



READING CIVIC SOCIETY

AGM Saturday, 7 April 2018

Chairman's Report 2017/2018

A. We will renew our membership of **Civic Voice**. Amongst the benefits are access to their website which offers briefings on upcoming planning legislation and news from other Civic Societies, and notice of opportunities to participate in their Regional Forums and national meetings. We share the communications and engagement benefits with the Conservation Area Advisory Committee

B. Events during the year:

i. **Bath** A successful visit to Bath to meet the members of the Bath Preservation Trust was held on 11 July. The afternoon free time was somewhat depressed by the consistent rainfall.

ii. **Civic Day and Heritage Open Days Walks**

We ran walks of the two central Conservation areas around Civic Day (16 & 18 June) and Heritage Open Days 10 September, developed and led by Dr Margaret Simons. Events were promoted on Eventbrite. 89 people participated, mainly new to us, and we gained some new members. The Civic Day walks were launched by Matt Rodda MP and were covered by Mel Bloor of ITV Meridian.

CADRA, Friends of Caversham Court Gardens and Whitley Pump also ran walks of conservation areas over Heritage Open Days.

At the Civic Voice AGM in October we were one of 6 Civic Societies presented with the Civic Voice Award “for an outstanding contribution”. This recognised the walks and also the wider efforts to promote Conservation Areas in Reading undertaken by members of the CAAC.

iii. **Churches Tour** – Lynette Edwell ran a visit of 3 churches (St Thomas-East Shefford, St Swithuns-Wickham and St Mark and St Luke-Avington) & tea in Angelica's (in Camp Hopson). The guide was David Peacock. With a comfortable coach, which only just managed to manoeuvre into some tight spots, it was a success.

iv. **11 March 2018 – Luncheon Get-together**

Whilst 50 booked for this year's event the snow understandably discouraged some and eventually we were delighted to welcome 44 members at a most enjoyable lunch at Pepe Sale.

We continue to receive good feedback about the quality of the food, the service by the team there and that we are able to occupy our own part of the restaurant.

Many thanks to Clare Platts and Brenda Tait for organising the event, and to Chris Widdows for his photo quiz about Reading and to Jill Tait and Philippa Woodward for running the raffle most successfully for us.

v. **Updating Reading Civic Society town trails**

In the early 1980s Godwin Arnold compiled 4 Town Trails, edited by John Punter, drawings by Janet Tait.

Design work for an updated booklet covering “**The Forbury, Market Place and London Street**” was undertaken in 2017 with a student at Reading University’s Department of Typography, under the “Real Jobs” scheme. We made a £100 donation to their scheme. The content of the walk itself just needs some fine tuning as the original was somewhat academic for general users from outside Reading.

Initial work undertaken on the content of the Caversham walk and the walk from the Station to Reading Minster, though the latter needs more re-organisation.

Reading Museum has confirmed they are keen to sell them for us. We aim to publish at least one of the updates in time for Heritage Open Days 2018.

vi. **Phoebe Cusden**

In November a blue plaque to Phoebe Cusden, former Mayor, was unveiled on her former home in Castle Street. We worked closely with Kerry Renshaw as he worked his way through the issues around the design and planning permission. The cost was split 3 ways; Civic Society, Dusseldorf Association and the family. RBC erected the plaque for free

vii. **Reading Civic Society Website** www.ReadingCivicSociety.org.uk

A major update has been undertaken to all pages. The date of page updates is now shown.

The RBC website continues to be deficient in the information it provides to owners of Listed Buildings and those who live in Conservation Areas.

We have, therefore, sought to fill a gap by adding guidance on; “Living in a Conservation Area”, “Listed Buildings & Planning Consents” and sources of further information. We drew on information gained during our visit to Bath and the Bath and North East Somerset Council’s website.

RBC Planning Manager, Kieran Roughan commented:

“There is a lot of useful material here and I know we need to get similar material on our website. I have circulated your email as it may help us in dealing with queries at least until we get the similar material on our website.”

Information on streets/ buildings with Article 4 Directions

In February 2018, with the help of Fiona Rycraft, we finally identified the 15 streets / buildings which have Article 4 Directions placed on them to control changes to their features. Whilst the council knew there were 15 they did not know where 14 of them were. It was news to CADRA that both sides of Rectory Road were included.

RBC incorrectly attributed the reason for the A4 as **“to protect patterned brickwork”**, which was certainly not correct for Jesse Terrace. Fiona provided a document from 1988, signed by Harry Tee, which detailed 14 of the roads, Jesse Terrace was a later addition, and the reason for their inclusion. All this information was placed on a page on the Civic Society website, including images of each group of buildings set in a flip book page. A link to the page was sent to the council’s Planning Manager & the Deputy Leader of the Council. In March the council’s website was updated to show all the roads and the correct reason for their inclusion.

We received the following from Planning Manager, Kiaran Roughan; **“Thank you Richard. Very impressive and very informative. Well done. I will circulate to all my staff so that they are aware of this resource.”**

The website continues to include information on the Conservation Area Advisory Committee, including progress on updating Conservation Area Appraisals.

viii. **Civic Voice**

The RCS Chairman has continued to participate in the South East Region Committee of Civic Voice. This gives us a broader understanding and access to the national position on planning matters, conservation areas etc. In addition Society member Karen Rowland attended those meetings during 2017 and is working with the Chair of the regional committee on issues facing Conservation Areas around the country.

We made a donation to Civic Voice of £250 in November 2017 to support the work to promote the risks to Conservation Areas, and in particular the setting up of the All Party Parliamentary Group in 2018 and work around HODS 2018.

C. **Planning**

We continue to review Reading Borough Council’s On Line list of planning applications. In particular we keep an eye out for, and comment on, applications which impact on conservation areas, Listed Buildings and local Heritage Assets. Our comments do recognise that old buildings have to have modern uses and that changes in such instances are required but take the stance that these have to be achieved with care and in a manner which preserves or even improves the building or area. We also comment on other applications which are outside of these “areas” which might impact positively or negatively on the townscape. Our comments seek to encourage good modern design.

Most recently we commented on, and spoke at the Planning Applications Committee, re proposals for

- St Patrick's Hall, where we worked with the Northcourt Avenue Neighbourhood Action Group.
- Demolition of 39 Brunswick Hill (an early Edwardian building of merit) and its replacement with an uninspiring building of flats, we sought to encourage retention and if necessary conversion.
- Grovelands Church and its replacement with an uninspiring building of flats, we sought to encourage retention and if necessary conversion and are working on a submission for it to be considered as a Locally Listed Building.

The significant planning applications have been reported on in newsletters, all of which may be viewed on the Civic Society website.

D. Forthcoming 2018 events.

i. The Charterhouse, London –Saturday 4th August

Re-opened after extensive work in January 2017 The Charterhouse has been living the nation's history since 1348. In that time it has served as a monastery, private mansion, boys' school and an alms-house, which it remains to this day. It is a 5 minute walk from The Barbican and Smithfield Market.

In the 2018 **Civic Trust Awards** the restoration work received a Commendation.

We will aim to get there for 11am. We will take a standard guided tour, which takes an hour. Each tour has a maximum of 20 people so there will be 2 tours. Tour times at 11:30 and 12 noon.

There is also a museum, shop, chapel, Café.

Afternoon free but there is also the opportunity to visit the nearby **Museum of The Order of St John**.

Further details and a booking form will be circulated in due course and placed on the Website.

ii. Civic Day & HODS

2017 marked 50 years since the passing of the act which led to the establishment of Conservation Areas. Many of these are under threat and the ability of councils to resource conservation officers is under attack as a result of the massive cuts to council funding. Civic Voice continues to address the risk this poses using the strap lines **“I care about where I live”** and **“My Conservation Area is important to me”**

We hope to run a walk “around” Civic Day (16 June) of the Russell Street/ Baker Street Conservation Area. This will be as a dry run for running the walks on Heritage Open days (6-9 and 13-16 September). We hope we have persuaded the Register Office to open Yeomanry House for HODs. Other groups are again considering running events around Conservation Areas.

iii. **Churches Tour 30 September.**

Lynette Edwell is planning a tour of three churches “around” Newbury; Aldworth, Bucklebury and Frilsham. David Peacock will guide us as he did in 2017. Tea at Camp Hopson's as last year. Further details and a booking form will follow and be placed on the website.

E. **Other related activities – CAAC for information**

- i. I have previously mentioned that a **Conservation Area Advisory Committee** had been established to provide advice to the Council on issues in Conservation Areas, including updating the CA Appraisals. The members of the committee include several members of Reading Civic Society, CADRA, BSANA, Bell Tower Community Association, Whitley Pump, Redlands NAG and residents of the South Park Conservation Area.

The revised St Peter's (Caversham) Conservation Area Appraisal was submitted to RBC at the end of December 2017. It proposes some extension of the area. Work with the planning officers continues. It is projected that it will be formally adopted by RBC by December 2018. The re-appraisal for Russell St/ Castle Hill is expected to be submitted later this year along with that of Market Place/London Street. There will eventually be formal council consultations on both.

ii. **Updating the Local Plan**

Members of the CAAC worked with the Planning Policy Officers of RBC to provide an input to the Local Plan. The Heritage component of the Plan is far more significant than in the previous version. This has been achieved by different groups working together to provide a single unified input.

An enormous amount of work was put in to prepare a document which analysed **Heritage Views**, 8 have been incorporated into the Plan. This is now accessible on the Civic Society website.

iii. **Locally Listed Buildings**

There are now 10 buildings on the list, though 2 were demolished in 2016. The Civic Society and the CAAC have provided information to assist consideration of a number of buildings for inclusion in the Local List. Does not provide formal protection but in the case of St Patrick's Hall it clearly assisted in the discussions at Planning Committee.

Richard Bennett, Chairman
24 March 2018

Officers' Reports

Membership Report *Note previous year in brackets*

We currently have 200 members (197 last year), including 7 honorary life members (9 last year).

We have 13 (8) new members since the last AGM, including The Abbey School. We lost 10 (15) members who have moved away or did not renew for other reasons.

Subscriptions for 2018 received to date total £1,280 (£1,385).

Gift Aid received in year was £517 for the years 2015 & 2016. Gift Aid to be reclaimed for subscriptions paid since January 2017 to date is £350.

Civic Voice membership will be £290 (£282), based on the number of members. 170 (164) newsletters are distributed, including 17 which are free to media, MPs, or other organisations.

Hon. Treasurer's Statement of The Accounts

The accounts have been prepared by The Hon Treasurer and Examined by Paul Welch FCA. In view of the limited transactions in our accounts the Charity Commission does not require a full audit to be undertaken.

The accounts are provided on the website and hard copies are available here.

Points of interest:

- 1) Events and Room Hire costs at £2,399. This included; the trip to Bath, Churches tour and commissioning and running the Civic Day and Heritage Open Day walks from Dr Margaret Simons. Offset by Income from events £2381.
- 2) Newsletters. £418 Two were paid for in 2017 (three in 2016).
- 3) Postage & Stationery £591 – of which £300- costs of issuing the newsletter and occasional flyers (postage etc).
- 4) Printing £87.
- 5) Included in Subscriptions and Donations Costs in 2017 of £780 is;
 - a) £250 donation to Civic Voice campaign to mark the 50th Anniversary of Conservation Areas and to establish an All Party Parliamentary Group to focus on issues faced,
 - b) £133 (1/3 share of the costs) towards erection of Phoebe Cusden Blue Plaque.
 - c) £100 to the University Dept of Typography to mark the work undertaken on the design of the Town Walks by one of their students.
 - d) £282 subscription to Civic Voice.
- 6) Miscellaneous £154. This holds the cost of the website (£94) and bank charges £60.

Richard Bennett 22 March 2018