

When travel guide 'Lonely Planet', published its latest edition in June, a raw nerve was touched as Coventry was given the concrete city treatment with the words: 'planners filled in the gaps with dull concrete developments'.

BBC Coventry & Warwickshire radio was quick to look for comment from the Coventry Society and none other than vice-chairman Paul Maddocks was invited to climb to the top of the Old Cathedral Tower where presenter Annie Othen was there to interview him. Surveying the scene below, they looked for all the dull concrete developments. Clearly the post-war precincts should have been a contender but here all the buildings are faced with pleasant brick. And the tower blocks? 'Not an easy thing to build that high in brick alone,' said Paul, 'We shouldn't take the Lonely Planet too seriously.'



July 2013

HS2: Council drops opposition

Next month:
HS2: Shall we start again?

Coventry City Council rightly objected to HS2 not only because of its effect on the residents on the edge of the city close to the line, but also because of the severe threat posed to Coventry's economic future. Birmingham would become closer to London than Coventry, and Coventry would lose two thirds of its fast trains to London. The council recently dropped its opposition on the basis that the government is pressing ahead and that the best strategy now is to make the best of a bad job.

The recent proposal for restoration of the Stonebridge rail line (Coleshill to Birmingham International) only serves to show how inadequate the plan is to build a parkway station in the green belt, remote from the people it's supposed to serve and with an 8000 space car park that will not exactly reduce road traffic. You only need to contrive a means of connecting the proposed "West Midlands Interchange" station if you put in in the wrong place to start with. Asked by Bob Ainsworth MP about the possibility of reopening the Stonebridge line, the minister said it's a matter to be resolved locally. In other words, you can have it if you want to pay for it. Clearly, it isn't going to happen.

HS2 is not a done deal. It has to be debated by parliament and many prominent personalities have questioned the plan.

Virgin Trains chief executive Tony Collins



said: "We need the extra capacity on the rail lines. Unfortunately the way that HS2 is being done is an engineering solution looking for a problem. If it carries on it won't properly integrate with the railway system."

Ian Brown, former MD of London Rail, said: "There is also HS2, which could be powerful if properly integrated into the system and seen as increasing capacity rather than just a quest for high speed." French rail president M. Pepy said in York that high speed lines should connect with other lines and other transport modes. He rued that France had built its TGV routes as if they were independent lines and had stations with no regional connections to rail or other passenger transport.

The House of Commons Transport Committee, the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee all question the wisdom of HS2.

Railfuture, a voluntary body dedicated to enhancing rail in the UK, polled its members. A quarter of them thought HS2

should be built as planned, a quarter thought the money should be spent instead on reopening old lines and improving the existing network, and nearly half thought a new line was needed northwards from London but not the one proposed by HS2 Ltd. This last view is the official one held by Railfuture.

Some engineers working for the consultant firms express their concerns privately but cannot speak out publicly because their firms depend on DoT for work. They will not bite the hand that feeds them. Thus, the truth is suppressed and the madness goes on.

Others get excited about the "transformational effect" HS2 would have on the economy, without being able to say how. True, there would be pressure to build around the new stations even if we don't want the Meriden gap to be built over, but would this be additional development or would it be relocation from other areas? In the 1930's depression there was a plan to pay people to dig holes and fill them in again, just to get the economy moving. HS2 would be more use than holes in the ground, but there are better ways of spending £33bn, or whatever the cost is when we add the bits they ignored such as the trains themselves (£8bn), VAT, landfill tax, business rates. We need honesty rather than a smokescreen. Only then can parliament decide what is right for Britain.

Les Fawcett

Next meeting



A tour of Princethorpe College

The former Catholic Priory includes buildings designed by Peter Paul Pugin, son of the famous Augustus Pugin who designed much of the Houses of Parliament.

Monday, July 8 meet at 7pm

From Coventry take the Oxford Road A423, then right at Princethorpe onto the B4453. Any member needing a lift then please telephone the Chairman on 7640 2030

'Dreadful' scheme approved

Despite several members of the Planning Committee describing the proposed development at 5-7 Lower Holyhead Road as dreadful and inappropriate for the historic environment of a conservation area, renewal of the plan first approved three years ago, was passed unanimously.

Considerable efforts had been made on our part to have the plan reviewed by Oakmoors and we were grateful for the enthusiasm of Councillor Bally Singh, who arranged a late meeting between our chairman and Cerda Planning, who are planning agents acting on behalf of the developer.

Speaking in the planning meeting we said: "The current proposal for student flats does not fit well with adjacent properties in either form or scale. The sight lines in Lower Holyhead Road show a curved roof above end walls that are better suited to a business or retail park. The proposed building affects significant heritage assets, the court cottages on the site itself and other nearby neighbours."

Conservation officer Chris Patrick also added his weight in the hope the committee would turn down the renewal. He said: "As I have said before the proposed building is



Artist's illustration: Oakmoor's student's flats in our view 'better suited to a business or retail park'

hardly a thing of beauty and it is hard to see how it preserves or enhances the Spon Street Conservation Area."

There were no pre-application discussions with Oakmoor three years ago that might have led to a better proposal. Once approved in 2010, it clearly meant that chances of seeing a better scheme brought forward at a later date was an unlikely possibility.

We have been promised a further meeting with the developer in the hope that something can be improved within the development.

Fargo visit

The June meeting was a tour of Far Gosford Street, led by Ian Harrabin and Steve Compton from Complex Development Projects. Far Gosford Street is a Conservation Area that over the past five years has seen many run down historic buildings rescued and brought back to life.

Windsor's Refreshed cafe and shop opened late and Steve Ryan the project manager of Cyrenians explained to members how they help homeless people. The fashion side of the business sells clothes made by Coventry University fashion students using cloth from counterfeit goods recovered by Customs and Excise and Trading Standards. An interesting concept.

In a factory unit about to be turned into a restaurant Ian Harrabin spoke about the history of the street and how it became a Conservation Area. This status helped gain grants to redevelop the area. A tour of the buildings soon to become a market hall and a glimpse at Far Gosford Street itself made a fascinating evening for members.

Paypal

Members can now pay their subscription by Paypal on the Society website.

You don't need to have a Paypal subscription.

It can be paid by using your normal credit card, and renewals will now be simpler for everyone.

Festival

Charterhouse and Fargo village will set up stalls in the Lives and Times tent on the family field at the Godiva Festival on Saturday and Sunday, July 6 and 7.

An opportunity to support both of these flagship heritage projects.

Weavers

A textile exhibition and workshop takes place at the Weaver's House, 120 & 121 Upper Spon Street.

Mon - Thursday, July 1-4 from 10am - 2.30pm. Then Friday to Sunday July 5-7 from 10am - 4pm

Rendering

After a resident in Lower Coundon alerted the Society to two instances of adding external cladding to houses in Waveley Road we asked the Council to clarify the planning regulations.

In its reply they said: "We agree that overcladding of some of the units in a homogenous terrace, where this changes the appearance, should be resisted. The Planning Portal advises that permission is needed where the appearance is changed



such as from redbrick to white render, but there are exceptions such as if part of the elevation is already clad, or if the existing surface is render of a similar appearance to the finished cladding."

It appears that external cladding such as that recently added to two houses in Waveley Road does need planning permission, yet no planning application has been made.

Member Les Fawcett comments:

"I applied internal and external insulation to a large number of council properties when I worked for the city in the 1980's. I learned from that that there is little to be gained from insulating the front and rear elevations of a centre-terraced property because it forms a small part of the overall heat loss, much of the area being taken up by windows and doors. The recent rash of external insulation is due to pressure from the government on energy suppliers to provide insulation to their customers' properties. This appears to be pursued with no consideration of the potential damage to the appearance of attractive terraces, or of the need for planning permission."

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