



# LANCASTER CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## Growing activity in Lancaster

It may not be obvious to someone walking around the centre of Lancaster - in fact it's quite hard to believe it, after many years of stasis - but it seems the city is on the brink of major change.

The first indicator of this was the announcement, more than two years ago now, that the Castle was to close as a prison. This was followed by the consultation exercise about the future of the Castle, and the recommendations that a small hotel should be introduced, together with a museum of penal history, event space, and a café.

Following that, in recent months we have seen the approval of the M6-Heysham Link Road, the moves by British Land to develop the Canal Corridor North site, and the start of work towards housing developments at both the Luneside East and the Moor Hospital sites.

Members probably have mixed feelings about some or all of these developments, and anyway there are still some hurdles to be cleared before we can be certain they will be built. But if they do go ahead, as seems more and more likely, this will represent a huge investment in Lancaster. This will be good for local employment, and if properly managed it should bring other improvements too.

Lancaster Civic Society will need to keep a careful watching brief over all these changes, to try to ensure that (in line with the aims of the Society) high standards of architecture and town planning are maintained, and the special qualities of Lancaster are conserved. We also want to contribute to the debate on how access to these sites can be gained without city-centre traffic jamming up completely.

To enable it to do this, the Society would welcome more members, and especially more members of the committee - do consider joining it if you can.

*Martin Widden*

## British Land

A quick search on the web reveals that the British Land Company was founded in 1856, as part of the radical movement by Richard Cobden and John Bright to extend the franchise much more widely. (At that time, only landowners - male, of course - were allowed to vote.)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this motive ceased to govern its operations, and thereafter it operated as a conventional company. Now it is one of the largest property companies in the UK - but it is interesting that the company had this radical background.

A number of Civic Society members will no doubt have visited the British Land trailer on Tuesday 14 May, when it was parked in Market Square all day for consultation about their proposals for the Canal Corridor North site.

British Land's proposals for the site are broadly similar to the earlier proposals by Centros, but with some important differences, notably that the bridge over Great John Street has been removed, and that the shopping proposed for the site is more mixed, with less emphasis on large stores. They feel this makes it less likely to damage the existing shopping centre. They have appointed the respected architects Chapman Taylor for the scheme, alongside Richard Griffiths architects who specialise in schemes for historic buildings. They say they are keen to make the best use of the Brewery as a point of interest in the site, and to develop sensitively the spaces around the Duke's and the Grand theatres.

They have ideas on how the road-approaches to the site from the north and north-east could be improved.

The consultation was generously staffed, and we came away with the impression that British Land

genuinely want to do the best they can for Lancaster. Obviously their chief motivation is financial, because that is what business is about - but clearly the scheme will be more successful in business terms if it is sensitive to the environment in which it is proposed to build it.

British Land is a Real Estate Investment Trust, or REIT. Invented in the US, these are companies that own and manage real-estate properties. Anyone can buy shares in a REIT, and thereby invest in major properties, but without needing the enormous financial resources that would be required to buy the whole of a property. REITs are 'tax-efficient' entities. This usually means devices for avoiding tax, but in this case it appears to mean they avoid double taxation, which seems a bit more respectable.

At any rate, it is encouraging that a prominent and respected company has decided to take an interest in Lancaster's retail area.

*Martin Widdon*

## **Roger retires**



Roger Frankland has been a member of Lancaster Civic Society for almost 30 years; but this is not as long as he served as a Probation Officer, an office he performed for 38 years. Initially a Probation Officer in London, he started work in Lancaster in 1985, and has been based here ever

since. Now he has retired from the service - but fortunately not from Lancaster Civic Society. Roger has always had many interests outside his work, including Lancaster Civic Society - now he will be able to devote even more time to them.

## **Reports on Civic Society meetings**

### **March meeting**

Dr Andy Gritt gave a fascinating account of the development of the Lancaster and Lunesdale workhouses at the March meeting.

Prior to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, welfare provision for those in need had been the responsibility of individual parishes, with decisions about entitlement made by the local overseer.

The 1834 Act introduced centralisation, with bigger units, the Poor Law Unions, staffed by salaried officials running the system at local level and reporting back to London. The new system was intended to bring greater efficiency and better value for ratepayers. The new Act was resisted in many parts of Lancashire, but not in Lancaster where a Poor Law Union was set up in 1839. The existing parish workhouse on Quernmore Road (now part of the site of LRGS) was expanded, with men, women, children and later vagrants, occupying separate quarters and subject to many rules and regulations (workhouses were intended as a deterrent). Over the years more medical facilities were introduced so that the workhouse effectively became the care home for the elderly of the 19th century.

Workhouse provision in Lunesdale took a slightly different course with the Lunesdale Poor Law Union being formed only in 1869. Dr Gritt, drawing on the wealth of poor law records and correspondence which exist in local and national archives, outlined some of the differences between the urban workhouse at Lancaster and its rural counterpart at Caton.

Although the talk focussed on the development of the workhouse following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, many of the themes are still heard today - the cost of relief provision, the dilemma of welfare dependency and the active encouragement of the able-bodied to work.

*Winnie Clark*

## April meeting

In 2005 five friends had a vision of a community built on ecological values, living in sustainable, energy-efficient homes with communal social facilities. By July 2013 this dream will have come to fruition with the completion of the Forge Bank eco-cohousing scheme at Halton. The development of this project and the principles of eco-homes and co-housing were outlined by Stuart Parkinson to members at the April meeting.

The co-housing concept originated in Scandinavia. The idea is that people have their own living space but also share communal space and facilities. Eco-homes are designed to be highly energy-efficient with minimal carbon impact both during and after construction.

In 2009 the Lancaster Cohousing Company purchased a 6-acre site alongside the River Lune at Halton and construction of eco-friendly "passivhaus" style homes began in 2011. A year later the first houses were handed over and the first residents moved in. By July 2013 the Forge Bank project will be complete with 41 houses on the site. In addition to the homes there is a "Common House" with facilities all can share, including an industrial kitchen for cooking and sharing communal meals, a laundry, guest rooms and children's play area. A central wood-chip boiler provides heating for all the homes and hot water is supplied through solar panels. Energy bills are enviably low thanks to the high level of insulation. All residents share the responsibility for running the community and decisions are reached through consensus. Stuart Parkinson's talk offered a fascinating insight into a style of communal living which has much to offer and the successful completion of such an ambitious project is a tribute to the dedication of all those involved.

*Winnie Clark*

## Planning matters

Lancaster Civic Society has sent representations to the City Council Planning Committee on the following planning applications:

**Application no 13/00082/FUL, 47-51 North Road, Lancaster** (we welcomed the re-development of this prominent site and the

restoration of the warehouse. We said we appreciated that the ground floor commercial premises provide an active frontage to North Road. However the Society had several serious concerns:

- The overall height and roof profile of the two new buildings. Although the height may not be obvious from North Road, it is likely to be prominent when viewed from a distance e.g. from Dalton Square or the canal. The flat roofscape also appears at odds with the surrounding buildings.
- The North Road frontage is especially prominent in relation to traffic coming into the city from the north, and it is unclear what materials are proposed. We trust that these materials will be sympathetic to the surroundings especially to St. John's Church, immediately opposite.
- There seems to be little provision for deliveries, rubbish collection and drop-off and pick-up for residents at the beginning and end of term. This could be problematic given the location on the busy gyratory system.)

*Update: This application was refused at the Council's April Planning Committee. We understand revised plans will be submitted.*

**Application number 13/00198/FUL: Erection of new Engineering Building (4692 m<sup>2</sup>) at Lancaster University, comprising workshops, offices, teaching and research laboratories, communal areas and the provision of new external landscaping.**

(no objections, and no comments on this application).

*Update: This application was approved at the Council's April Planning Committee*

**Application number 13/00232/REM for Storey Homes at Lancaster Moor Hospital.** (as far as the plans were available at present, we had no objection.)

*Update: This application was approved at the Council's May Planning Committee.*

Application number 13/00153/REM for the conversion of Campbell House at Lancaster Moor Hospital (no objection).

### 2013 Summer Walk

The Summer Walk on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> of June will take place at the village of Heysham, and will be led by Peter Wade. There will be a charge of £2.50 per head from the participants. We shall meet at 7.00 pm at the large car park in the centre of Heysham village.

Any queries please contact Anne Stelfox on 01524 823299, or by email [annepstelfox218@gmail.com](mailto:annepstelfox218@gmail.com)

### Message from the Treasurer

It is a decade since subscriptions to the Civic Society were increased. Inflation has clearly taken its toll over this period, and your committee would like to be in a position to manage whatever might arise in this critical period in the future of the City of Lancaster.

The proposal to be put to the AGM on 12<sup>th</sup> June is that from October 2013 the subscription rates should be raised to:

	Individual	Family
Standard rate	£12	£18
Concessionary rate (over 65 or student)	£10	£15

### Help needed

Enclosed with your newsletter is the AGM notification **and nomination form**. The nomination form is not a paper exercise - we are very keen to recruit new members onto the Committee with a view to being future office holders. Many of your existing Committee members have served for a number of years and some of us are past our constitutional sell-by date! There are major developments afoot in the City (the Castle, Canal Corridor North site and Luneside East and West to name but four) plus the implications of the M6 link road, recently approved. The Society needs to be actively involved in the consultations and discussions which will help shape the future of our city.

The Society's membership encompasses many talents. Please do not hide your lights under bushels, but offer your services. If you would like to discuss possibilities for more active participation in Society affairs, either on the Committee or in some other capacity, then please contact any member of the existing Committee. Contact details are on the programme card and our website: ([www.lancastercivicsociety.org](http://www.lancastercivicsociety.org)), or phone or email Winnie Clark (01524 33411 or [clark4be@btinternet.com](mailto:clark4be@btinternet.com)). We really would appreciate hearing from you.

### AGM

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held at St John's Church, Lancaster, at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 12 June. As well as the formal business, which will be quite short, we look forward to a presentation by Mark Cassidy, Assistant Head, Regeneration and Planning, Lancaster City Council.



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