

**Campaigning for a quality Coventry
and raising awareness as to what quality means.**



Annual Report 2014

Strong committee..good work

A voluntary organisation like The Coventry Society can only achieve through the enthusiasm and dedication of its officers and committee. This year's report highlights some of the successes and progressive thinking that has enabled us to maintain all the elements of a good civic amenity society.

To do this I mention individual members in no particular order.

John Payne has put considerable effort into maintaining our excellent website. Judging by the monthly viewing statistics it goes from strength to strength with great interest shown in our campaigns, heritage pages and general news.

Paul Maddocks as a Vice-Chairman, not only provides us with a never ending supply of pictures and current news, but headed up the inauguration of the Friends of Charterhouse.

Colin Walker as a Vice-Chairman also takes care of our funds and is always at hand to look after the essential technical equipment we use at our meetings.

Terry Kenny keeps the all-important record of our committee meetings and makes sure that each member knows precisely what they have promised to carry out. As a retired school teacher he regularly keeps track of speakers and is an accomplished speaker himself.

Jayne Long provided the stimulus to publish our first calendar and through her initiative has made the river Sherbourne the subject of our efforts for Civic Day in June.

Stuart Daniel who represents us on the Charterhouse Trust has often produced exacting responses to planning applications. A skilful craft that requires careful consideration of Council policies.

Les Fawcett, formerly an architectural technician, is always on hand to provide expert advice. His special expertise in railways has enabled the Society to have a role in the highly controversial high-speed rail debate.

Adam Mottershead has many links with firms through his professional work and has enabled useful face to face meetings with developers.

Chris Daniel has a great passion for local issues and through a considerable amount of practical research enabled the Society to mount an informative debate devoted to Coventry's Ring Road.

We are also indebted to John Haslam for providing the refreshments at our monthly meetings. One time committee member Stephen Williamson continues to provide technical skills needed to maintain our website. For my part I still chair the traders in the Spon Street area and after many years of meetings with the Council finally achieved the street's upgrading with heritage lighting, newly-laid pavements and a safer road surface. Keith Draper Chairman



Taken a lead in the formation of the Friends of Charterhouse Priory Trust, an organisation with ambitions to restore and open the Colonel Wyley Estate to the general public. Creating a riverside walk to Coventry University.

Taken a lead on the rehabilitation of the historic Spon Street with its mix of medieval and Victorian buildings. Council funding allowed the relaying of footpaths and road surface, and installation of mood lighting and new *Coventry Lanterns*.



Taken a lead in bringing the Feibusch Mural in St Mark's Church to the notice of the general public. The mural, now recognised as being of international importance, was painted in 1963 by Hans Feibusch, a German Jew who had to leave Germany in the 1930s when his paintings were described by Joseph Goebbels as "degenerate".

Taken a lead in a campaign to bring a high-speed rail link directly to Coventry's Rail Station. Coventry Society believes that HS2 should be integrated into the existing network, providing direct connections to many more towns and cities across the country.



Taken a lead working as a Conservation Liaison Group with the city's Conservation Officer to produce management plans for each of the city's conservation areas. Working with Historic Environment Record Officer, Anna Wilson, the liaison group have already contributed to an emerging plan for the Hill Top Conservation Area. Lady Herbert's Garden Conservation Area and the Burges are next in line for consideration.



Conservation area matters

African Village When the restaurant owners painted the sandstone faced building black we brought the matter to the attention of the Council. The black paint was removed from premises in August.

5-7 Lower Holyhead Road A planning renewal was granted in July for an inappropriate building to accommodate students. We are still working on an alternative plan that is in keeping with the Spon Street Conservation area.

Bayley House We supported English Heritage in its opposition to the use of the historic building for student flats. It resulted in the refusal of planning permission. A new plan is under development.

Drapers' Hall feasibility study started April 2013—presentation by architect for the scheme David Mahoney who explained in some detail the latest plans by the Higg's Charity to refurbish the hall to allow for the installation of stage lighting, an impressive new foyer entrance with toilets and disabled access. The Society formed the Coventry Building Preservation Trust back in the 1990's to bring the hall back into use. We are therefore supportive of this new scheme to re-use the building.



Lower Coundon Area of Local Distinctiveness After significant changes to front elevations were taking place in this historic area we asked the Council to clarify planning regulations. 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 red brick to white render. Examples in Waverley Road, the cause of the query, therefore do require planning permission.

We also objected to the demolition of The Black Horse Pub in Spon End.

Friargate We met the Council and re-iterated our concerns for radically new traffic arrangements that the developer is demanding. Some of the issues: opening Park Road as a through route for taxis exiting the rail station, the people of Humphrey Burton's Road who already see their thoroughfare used as a rat run, access to Queen's Road Baptist Church. And the many who use Warwick Road who will be forced to take a devious route to go in the direction of London Road. We also expressed concern about an apparent lack of bus access to the rail station in the final design. Friargate will be good for the regeneration of Coventry but we question whether the new traffic plan is in the best interests of the people.



31 Allesley Old Road Over the last few years the roof of this watchmaker's house was set on fire and topshops at the rear were demolished when they were considered unsafe. Residents were not the only ones fed up with the hoardings surrounding the site, but action by the Society persuaded the Council to motivate the owner to restore the master's house and rebuild the all important workshop wing. The work is nearly complete and we await its new use.



Whitefriars Gatehouse When the new Coventry University Science building on Whitefriar's Lane looked set to compromise the setting of the former Toy Museum we met with representatives of the university to discuss possible ways of improving the situation for the Grade 2 listed building. Our take on the development is clear—either the huge Science building should finish well clear of the old gatehouse or it should be integrated into the design. We await further developments.



Keresley Old Hall We supported the plans to restore this Grade II listed building two years ago. Now, after the presentation of a new scheme by the architect for owners KEP Development we are impressed by the imaginative scheme and once again recommend approval. The modified plan would see the Old Hall open with a subterranean function room and the historic building restored as a hotel with an extension providing 50 bedrooms in all. We recognise there is an issue of this scale of development in the Green Belt, but consider the efforts made to ameliorate the potential impact and the restoration of the listed building counter-balance this concern.

Carnegie re-run The Society instigated a re-enactment of the day in October 1913 when the Scottish-American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie came to Coventry to open the three public libraries he had paid for. A classic car borrowed from Coventry Transport Museum carried a Carnegie lookalike to each of the three libraries with cabinet member Cllr Kershaw on board. Each library was presented with a certificate from the Carnegie Institute to mark the anniversary. The three libraries, Stoke, Earlsdon and Foleshill, were the first suburban libraries to open in the city and each building was designed in a similar red-brick style.



Monthly lectures

September Coventry Museum Service—the Road Ahead with Damien Kimberley and Steve Bagley

October Coventry Ring Road—Love it or Hate it? With archive film and speakers Colin Knight and Chris Daniel

November Current Projects at London Architects MAKE with founding partner John Prevc

December Christmas Quiz and Peter Walters presenting his new book The Story of Coventry

January Coventry in the 17th century with Stewart Fergusson

February The value of nature in our cities—designing ecological rich urban environments with chartered landscape architect Ian Lanchbury from the ARUP campus in Solihull

March The Staffordshire Hoard with Dr Chris Upton

Around and About

May at Coventry University Members were greatly impressed with the rich, dynamic experience of the university's Engineering & Computing Building that opened in 2012. Clearly we could see how Arup Associates approach has given students every possible opportunity to learn practically, with even the building itself a learning tool. In our guided tour we were shown a high-performance engineering centre with flight simulators and engine test cells; a high-precision wind tunnel testing facility; two lecture theatres that can be subdivided for conferences; collaborative classrooms for 4,000 students, including IT workspaces; communal interactive spaces with learning booths; all linked by a state-of-the-art communications backbone. A fascinating tour for members.



June at Far Gosford Street The visit, led by Ian Harrabin and Steve Compton from Complex Developments took in the Far Gosford Street Conservation Area where, over the last five years many run down, often derelict buildings, had been rescued and brought back to life. *Windsor's Refreshed* café and shop opened late and Steve Ryan the project manager of Cyrenians explained to members how they help homeless people. We also saw the fashion side of the business that sells clothes made by Coventry University students using counterfeit goods recovered by Customs and Excise. In a factory unit about to be turned into a restaurant we heard about the history of the street and how it became a conservation area.



July at Princethorpe College Alex Darkes, assistant Head at the school took members on a fascinating tour of this historic Catholic Secondary School serving a wide area of Warwickshire. We heard how it was originally founded by nuns in the early 19th century fleeing in the aftermath of the French Revolution. After some years they bought the estate and set about building the convent with Hansom of cab fame as architect. But the man who transformed the complex was Peter Paul Pugin, son of the more famous Augustus Welby. His greatest addition to the convent was the magnificent church with its impressive altar. The site was acquired by St Bede's College in Leamington and transformed into the school we know today.

August at Charterhouse A large gathering of members took advantage of our monthly meeting that was held at this monastic site. Trustee Stuart Daniel had organised a briefing on its long history that goes back to the late 14th century. The life of the Carthusian monk was very hard and they wore a black and white habit and a hair shirt next to the skin. Each monk had his own two-storied cell surrounded by a walled garden, where he would spend most of his life in prayer or in the garden growing flowers, vegetables and herbs. A tour of the house and gardens enabled members to see the line of the cloisters around a modern bowling green. The rest of the current gardens were laid out by the city's archaeology department to represent 600 years of gardening history.



Outcome uncertain

Theatre One In September we met local artist James Birkin who was displaying some striking paintings of the interior of the old cinema. He explained how he had formed a



group that wished to purchase and restore the building to create an arts centre in the students' quarter of the city centre. The Society has been helping the group with advice, especially trying to source the all-important funding. There has been a varying degree of interest on the part of the Essex owner. Despite the roof having been removed there still appears to be a slight chance for the scheme to come about.

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We also have our own page on Facebook.
You can also follow us there at <http://www.facebook.com/CoventrySociety>

More news and views on our website: www.coventrysociety.org.uk



Valuable campaigning by Civic Voice

The civic society movement promotes and celebrates what is valued from the past and works to improve what is developed for the future so that everyone can be proud of where they live. Through regular email updates Coventry Society is able to take part in matters of national importance that affect us all. It seems appropriate that our wider membership should be familiar with some of the work and interaction over these last twelve months. Here is a synopsis:

May

LOCALISM President, Griff Rhys Jones said to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies: “With the localism agenda, what the Government is essentially saying is, we want you to get involved, decide what you want locally, but, oh, for the really important decisions we are going to ignore you and do what we want. I am sorry, but that is just not good enough”.

HOUSING Responding to comment on the planning system by Minister, Nick Boles MP, Paula Ridley, Chair of Civic Voice said: “Developers will always chase low density, Greenfield development regardless of the environmental and social consequences because that is what makes them the most profit. A strong planning system based on a smart growth approach is needed to ensure top-quality homes, built to the highest standards are located in the right places, with the support of the community. The planning system is not stopping house building; it is an inability of people to access affordable mortgages from the banking sector that is the real issue. The Minister needs to focus on keeping our cities alive and preserve our countryside through smart growth. Good quality, high density housing schemes on brownfield sites should be the priority.”

June

WIND FARMS Responding to an announcement that in future residents will have to be properly consulted over new wind farms, Paula Ridley, Chair of Civic Voice said: It is not that the civic movement is fundamentally against wind power—it is just that the planning rules and the community benefit seem slightly disjointed. A planning policy that respects community views in deciding what is important and protects everyday places can only be welcomed.”

HIGH STREETS “We should treat our high street like our front rooms and make them interesting,” was one of the messages delivered by Griff Rhys Jones in a keynote address to the AGM of the Women’s Institute.

CIVIC DAY Secretary of State Eric Pickles MP launching Civic Day said: “Civic Day is a great time to take pride in our local communities and the neighbourhoods we love. Enthusiastic and enterprising people, like those involved in civic societies are the backbone of those communities.”

July

PARKING ON DOUBLE YELLOW LINES Responding to news that the Government plans to allow motorists to park on double-yellow lines for up to 15-minutes without paying, CV Deputy Chair Freddie Gick said: “Giving motorists ten minutes parking to pick up their purchases will not encourage them to come into town to shop. We would expect the Government to come up with a much more strategic approach to the problems facing the High Street.”

GREEN BELT Civic Voice attended the first meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Green Belt.

August

SHOPS TO HOUSES Announcement that the Government is considering allowing empty retail units to be converted to housing. CV approached by media for a response—Sunday Times, Sky News, BBC: Not against this policy per se, but believe that local communities are best placed to decide if empty retail units should be converted to housing and that it should not be via permitted development.

September

HIGH STREET Grimsey Report. CV Chair, Paula Ridley, said: “Details of Grimsey’s review include the idea of forcing local councils to draw up 20-year visions, freezing of car parking charges, and forcing shopping centre developers to provide affordable shops or market stall spaces for local traders. Many of these are sensible suggestions.”

Campaign announced urging individuals and communities to contact their MP to oppose the proposal to allow shops to be converted to housing without requiring full planning permission.

October

WEAKENING PLANNING SYSTEM Key message to communicate that Government should not be encouraging a free-for-all blanket policy when this goes against localism.

November

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE Civic Voice leading a discussion with partner organisations as to how more communities can play a major role.

CIVIC SOCIETY MOVEMENT The All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies—a cross party group with over 70 members—gathered to evaluate the influence of the civic society movement in Parliament and to debate future priorities.

January

ANNUAL LECTURE Speaking about the launch of the Annual Sandys Lecture, Laura Sandys MP said: “It is such an honour to have been asked to speak at the inaugural Sandys Lecture. Civic groups really can transform communities and I, like my father, am so proud to be supporting Civic Voice with the fantastic work I see them doing both in my own constituency and right across the country.”

February

COMMUNITY ASSETS Civic Voice, the National Association of Local Councils, The Theatres Trust and Supporters Direct announced an initial programme of events to promote greater uptake of rights established under the Localism Act 2011.

March

URBAN REGENERATION A coalition of civic, environmental, transport and brownfield bodies submitted a response to the Lyons Review. Speaking about Smart Growth, Freddie Gick said: “We want to see priority given to the development of brownfield sites in urban areas and regions where it is most needed, which will reduce urban sprawl and the need for out-of-town expansion.”