



READING CIVIC SOCIETY

AGM 2020. Held virtually because of the CV 19 Pandemic

Chairman's Report –to 31 December 2019

A. Events during the year:

i. HODS 13-22September

19 September. A talk was given by the Chair in Thames Lido about the **Changing Face of Reading**. Over 40 people attended, many were not members & it was well received. The committee decided to provide free coffee/tea and cakes for those who attended but to ask participants to make donations to two charities the committee had decided to support. Bucket donations of £189 were received, supported by a specific donation of £136. This enabled donations, including Gift Aid, to be made to; Berkshire Care Trust (which provides immediate support to prisoners released on parole) £243 & Berkshire Women's Aid £164.

20 & 22 September. Terry Dixon & I ran a walk called **Bricks and Water** which covered part of the Russell Street/ Baker Street Conservation Area, Downshire Square and out along Bath Road to the former Reservoir site. A total of 27 people took part. £100 was raised for Terry's charities split 50/50 between Action For Kids & Age(UK) Berkshire.

ii. Visit to Cheltenham 6 August

25 members met with members of Cheltenham Civic Society who after an introductory chat with coffee in the Wilson Museum led us on a short introduction to the centre of Cheltenham. This was followed by a choice of two walks, led by professional guides, around Regency Cheltenham & Pittville followed by free time in the afternoon. The visit incurred a £85 loss (we seek to recover costs based on 30 participants).

iii. Churches Tour Sunday 29 September.

Lynette Edwell and David Peacock led us on a tour of three churches "around" Newbury; Padworth, East Garston and Lambourn Churches with tea at Camp Hopson's. Some 24 members and guests took part. The event fully covered its costs. Separately donations to the churches totalling £120 were made in January 2020.

iv. Talks

I have delivered a number of talks mainly around the theme of the **Changing Face of Reading** to some 365 people. These include:

- i. Newbury Civic Society – **The challenges facing Civic Societies focusing on Developments in Reading** - 29 Jan 2019 (approx. 30 people)
- ii. Reading Rotary Club - 14 Feb 2019 (approx. 80 people)
- iii. Milward Court Residents Association - 30 May (approx. 15 people)
- iv. Reading Abbey School – Governors - 1 July (approx. 15 people)
- v. Rotary Club of Maiden Erlegh - 24 September (approx. 25 people).
- vi. Caversham and District Residents Association AGM with Mark Worringham, Planning Manager RBC - 12 November. (approx. 120 people).

- vii. Reading WEA - 29 November “**Reading Developments and Reading Gaol**” (approx. 25 people).
 - viii. Friends of Reading Museum - 3 February 2020 (Approx 60 people)
 - ix. Planned talks in 2020 - Belltower Residents Association and the Caversham WI, were postponed because of CV19.
- v. **Memorials and Sculptures**
- a. During the year Lynette Edwell, with the assistance of Cllr Page, contacted the owners of O’Neill’s in Blagrove Street and persuaded them to highlight in paint the inscription on the foundation stone laid by Lady Somerset which had been painted over in grey several years ago.
 - b. Adam, Libby and Karen. This sculpture was removed from the private garden behind Minerva House in 2014. After we contacted the developers the council negotiated successfully for it to be passed it to Reading Borough Council for later erection. During the year we contacted Cllr Page and Cllr Rowland asking if there was a plan and money for its re-siting. Work on this continues in 2020 and will be reported in newsletters/email updates.
- vi. **Save Reading Gaol – Gaol Hug**
- a. At the Arts and Heritage Forum in early 2019 artist Linda Saul suggested that an attempt be made to Hug Reading Gaol to show the MOD the support in the community for it being converted into an arts hub instead of yet more flats.
 - b. It seemed an interesting idea yet to be able to get it off the ground such an event would need insurance cover. The RCS committee offered to cover this though our insurers for £56. This removed a potential block and enabled further steps to be taken which culminated in the Reading Gaol Hug on 13 October, over 800 people took part.
 - c. The small organising committee (Reading Gaol Hug Society) was chaired by Linda Saul and composed of Civic Soc members Richard Stainthorp, Terry Dixon and myself. We all played key roles in organising the event. Linda subsequently joined RCS.
 - d. I met with Matt Rodda MP, along with Cllr Rowland, a couple of times to work out the strategy for the event and also met with members of the Oscar Wilde Society when they visited.
 - e. The HUG was good fun to take part in and a revelation as to what could be organised around an unusual artistic idea in just a few months.
 - f. The event generated much interest, social media and newspaper coverage. Civic Voice used a crowd shot in one of their pamphlets. Shortly before the CV19 lockdown the MOJ announced they had selected a preferred bidder but did not name them, and have subsequently not done so.
 - g. My letter to the Minister of Prisons pressing for an imaginative use for the site received a predictable Civil Service brush off, which I could have written myself.
 - h. Matt Rodda MP has continued to keep up the pressure by lobbying in parliament. In August 2020 he approached the MOJ again, this time drawing on the Historic Places Panel Report published in June, highlighting the report’s support for ***“reuse of the site should embrace the prison’s historic and cultural significance, the council controlling the strategic vision for the site and the cultural hub and the future of the wider site needed to be developed with consideration for the broader cultural needs of the town, including aspirations for a theatre.”***

- i. Following the disaster of the pandemic RBC are probably very relieved they were not selected as the preferred bidder, the financial challenges would have been significant in good times.

vii. **William Marshal Information Panel**

- a. In 2018 Helen Lambert (Chair of CADRA) raised at the Arts and Heritage Forum the idea of an information panel to celebrate William Marshal, the Greatest Knight. RCS committee offered to support this by processing all donations through the RCS Bank Account which would enable Gift Aid to be recovered, thus encouraging donations and also adding to the funds received. Donations by Civic Soc and CADRA members raised £3,102 and Gift Aid £706. The panel was unveiled on 26 November by The Deputy Mayor of Reading. It is sited on Caversham Bridge.

viii. **“Sign of the Times - Reading’s Memorials” by Malcolm Summers - 2 Rivers Press.**

The committee decided to support publication of this book which, as it delves deeply into the town’s history as revealed by its monuments and memorials, we hope will encourage people to develop a wider understanding of Reading, and its history. A RCS donation of £200 was matched by another individual donation, making £450 with gift aid.

ix. **Luncheon Get-together Pepe Sale - 11 March 2020**

Over 40 people attended, lower than had booked due to the emerging Coronavirus Pandemic. Last year 58 attended.

Many thanks to Clare Platts and Penny Kemp for organising the event, to Chris Widdows for his challenging photo quiz about Reading, to Jill Tait and Jenny Tomblin for running the raffle most successfully for us and also to the many donors of prizes. The raffle raised a net of £110.

B. Social Media

Reading Civic Society Website www.ReadingCivicSociety.org.uk

I continue to make regular adjustments/refinements to the RCS and also Conservation Area Advisory Committee websites. The date of page updates is shown.

RBC’s website continues to be deficient in providing information useful to home owners in Conservation Areas and owners of Listed Buildings, our website fills this gap. I have been contacted occasionally by members of the public seeking clarification on planning issues.

I have set up a Facebook Page which is used to provide information about planning issues and is used to comment on other FB pages on Planning discussions and to publicise events which might be of wider interest.

<https://www.facebook.com/ReadingCivicSociety>

We also have a Twitter Page [@ReadingCivicSociety](https://twitter.com/ReadingCivicSociety) which is used to engage with national organisations (Civic Voice / other Civic Societies) and some local organisations and to publicise events which might be of wider interest.

An Instagram page has been set up but its value still has to be tested.

C. Civic Voice Membership

This was renewed in 2019, based on membership numbers the cost was £287. It has been renewed in 2020.

I continued to participate in the quarterly Regional Committee of Civic Voice. This gives us a broader understanding of issues faced by Civic Societies and access to the national position on planning matters, conservation areas etc. Cllr Karen Rowland, now Heritage Champion, participates in these meetings when her other priorities enable her to do so.

In March 2019 a donation of £200 was made to support Civic Voice's work on **Building Better Building Beautiful** which led to an All Party Parliamentary Group in May 2019 in which I took part. The formal report **Living with beauty: report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission** was published 30 Jan 2020.

We share the Civic Voice communications and engagement benefits with the Conservation Area Advisory Committee and key broader information with the Deputy Leader of RBC.

Planning

We continued to review Reading Borough Council's On Line list of planning applications and comment on many. The Spring 2019 Newsletter gave members an idea of the pace and range of developments on Brownfield Sites in the centre of Reading.

Early engagement with developers assists our understanding of the constraints of a site and developer's plans and can give us the opportunity to influence designs and, if our comments are positive, can save time and money from the developer's point of view.

This year members of the Committee met with developers in Pre-Application discussions including: SSE site-Vastern Road (Flats); No 1 Reading (Station Road) (Hotel and Offices); Dukesbridge House (Offices to flats); "Hillside" Allcroft Road (student housing and restoration of the garden as a memorial to the 4 Sutton boys killed in WWI); Eaton Court, Oxford Rd – flats; 43 London St (Building of Townscape Merit) Dentists/ offices to flats, Reading Golf Club (new houses).

Members were encouraged to attend public exhibitions about proposals for; The Gasworks site along Kenavon Drive (flats & houses), Reading Metropolitan (north of the station (Offices and flats) the SSE site (flats) and Station Hill update (flats).

In November I met with local residents to discuss the pros and cons of their setting up a Thames Path RA, in response to the SSE development challenges and also with a group focused on the impact of the development which will replace the Gas Holder.

We objected to proposals for

- 39 Brunswick Hill – Demolition/new build flats. Rejected at PAC and by the Planning Inspector.
- St Patrick's Hall (Locally Listed building LL6) – Demolition and new build. Rejected at PAC. I worked with the Northcourt Avenue Residents Association (NARA) assessing the pros and cons and presented the Reading Civic Society case at the Planning Appeal, which was heard over 8 days from 19 March 2019. Appeal rejected following the excellent work of the NARA.
- Grovelands Church (Locally Listed building LL13) – various proposals made over the years for demolition and new flats were rejected in autumn 2018 and again in Feb 2019. The building was added to the Local List. In late 2019 it was put up for sale and has recently been taken over by another church.
- Worked with a residents group objecting to 4 new houses on the site of 45 Upper Redlands Rd. Rejected by RBC and in 2020 by the Planning Inspector.

D. Other related activities – CAAC for information

- i. The **Conservation Area Advisory Committee** was 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, NARA, Redlands NAG and residents of the South Park Conservation Area.

The revised St Peter's (Caversham) Conservation Area Appraisal was approved by RBC in December 2018, a year after it was submitted.

In March 2020 the re-appraisal for Russell St / Castle Hill was finally adopted with an extended boundary which includes both sides of Oxford Rd to the Reading West railway bridge and some other changes. This took several years work, primarily by Cllr Karen Rowland.

The updates to the appraisals for Market Place/London Street, St Mary's Castle Street & Eldon Square are actively underway. Progress is constrained by volunteers' time.

- ii. **Locally Listed Buildings**

There are now 13 buildings on the list, after 2 were demolished in 2016.

Most recent are; LL13 Gillette building, LL14 King Edwards Building Station Road/ 22 Friar Street, LL15 Drews, Caversham Road. .

Several are under threat but the most immediate is LL8 – Entrance building from Vastern Rd to the SSE site.

A building being on a Local List does not provide statutory protection but Planning Inspectors now give increasing weight to Local Listing when considering developers' Appeals (e.g. 3 Craven Road & St Patricks Hall – Pearsons Court) and also to buildings being local Heritage Assets even when not listed in any way (39 Brunswick Hill).

The CAAC is working on proposals which, if approved, will add a further 20 buildings/features.

- iii. **Arts and Heritage Forum.** Along with members of other community groups, I take part in the quarterly A&HF which provides an opportunity to contribute to ideas to develop the Arts and Heritage in Reading.
- iv. **Historic England Historic Places Panel Visit 14 + 15 November.**

At the suggestion of a member of the CAAC, RBC invited the Historic Places Panel to visit Reading to advise RBC on the challenges and opportunities in the Town Centre Conservation Areas and also Reading Gaol. The panel's objective is to listen, share ideas and provide authoritative advice to developers, local authorities and regeneration agencies who are working in historic places. Several groups had the opportunity to explain to the panel of 10 experts how they saw the issues including; Reading CAAC, Reading Civic Society, BSANA, the Museum, Reading UK. Along with Julie Williams (Chief Planner) several of us escorted the group on a guided walk of the town centre during which we considered; the breadth of the town centre Conservation Areas and if they should be extended, the impact of the Hosier Street & Broad St Mall Development proposals and then along the Oxford Rd towards the railway bridge. We also had the opportunity to follow through with the Panel, Councillors and Officers during discussions over dinner, held in Thames Lido. The following day the Panel visited the Abbey and Reading Gaol but without the "Civilians". The report was published in May 2020 and we are working with the Council in formulating a response.

E. Membership Report *Note previous year in brackets*

Subscriptions for 2019 received total £1,620 (£1,483).

As at May 2020 there are 182 members (198) last year), including 7 honorary life members (7 last year).

We have 15 (10) new members since the last AGM. Sometimes people join because of a particular issue and then do not renew. Clearly people move away or do not renew for other reasons.

24 members do not have online access and receive notification of the AGM and the relevant documents by post. They will also receive hard copies of email updates which are now used in place of printed newsletters.

F. Committee

For a number of years we have sought new committee members in order to expand our knowledge and capacity. I am delighted to report that during the year 3 new committee members were co-opted to the committee; Stephen Snook, Richard Stainthorp and Terry Dixon. They have agreed to stand for formal election. We have started to form a Planning Sub Committee, this is work in progress.

Sean Duggan has decided to cease being a committee member (Sean joined the committee in 2013). In normal times we would have made a formal presentation at the AGM, the CV19 issue prevents us doing this. We have however presented Sean with an Amazon voucher with our thanks for his service.

Richard Bennett

Chair

23 August 2020

**The Reading Civic Society Accounts
for the year to 31 December 2019**

31/12/18		31/12/19
	Income	
£1,483	Subscriptions	£1,620
£0	Gift aid	£458
£2,545	Events and tours	£2,822
£0	William Marshall Plaque income	£3,102
£0	William Marshall donations gift aid	£706
£5	Donations	£525
£5	Interest	£11
£0	Other	£5
£4,038	Total Income	£9,249
	Expenditure	
£2,566	Events and room hire	£3,073
£0	William Marshall Plaque expense	£3,808
£435	Newsletter	£210
£543	Postage and stationery	£415
£172	Printing	£137
£365	Subscriptions and Donations	£1,343
£194	Insurance	£260
£279	Miscellaneous	£371
£4,554	Total Expenditure	£9,617
-£516	Surplus/(deficit)	-£368
£8,139	Accumulated fund brought forward	£7,623
£7,623	Accumulated fund carried forward	£7,255
£7,623	General fund	£7,255
£0	Other	£0
£7,623		£7,255
	Represented by	
£7,323	CAF Bank	£7,255
£300	Debtors	£0
£0	Creditors	£0
£7,623	Net Assets	£7,255

Note : Gift Aid claims are accounted for when the cash is received. Claims of approximately £325 were outstanding at 31 December 2019.

Signed by one trustee on behalf of all the trustees

Richard Bennett

R Bennett
Date

01-May-20

In accordance with instructions given to me, I have prepared without carrying out an audit the above financial statements from the accounting records of The Reading Civic Society and from information and explanations supplied to me.

Paul Welch

Paul Welch FCA
Date

10 May 2020

Hon. Treasurer's Statement of The Accounts (previous year in brackets).

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:

Overall the loss for the year of £(367) in big numbers may be attributed to ; sponsoring “**Sign of the Times**” (£200), Civic Voice Building Better Building Beautiful campaign (£200), Gaol Hug insurance (£56) offset by lunch raffle £126

- 1) **Gift Aid** £458 (Nil). This is included £374 Gift Aid covering 2017 & 2018 paid March 2019 and £82 on donations given at the HODs talk in Thames Lido. At December 2019 Gift Aid due was £324 and this was received in 2020
- 2) **Events and Room Hire** £3,073 (£2,566). The major costs related to; the trip to Cheltenham, Churches tour, the Annual Party, holding the AGM & the HODs talk in Thames Lido offset by Income of £2,822 (£2,545). We do not aim to make a profit on our events but there was a loss of £84 on the Cheltenham visit. The committee decided to cover the costs of coffee/tea and cakes at both events = £329.
- 3) **William Marshal Information Board – Caversham Bridge.** Income £ 3,808 being donations from CADRA and Civic Society members and by others who had seen the fundraiser on Facebook £3,102 plus Gift Aid recovered of £706. This was the total cost incurred and paid to Reading Borough Council.
- 4) **Donations £525 (£5).** £189 HODs talk- cash donations, specific linked donation £136, individual donation matching RCS sponsorship of **Sign of the Times** £200.
- 5) **Newsletters.** £210 (£435). Following the decision to cease publishing a physical newsletter only one was published in 2019 (instead of 2), future years will show a larger saving. See also reduction in postage & printing costs.
- 6) **Postage & Stationery** £415 (£543) of which £300- costs of issuing the newsletter and occasional flyers (postage etc).
- 7) **Printing** £137 (£172)
- 8) **Subscriptions and Donations** Costs £1,343 (£365);
£286 subscription to Civic Voice, £200 donation to Civic Voice re Building Better Building Beautiful campaign, £407 HODs donation payments to Berkshire Care Trust and Berkshire Women's Aid, £450 Sponsorship of “Sign of the Times” published by 2 Rivers press (offset by an individual donation which, including gift aid, totalled £250).
- 9) **Insurance** £260 (£194); Standard Public Liability insurance £204, Gaol Hug £56
- 10) **Miscellaneous** £ 371 (£279). This holds the cost of the website (£157), bank charges £60, Chair attending the British Association Of Friends Of Museums held in Reading Town Hall in November £154.