appeared in John's day!

*Tony Duck*

# The Draft Transport Strategy

Wiltshire Council recently commissioned Mott MacDonald to devise a transport strategy for Devizes. The objectives of the strategy include:

- Reducing transport related emissions and address climate change and local air quality problems;
- Creating a better environment for people, rather than vehicles, in the town centre and residential areas;
- Safeguarding the historic environment.

The draft report recommends a number of actions which can be taken to meet these objectives. It also discusses the possibility of a relief road to the north of the town. The likely cost would be more than £16 million and it would be difficult to construct. It would also define a new development boundary (as evident by Windsor Drive on the eastern side of the town) and would encourage expansion of the town to the north.

The report concludes that "additional development on a scale to fund such a new road could require 5,000 new homes or more to be built. On this basis, the relief road has not been included for further consideration.". However, in the Trust's view, there are more imaginative schemes that are realistic possibilities for diverting traffic which should at least be considered in the strategy.

Many of the measures recommended by the consultants involve increasing cycling, walking and public transport and improving traffic management. As far as traffic management is concerned, the Trust does not support expensive schemes, such as the alterations at Brewery Corner, and would

need to be convinced that any proposals to change the layout of junctions, for example, would be cost effective.

Other proposals in the strategy, such as the pedestrianisation of Maryport St, would need to be carefully examined. The Trust would support changes to the one-way system if they could be proven to provide benefits.

Public transport is included in the strategy and it is recognised that, in rural areas, subsidies are often required. The Trust believes that services need to meet the needs of the population in order to become self-financing.

In the Trust's view, the cause of the problem needs to be tackled, rather than just the symptoms. Short-term planning has led to a large increase in the town's population while little has been done to improve the infrastructure.

If all the schemes identified in the report are implemented the cost will be in excess of £5 million. Developer contributions would never be sufficient for these plans, and besides, further development would make the problems worse!

On this basis, if the Transport Strategy for Devizes is to be effective, Wiltshire Council must recognise that it needs to seek government funding for essential infrastructure development. The time for that may be ripe as the Government contemplates ways of stimulating the economy. The alternative is that the problems will have to be endured.

We will monitor the situation and keep you updated on this important topic.

## McCarthy and Stone set to work



Work has already started on clearing the site of McCarthy and Stone's new development at the Wharf.

The scale of the advertising signs gives some idea of the intrusive nature of the development!

## Museum News

The Story of Devizes exhibition will be on display until the middle of September so get your skates on and get along there soon.

The exhibition tells the story of the town's history and development, using objects from the Museums collections, how and why the town exists, why it has such an unusual name and how it has developed.

Given the ongoing saga about shops in Devizes, there is an interesting display of material harking back to the days of Slopers which started as a drapery store at no 14 the Brittox and expanded into nos 11, 12 and 15 to become a department store. Those were the days indeed.



## More news around town

We now have another cafe in town, but this time it's definitely in the right place!

The cafe has opened on the first floor of the Kennet & Avon Trust building.

On a quite Tuesday afternoon when I visited, there was a steady stream of customers. I had a pot of tea and a lovely home-made scone with butter and jam for the very reasonable price of £3. We wish them every success.

The trend for more antique shops gathers pace as the old tobacco shop in Northgate Street is shortly to reopen as an antique shop.

## A message from the Treasurer

Most members remember to pay their annual subscriptions, but a small number are unaware that another year has passed since last they paid and I have to send them a reminder letter. There is a batch of reminders coming out with this newsletter. If you do not receive one it means that you have paid for 2012!

The easiest way to keep up to date with your subscription is to set up a standing order at your bank. A form enabling you to do this can be downloaded from our website [www.trustfordevizes.info](http://www.trustfordevizes.info) or I can send you one by post. I can be contacted at [inezskinner@aol.com](mailto:inezskinner@aol.com) or telephone 01380 725466. Be prepared to leave a message on my answerphone as it cuts in quite quickly.

Thank you for your support in the way of subs and donations and attendance at our social events. It is good to meet face to face sometimes. If you have any suggestions regarding speakers you would like to hear, or topics you think we could find someone to give a talk about, please do not hesitate to contact me or another member of the Committee.

*Inez Skinner*

### Are you online?

Would you prefer to receive your Trust News by email?

Printing and posting the Trust News is one of the major costs incurred by the Trust.

If you would be happy to receive your copy of Trust News by email it would help to reduce our outgoings, saving paper as well as the time spent by our volunteers stuffing envelopes!

To register for this service, send an email to [info@trustfordevizes.info](mailto:info@trustfordevizes.info).

## Dates for your diary

Our next Trust Social will take place on **Friday 14th September** at the Museum. The speaker will be Mrs King who will be talking about developments at Avebury.

The Christmas social will be held on **Friday 7th December** at the Nursteed Centre and entertainment will be by First Stages, the young people's choir who sang so beautifully at last year's Christmas Social.

Also for your diaries are two events supported by the Devizes Community Area Board. The Sustainable Devizes Network is holding an event "Low Energy Devizes" on **Saturday 29 September** from 10.00am to 2.00pm in the Corn Exchange. The event will showcase the range of possibilities for reducing your use of fossil fuels and your carbon footprint. On **Saturday 6th October**, a new organisation called Cycle Devizes will be holding an event in the Market Place between 11am and 3pm. It will be a cross between a bike festival and a village fete.

**Make sure these dates go into your diary now!**

## Around Town



## On The Shop front...

A new shop in the Brittox, with more to come

Since the last Trust News when we reported on the empty shops in the town centre, Julian Graves has gone into receivership. However, we now have a fruit and veg shop, Jimmy Deane's, at no 19 and Cafe Nero is now open in the old Curry's store. We also have a new children's clothes shop, Funky Rabbit, in the former Darcy Books.

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