



LANCASTER CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No. 109 April/May 2012

Lancaster Market Hall

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. It seems clear now that the City Council were probably misguided when in 1995 they took a 99-year lease on the Market Hall, then sublet stalls to the traders; but few of us could have foreseen the competition that many of the businesses in the Market would soon face from the supermarkets, which makes the stalls much less profitable than they used to be. The Council's decision to take on the lease seemed right at the time.

Their more recent actions look less excusable. Last year the Council considered the option of moving the indoor market to the City Museum, a suggestion that many of us thought impractical and inappropriate. In July 2011 they decided not to do this, but instead to move all the traders to the lower ground floor of the Market Hall. After hawking for a couple of months, all the traders agreed to move to the lower ground floor - except one, a 'national company not belonging to the Market Traders Association', which tried to get a special rent reduction (who were they, we wonder?). This put a spanner in the works.

In November 2011, on a cross-party resolution, the Council voted to close the indoor market and negotiate a buy-out from its lease of the Market Hall building. The Lancaster Guardian reported that this could cost the local taxpayer up to £20 million, to compensate the traders and (especially) the landlord. A number of market traders had already moved out, but following the Council's decision several more left, leaving the Market a mere shadow of its former self. In November, Council officers were still reiterating that they 'desired a thriving indoor market', but without a miracle, there was no prospect of reviving it.

But wait! The Council's Chief Executive reports on 11 April that the landlord of the building, Allied (Lancaster) Ltd, had come up with four new proposals. How can *four* new proposals appear at such a late stage? Why were they not put forward earlier? Could the Council officers not have foreseen these possibilities? Can we put any trust in a company that suddenly produces four new ideas like rabbits from a hat at the last moment? The full Council meeting at which these four proposals were discussed failed to reach a decision so the outcome remains uncertain and the few remaining traders remain in limbo. However we can be sure of one thing: Lancaster's indoor market, a feature for over a century of the city centre and a place where those without access to capital could start a small retail business in Lancaster, is no more.

Martin Widden

April/May Newsletter and the AGM

Once again the April and May newsletters have been combined into one issue. This issue therefore includes the AGM notification and nomination call as well as the summer-outing booking form.

It has been standard practice to include with the AGM notification, the statement of accounts for the financial year ending 31st March. However the accounts have yet to be finalised and inspected and approved by the Committee. They will be available at the AGM (along with the minutes of the last AGM and the Special General Meeting held in December), but if anyone wishes to see the accounts in advance of 13th June, please contact Winnie Clark (tel. 01524 33411 or email clark4be@btinternet.com). A copy will be sent to you as soon as they become available.

Centros and the Canal Corridor North site

Centros recently issued a revised masterplan for the Canal Corridor North site. This is a more sensitive scheme which appears to address the concerns of English Heritage, notably through the retention of more of the historic buildings on the site (including the Brewery, parts of the Joseph Storey/Heron Works and parts of Swan Court - a rare surviving example of early court housing). The controversial bridge link over Stonewell has also been removed. There is provision for a canal-side park, public spaces, a foodstore, a department store, a variety store and about 30 other shops. The Heron Works would form a restaurant quarter near the canal. It is proposed that the Musicians' Co-operative be housed in the restored Brewery and there would be some new housing at the north end of the site, near Alfred Street. Parking for about 800 cars would be provided, some in an undercroft below the retail area. A broad pedestrian crossing would lead from Lower Church Street (scheduled to be upgraded) through Stonewell into the new development.

Successfully linking the new development and the existing city centre will be essential to ensure the retail success of both areas. The southbound leg of the A6 road, which separates the two areas, is a formidable obstacle and good linkages will be crucial. In an interview with Radio Lancashire, Steve Bryson of Centros promised public consultations during 2012 prior to the submission of a planning application towards the end of the year.

When more details become available, we propose to hold a general meeting at which members can discuss the proposals before the Society submits a formal statement.

Meanwhile members may be interested in a general public meeting to discuss the masterplan organised by the campaign group "It's Our City". This will be held on 15th May at Lancaster Town Hall starting at 7.30pm.

The Centros revised masterplan is available on the Society's website www.lancastercivicsociety.org. There is also a link to a statement by the City Council and to the Heritage Assets Report prepared by The Conservation Studio for the Council and English Heritage entitled "Assessment of Heritage Values and Significance" which is also available on the Council's website:

www.lancaster.gov.uk/ccnreport).

Scotforth Supermarket Appeal

The appeal by Commercial Estates Projects (CEP) against the refusal of planning permission by the City Council's Planning Committee for a large (7250 sq metre) supermarket on fields to the south of Lawson's Bridge, reconvened between 21-30 March. The appeal had been adjourned since December to allow CEP to revise its application to take into account some of the concerns expressed. The revised proposal removed the hotel and pub/restaurant and, for the time being the filling station, and provided a road which could link with a bridge over the West Coast railway line to allow access to the Whinney Carr site, should that be developed at a future date. The supermarket's outline design was also slightly revised with more landscaping along Scotforth Road and a more active frontage on the south, east and north elevations. Our concerns remained however and we again wrote to the Inspector, re-iterating our earlier objections to the proposed development on six grounds:

1. The proposed development would add to the traffic on an already congested route on a narrow section of the A6.
2. The use of a greenfield site on the outskirts of Lancaster when brownfield sites exist near to the city centre (and potentially in the city centre) does not seem compatible with sustainable development.
3. The introduction of this large out-of-town development was likely to damage, or at least seriously dilute, the retail potential of the city centre.
4. The removal of the hotel, restaurant and (for the moment) the filling station, makes the revised application less dense, but the scale of the proposed supermarket remains out of character at this key gateway to the city.
5. The application remains in outline only, so it is impossible to fully assess the impact of this large development on a sensitive and key site.
6. Such a large development with its associated traffic implications could constrain other proposed developments in the area, especially the Science Park.

There was a final meeting on 16 April and the Inspector will now write his report and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles).

Report on March Meeting

After 50 years building supermarkets, what have we learned? With several new supermarket proposals in Lancaster, the question is pertinent. Tom Miller, formerly Head of Planning in Ellesmere Port and Neston, shared with us his experiences of good and bad supermarket developments in a talk entitled "What seems to work best in planning supermarkets: 38 years of error and trial". At worst, the local authority has to accept the standard design of huge supermarket from whichever of the Big Four chains has bid the most for its preferred out-of-town site. The result is the maximum disruption to town-centre trade - shops close and shopping has to be car-based. At best, the local authority sells its preferred town-centre site to the Big Four chain that has most closely met the authority's development and design brief for the site. The supermarket is the ideal size and well designed and, by attracting shoppers to the town centre by car, bus and on foot, it supports the existing shops which food shoppers will also visit on "linked" trips. The town centre remains vibrant. The decisive factors between the best and worst outcomes are a widely accepted vision for the town centre, a supermarket in the centre and a determination to mould the supermarket's investment to the needs of the town and its centre. How many of these decisive factors are present now in Lancaster?

Gordon Clark

Report on April Meeting

Heather Davis restores pictures that have had a hard life. Over the years they get torn, paint falls off, dirt covers them, varnish yellows and colours fade. Lancashire's heritage of paintings would be lost if conservators did not have the skills and tools to save them. Heather, the Conservation Manager at Lancashire Conservation Studios (part of the county's Museum Service), spoke to the Civic Society on 18 April, describing her and her colleagues' work. The conservator needs to choose the right technique for each type of paint and each kind of damage. The audience was very impressed at the necessary mix of skills and infinite patience the conservator has to deploy. The process of restoration sometimes reveals new details and hidden images or even whole paintings that have been painted over. The conservator needs the skills of the detective to be able to unravel the history of some of the county's paintings.

Gordon Clark

National Planning Policy Framework

The government's revision of the planning system came into force on Tuesday 27th March 2012. It marks the biggest reform of the planning system in England for fifty years. It is intended to reduce and simplify the very complex planning guidance which had developed over the years, replacing it with a more accessible system, which it is hoped will also stimulate development and encourage economic growth. The draft framework, put out for consultation last year, attracted widespread concern that it contained insufficient protection for the countryside. It was seen by many as a "developers' charter" and the National Trust, CPRE and other bodies, including our own national organisation, Civic Voice, lobbied for revisions. Their concerns seem to have been heeded by the government. The published policy recognises the intrinsic value of the countryside and actively encourages councils to reuse brownfield sites before granting permission for the development of greenfield sites. There is also a "town centre first" provision that requires councils to promote development of shopping centres in town centres ahead of out-of-town retail parks. (Very pertinent points in relation to the CEP Scotforth supermarket appeal). The definition of "sustainable development" has also been strengthened and local plans given priority (Lancaster's "Core Strategy" has been in place since July 2008). There is some concern however that the loss of detail will give considerable scope for argument over interpretation and possibly legal challenges (to the benefit of planning lawyers), possibly leading to delays - the opposite effect to that intended. The implications of the NPPF at local level will feature in Mark Cassidy's address to the AGM on 13th June.

Photographic Competition

The Society recently organized a photographic competition on the theme "Civic Pride : Civic Shame" to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The winners will be announced on 1st June and the prizes (donated anonymously by a Society member) will be presented at the AGM on 13th June when there will also be an opportunity to view the winning entries. All the entries submitted will be on display in the Thomas Storey Room on the ground floor of The Storey between 15-24 June.

Lancaster District Design Awards

This year, the Lancaster District Design Awards are offered once again, in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, the Lancaster Guardian, and LICA (Lancaster University's Institute for Contemporary Arts), and we are looking for nominations.

The Awards are for schemes in the built environment whose external design and appearance add to the attractiveness of the Lancaster District, including the urban areas and all rural parishes. Small schemes will get equal consideration with large schemes, and restoration projects are eligible as well as new-build ones: the only criterion is their design quality. Because the Design Awards have not been offered for some years, nominations are invited of schemes completed in the past five years, since May 2007.

Nomination forms will be available shortly, and completed forms will be gathered by the Chamber of Commerce at Fenton House in Fenton Street. We will put a copy of the form on the Civic Society website (www.lancastercivicsociety.org). Please think about nominating any schemes in the District that have struck you as good and/or attractive: we don't want to miss any of them out!

Martin Widden

Freeman's Wood

Concern remains over the future of Freeman's Wood which was fenced off in December. The company which owns the land has lodged an appeal against the Tree Preservation Order imposed by the Council in December and trees appear to have been cut down despite the Order. The Council's Appeals Committee considered the case on 23rd April and upheld the Order.

Supporters of the wood are hoping to achieve Town Green status for the area and would welcome any support. If you are interested in helping, contact Gill Aitken (tel 01524 841525 or email gill@animalmanners.co.uk).

The Freeman's Wood Supporters also have a website: <http://savefreemanswood.wordpress.com>

Summer Events: Dates for your Diary

Summer Outing, Saturday 19th May. A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter. The bottom portion should be returned, with your remittance to Roger Frankland.

Society's AGM, Wednesday 13th June, 7.30pm in St John's Church, North Road. Mark Cassidy, (Assistant Head, Regeneration and Policy, Lancaster City Council) will address us after the formal business of the evening. In addition, prizes will be presented to the winners of the Society's recent photographic competition. Refreshments will be served at the end of the meeting.

Summer Walk on Wednesday 27th June (*please note the change of date from that given in the printed programme*). This will be in the Tatham and Wray areas and will be led by Dr Mike Winstanley. Please meet at 7pm at St James the Less Church, Tatham. If you require further information, please contact Anne Stelfox (tel@ 01524 823299 or email rjw.stelfox@virgin.net).

National Civic Day Saturday 23rd June

The second National Civic Day will be on Saturday 23 June. There will be an opportunity to view the entries to the Society's Photographic Competition on "Civic Pride Civic Shame" at The Storey and there will be tours of the city featuring its lesser-known aspects. For more details consult the Society's website (www.lancastercivicsociety.org).

Cemetery Walks

Roger Frankland will lead tours of the "Top" cemetery on Quernmore Road on the third Sunday of the month between April and September (i.e. April 15th; May 20th; June 17th; July 15; August 19th; September 16th). These walks feature the symbolism of Victorian memorial art and the tombstones of many Lancaster worthies. Meet at the main cemetery gates, off Quernmore Road at 2pm. Duration: about 1 hour

City Walks

Malcolm Martin will lead City walks, illustrating the history of Lancaster, on the following dates: May 6th; June 4th; August 26th. Meet at the Covell Cross at the top of Church Street at 2pm. Duration: about 2 hours.

Don Waddell

An appreciation of Don Waddell by Martin Widden appeared in the February newsletter.

Malcolm Taylor has contributed these additional thoughts on Don Waddell's civic influence.

Waddell may in fact have had a more influential role in the formation of the Lancaster Civic Society than Martin realises. In 1966 there existed an Amenity Society. It was troubled by dissent, widely reported in the press, which Waddell attempted to dispel. We should not speculate on his behind-the-scenes actions and it may be stretching credibility too far to claim that he was the prime mover in both the winding up of the Amenity Society and the birth of the Civic Society. But it is true that he offered Town Hall secretarial assistance, as well as a room for meetings. He was indeed the Society's first secretary, but quickly gave way to Peter Osborne, probably because he realised that sooner or later there would have been a conflict of interest.

He had an ulterior motive and came to the new committee with a list of jobs he wanted members to do - none of which appear to have been enacted.
Malcolm Taylor, February 2012

Lune Aqueduct and the Lancaster Canal

British Waterways is launching an oral history project about the Lune Aqueduct and the Lancaster Canal. The project aims to record the memories of people who have worked or lived alongside the canal or used it for leisure. Anyone with memories, information or old photographs of the canal is invited to share them. Volunteers are also being sought to help with oral history interviews and transcription (training will be given). If you are interested in helping or just want to know more about the project, either visit the Lancaster Maritime Museum on Saturday 5th May between 11.30am-4pm, when the project will be launched, or contact Dr Bill Bevan (tel. 0114 2345411 ; email bill@inheritage.co.uk).

Your Society needs You

Much is happening in Lancaster at present and to enable the Society to respond quickly and effectively, we need more help and expertise. Please contact any member of the Committee if you would like to be more actively involved with the Society, either by joining the Committee or assisting us on an *ad-hoc* basis.

Lancaster Castle

The Duchy took possession of Lancaster Castle from the Ministry of Justice in January 2012 and has appointed Malcolm Reading Consultants to undertake a study to investigate appropriate options to ensure the Castle's sustainable future. In March the consultants organised a series of workshops to which a wide range of consultees were invited to discuss ideas for the Castle's future use. The Society was represented by Martin Widden and there were representatives from local government, statutory bodies and other relevant stakeholders from education, the arts and the local population. Points emerging from the discussions were that any plans had to be commercially viable because of the cost of the upkeep of the Grade I listed building and that road access and parking were additional constraints which needed to be addressed. Hopefully the results of the discussions will become available in due course.

Meanwhile, guided tours of the inner courtyard areas of the Castle were available over the Easter weekend and many took advantage of the opportunity to see what lay beyond the John o' Gaunt Gateway. We understand that it is hoped to provide similar tours later in the year, possibly over the Diamond Jubilee weekend and other occasions.

Plea for more "posties"

About two thirds of the Society's newsletters (four per year) are hand-delivered by a small band of dedicated members to whom we are very grateful. Some of the current rounds are quite extensive and there are some local areas which are not currently covered, and so additional volunteers would be very welcome, especially given the forthcoming increase in postal charges. If you are willing to help with deliveries please contact Winnie Clark (01524 33411 or email clark4be@btinternet.com). We would especially welcome someone willing to take on deliveries in the Haverbreaks area.

Emailing the newsletter is even cheaper for the Society as no printing costs are involved. A few members have already agreed to receive their newsletter via email and if anyone else is willing to do so, please let Winnie Clark know.

The Winter Gardens, Morecambe

Recent newsletters have featured a debate between Malcolm Taylor and Mike Quinton about the preservation of the Winter Gardens, which continues below:

From Malcolm Taylor:

Mike Quinton rightly challenges my plea for preserving the Winter Gardens (February Newsletter). He would feel even more justified if he knew that I have myself been challenging those who want to preserve Preston Bus Station on precisely the grounds he argues.

I have no logical defence, but am happy to talk round the issues. My wish to preserve the Winter Gardens arose from its powerful evocation of how the working classes enjoyed their new-found leisure, and as such is a symbol of Morecambe itself, plus the desire to support the Herculean efforts of the group struggling to preserve it. Mike may not see these as good reasons for preservation, particularly as there is no obvious use for the building.

But I think that there are wider considerations. Until recent years, as soon as a building's useful life ended, it was pulled down. With hindsight we would now have kept many of these buildings on historical grounds. We now cherish the buildings which survived and thank those who had the foresight to recognise their importance. Happily many have found new uses, and some retain original features which remind us powerfully of their historical context. At any given time in our history, we have to make choices, and of course we cannot be too indulgent about what we preserve. There is always an economic component.

So, there can be no rights or wrongs: but I stand by the Winter Gardens as deserving preservation and am left with the dilemma of my apparent inconsistency with regard to the Preston Bus Station.

From Mike Quinton in response:

Re Malcolm Taylor's defence for his support for the preservation of the Winter Gardens I would throw in just a few words which in my mind settle the argument.

One is **photography**. Our ability to preserve, if needed, an almost infinite number of images of a building dramatically reduces the need to keep buildings for which there is no practicable future use.

Secondly, of course, is **responsibility**, the all-too-obvious burden which falls on later generations to maintain buildings for which there is no future use or economic support, the latter stemming from either historic, academic or touristic interest.

The third is **blockage**; except in the case of isolated sites any preserved building stands on land which could otherwise be used for the benefit of later generations or which might curtail the design of any adjoining development and thereby potentially attractive street scenes.

My fourth word is "**nostalgia**". The older I get the more I regret the modern preoccupation with the past. It is, as A. P. Hartley said, "a foreign country where they do things differently". The fact is, of course, that the past is just that and should be recognised as secondary to what we need and the resources we have to meet it. History is important as a source of wisdom and beauty but it cannot be our master, we have eventually to let go of it.

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This Newsletter is published by Lancaster Civic Society,  
36 Hall Park, Lancaster LA1 4SH  
Members are advised that the membership list is held in  
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Lancaster Civic Society is registered with Civic Voice and is a  
Registered Charity No 258434  
[www.lancastercivicsociety.org](http://www.lancastercivicsociety.org)