

Trust News



Issue 128 - May 2012

Chairman's Report May 2012

The new national planning rules (the NPPF in short) became law in March; they were an improvement on the draft produced last year. The Trust, and others, had lobbied hard through our MP for changes to protect our countryside and strengthen the status of local plans. Our Local plans are based on the new Wiltshire Council Core Strategy, which has now been submitted for government approval. That too had been improved after considerable lobbying: the need for local infrastructure to be a priority over new housing construction is now recognised and the housing allocation for the Devizes Area is now more reasonable. These changes are an important step towards the Government's stated aim of "localism", but it remains to be seen what now happens in practice.

The recent planning application from the Merchant Venturers to build an elderly persons "care home" with 139 dwellings at Quakers Walk was rejected by a Wiltshire Council Planning Committee at which the application was contested by the Trust and others. This is now going to an appeal hearing on 11th June. Amazingly, the Council has decided not to contest the appeal in case costs are awarded against it, which seems to give the green light to developers to concrete all over our remaining open spaces. Fortunately, The Trust, CPRE and DCAP are not so defeatist and will be submitting their cases to the appeal Inspector.

We held a public meeting on the 14th May to demonstrate the strength of local opinion. Read the report on page 3.

The McCarthy and Stone proposal for retirement homes with 39 apartments at the Wharf was rejected last year at an appeal. Despite that appalling proposal having obvious problems, the only reason for refusal was that it would be too dominant at the eastern side of the Wharf; such is our illogical planning system. A new application has been submitted for 37 apartments with the block adjacent to the Wharf reduced from 3 storeys to 2. The Trust is also submitting objections on this new proposal to Wiltshire Council.

Both of these proposals would bring older people to this area, which already has a high proportion of older people, and put further pressure on our overstretched medical facilities, care resources and all other infrastructure. Wiltshire Council has

CRISIS IN THE BRITTOX AS FOUR SHOPS CLOSE THEIR DOORS



Millers is due to close in June; (right) two of the empty shops in the Brittox

In the last issue of Trust News, we highlighted the change in the 'pubscape' of Devizes. This time, we are looking at the ever changing retail establishments and how they too can change the look and feel of our town.

In recent times, Woolworths has become Iceland while the Co-op has become Wilkinsons, which is almost a straight replacement for Woolworths! Plus ça change...

In the Brittox, at the time of writing there are four empty shops - Currys, First Choice Travel, the Sports Shop and Ethnique Trading - with a closing down sale at Millers.

Speculation mounts as to which shops will replace them. Primark maybe? Oh no, the old Currys shop isn't big enough. So we wait and watch as the shopfitters move in and transform the interior. Well, at least we hope they do as the last thing we all want in our lovely town centre are empty shops.

The results of the recent survey carried out by DCAP shows that there is considerable support from the people of Devizes for individual shops with over 70% agreeing that the range of individual shops makes the town an interesting place to shop. However, more than 60% of respondents said that they could

not get everything they want from shops in Devizes. There is felt to be a need for more furniture shops, men's clothes shops and teenage clothes shops.

The Daily Mail reports that some town centres such as Margate have a 36% vacancy rate and the recent report by Mary Portas suggested ways in which town centres could be revived. One of her recommendations was that there should be a 'visionary, strategic and strong operational management structure for high streets'. Devizes no longer has a town centre manager since Mitch Robert's departure so who is to provide this structure?

We need to find out what action Wiltshire Council is taking to support the county's market towns. Internet shopping is changing the role of the town centre as a place to shop and that needs to figure in any strategy for the future.

The Trust is supporting the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Devizes. This would be an excellent vehicle for setting out the town's vision for its town centre but it's taking a long time to get going. Meanwhile, shops are standing empty and the town centre is starting to look sad and neglected. How long can we wait?

produced proposals for meeting the local needs for the care of the elderly and these additional developments are not needed.

That is why we are in opposition and it will be interesting to see if "localism" has any real meaning in the new planning regime.

Other sites where we await development proposals with interest are the Browfort Council offices and the former St Peter's school site. One piece of good news is that planning permission has now been given for the redevelopment of the former Assize Courts building and I hope that work can begin soon.

Editor's words

2012 is a critical year for Devizes. Our town is being threatened by speculative developers anxious to exploit the lack of a current strategic plan.

Wiltshire Council planners appear to be content to roll over and give in to the developers rather than do their job properly. Our town centre landscape is changing with more empty shops appearing on what seem like a weekly basis. There is no sign of the improvement in health services which we all want and need. Our air is being polluted by excessive traffic. And another estate agent has opened in the Market Place!

So what are we to do about it? The Trust continues to be the foremost organisation that is campaigning to protect the town. Because we are non-political, we're not subject to the constraints of the politically based organisations and we can move quickly to take action.

We need our members to support us in our campaigns and we also need to attract new members to help fund our activities. Please tell your friends about us and encourage them to join.

The Birth Of The Trust



The Trust was born after a successful campaign in 1967 to stop the Borough Council building a 5ft wall on the side of the Crammer. In fact, the wall was built, as you can see from the photo above. Within four days of the building of the wall, a petition with 3400 signatures was presented to the Mayor of Devizes, Mrs Elsie Payne. As a result, the wall was dismantled and the bricks taken away in

blocks. The wall cost £1000 to build and Mr Fred Merritt, who presented the petition to the Mayor, guaranteed financial help with the demolition should that prove necessary. What a fantastic campaign but would we be able to achieve the same level of public support if the same thing happened in 2012? We hope so!



Waiting to present their petition to the Mayor of Devizes are (left to right), Mr F. W. C. Merritt, Mrs E. May (organiser of the petition), Mrs C. A. Varian and Mr A. Etheridge.



Workmen lowering the wall at the Crammer, Devizes, on Wednesday morning.

2012 Annual General Meeting

The AGM was very well attended; about 75 members and visitors were present.

Claire Perry MP, our guest speaker, was warmly received. Mrs. Perry referred to the Trust's long history and her pride in representing such a wonderful area. She had listened to local opinions and helped to persuade the Minister for Planning, Greg Clark, to incorporate protection for the countryside in the new planning regulations. She believed that towns like Devizes were now protected from the imposition of unsustainable housing numbers. She also answered a number of questions on planning matters.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Perry and paid tribute to her activities for the community. He was pleased that Devizes Town Council and two adjoining parish councils were now working together to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, but he was concerned that the process was bureaucratic and costly.

In his Chairman's report Ted East thanked the Town Council for the use of the Town Hall facilities on a grace and favour basis under the Town Council policy for charities. He stressed that the Trust did not oppose change, which was inevitable, but change must be managed for the benefit of the community. It was a matter of ensuring that developments were of good quality, in the right place and that the essential infrastructure was no longer neglected. He concluded with the assurance that the Trust will continue to oppose poor quality developments or those that are in the wrong place or which will overload the infrastructure on which we depend.

The Treasurer reported that the deposit account had been withdrawn and no

interest-paying accounts were now available. Money on deposit was losing value and it was logical to spend some of it when worthwhile opportunities arose. The capital balance was therefore lower than the previous year. Expenditure was significantly more than income, £7,355 against £3,324, although much of the expenditure was on non-recurring items such as an exceptional £2,500 donation towards the repairs of the Crammer wall.

The trend over recent years was for normal expenditure to rise and an increase in the membership fee would be necessary. After some discussion it was agreed that the fee would be £12.00 from next January. Some members suggested that the fee should be higher but members were reminded that additional donations were always an option.

The Committee and the Officers were elected unopposed: John Baumber, Tony Bolland, Sarah Cowley, David Dawson, Ted East (Chairman) Tony Duck (Honorary Secretary), James Flood, John Girvan, Inez Skinner (Honorary Treasurer), Philippa Morgan and Tony Sedgwick. John Baumber and James Flood had been seconded to the Committee since the previous AGM and Matthew McMurray had resigned for personal reasons. The Chairman expressed gratitude to Matthew for his efforts for the Trust over past years.

The meeting concluded with the usual refreshments and members took full advantage of the opportunity to chat over a glass of wine. Thanks are due to Tony and Joan Sedgwick and Inez Skinner for providing the food and to the others who assisted on the day.

Dates for your diary

Please visit the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Long Street and see the splendid new exhibition there: The Story of Devizes. The Trust is helping to sponsor this exhibition. The exhibition will be on until **2nd September 2012** and there will be four associated evening lectures - details from the museum on 01380 727369.

The next Trust Social will be on **Friday 29th June at 7pm at the Museum**. The speaker will be Ray Roberts who will be talking about the geological aspects of the buildings of Devizes.

Other dates for Socials are **Friday 14th September** which will include a talk about the restoration of Avebury Manor; and our Christmas Social, which this year takes place on **Friday 7th December**.

Make sure these dates go into your diary now!

Quakers Walk Care Village - a public meeting

The Trust organised a public meeting on 14th May to discuss the appeal by the Merchant Venturers against the decision by the Eastern Planning Committee to refuse their application to build a care village off Quakers Walk and the subsequent decision by the same Committee not to present evidence to the Planning Inspector.

Nearly 100 people attended the meeting which was supported by the Kennet branch of the CPRE, DCAP and Devizes Health Matters. Tony Sedgwick gave a presentation setting out the background to the Planning Committee's decision not to present evidence and the reasons why the Trust believes that the application should not go ahead.

Wiltshire Councillors Laura Mayes and Jane Burton spoke briefly in support of Tony's presentation. The floor was then open for comments and questions from the public. Issues of traffic congestion and air pollution, the need for more affordable housing for local people, the problems with infrastructure and the impact on health services in Devizes were all debated.

Councillor Jeff Ody pointed out that whilst health services were clearly a key issue for Devizes, this was not something which the Planning Inspector would be able to consider in making his judgement.

Tony Grant, Chairman of Devizes Sports Club, raised the possible impact on Sports Club activities if the residents of the proposed Care Village were to complain about the noise. He felt that there was a real likelihood that sports such as rugby and cricket might be curtailed.

After a lively debate, Ted East called the meeting to a close and asked for a vote to reject the planning application. 92 votes were in favour of the motion with one person voting against and two abstentions.

Anyone wishing to make comments to the Planning Inspector should do so by 11 June. You can follow this link to the Planning Inspectorate web site: <http://tinyurl.com/cf4fhg7>

A message from the Treasurer

I may not yet have received your annual subscription to the Trust for Devizes. This could be because you joined later in the year than April and so the anniversary of your last payment has not yet arrived!

It is quite difficult to keep track of people's joining date so please accept my apologies if I appear to be hassling you.

On our website there is a form which can be downloaded to enable you to set up a standing order with your Bank and, if you are kind enough to use this method of payment, the Trust will benefit from a more efficient collection of its funds. If you cannot access the website, please contact me and I will send you a form. My phone number is 01380 725466.

The annual subscription will be £12 per household from January 2013. It is £10 for 2012. Thank you to all members who do pay promptly, whether by cash or standing order.

Inez Skinner (Hon Treas.)

Sentimentality Is Not Enough Memories of St. Peter's School by Tony Duck



Photo: Chris Henley

The iconic school building, opposite Shane's Castle was opened in 1906. It was the Devizes Secondary School, then it became Devizes Grammar School and latterly served as St. Peter's School. Literally thousands of local people will have been pupils there. The majority will have happy memories; a few may not have enjoyed the experience so much.

At the time of its opening it would have looked starkly modern. A complete change from the dark, cramped Victorian building, now the Scientific and Literary Institute, which still bears the legend "British Schools" in Northgate Street and then housed the DSS. The new building stood imposingly on a large open, raised, site which overlooked the canal at the rear, with very large windows. Windows designed to give a light and airy interior without allowing the pupils distracting outward vision!

Originally the accommodation comprised a very large central hall used for assemblies and doubling as a gymnasium with classrooms and offices off and a galleried first floor with more classrooms.

By the time I was there in the late 40's and early 50's, the upper floor had been remodelled to provide three dedicated laboratories. Each was fitted with customised

workbenches at which we perched on stools. The Biology lab. had a sink at one end of each row of benches and there was a lead-lined wooden tank which contained dogfish preserved in formaldehyde. It was believed that these had been there forever! In front of each position in the Chemistry room there flickered an ever-lit Bunsen burner and three bottles of acid – no health and safety rules then! There were also two fume chambers into which our more noxious efforts were placed. The Physics lab contained a number of gadgets to explain the principals of electro-magnetism and the wonders of steam. Even by the standards of the time the equipment there looked rather primitive.

It has to be admitted that, although the building is imposing and has strong sentimental attractions for many, the reality is that it was cheaply constructed and designed for a very specific purpose. It does not lend itself to economic redevelopment for any alternative modern use.

The irony, or the comfort, is that there will be a continuity. The sale of the old British School partially funded the building in Bath Road, the sale of that site will now go towards funding the new Trinity School in Quakers Walk.

One generation begets the next: a bit like life, really!

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