



www.leafingtonsociety.org

The Leafington Society Newsletter

November 2019

Chairman's Notes

"When will the bandstand be finished?" A question you may well have asked over the past few months.

It is a good one but be assured that for well over a year the Leafington Society has been working closely with the District Council to rectify various mistakes, and ensure the work was completed to the highest standards on both the bandstand and the gardens themselves.

This has not always been easy, and we are indebted to Ian Bradbury for his eagle eye and expertise in these matters, as well as to the sheer perseverance of Archie Pitts. Archie's crucial role was recognised by the Finance and Audit Committee in September, when they considered a review of the project and the lessons to be learned.

The review noted that the "undercroft opening was closed for various reasons around access and technical issues the lack of consultation was acknowledged by WDC and it was agreed to re-open the undercroft and re-visit the design of the door and means of protecting the steps. A problem with the height of the main steps only became apparent once it was in situ and now requires retrospective work, albeit at no additional cost to the project. The issue of the undercroft is clearly an area which

Talks and Events

Christmas Party at the Real Tennis Club with guided tour

50 Bedford Street, CV32 5DT
Thursday, December 12th, **6.00**

Go shopping on Clemens Street to the Parade in the early 20th century

Barry Franklin
Thursday, January 16th, 7.30

Never underestimate the Power of a Flower

Sarah Horne
Thursday, February 20th, 7.30

Other than the Christmas Party, the
above meetings will be held at
Dormer Place Conference Centre
CV32 4AA

could have been handled better.” The remedial work on the undercroft and steps was started in October.

A very positive outcome to the review was that in future the District Council will appoint their own Clerk of Works for all similar future projects, to monitor the quality of work on an ongoing basis, independent of the project team.

It is heartening to see the Pump Room Gardens now used for so many events. As Christmas approaches there will be the Lantern Parade starting in the Pump Room Gardens on Sunday 1st December from 4.15pm.

Looking ahead to December, don't forget to book your presence at our Christmas meeting on December 12th at the Real Tennis Club. For catering purposes, it is necessary to book.

Sidney Syson

Forthcoming talks and events: For venues, dates and times see front page of this newsletter

Christmas Party at the Real Tennis Club with guided tour

Full details on page 3.

Go Shopping: Clemens Street to the Parade in the early 20th century

Barry Franklin was born, bred and educated in Leamington Spa and has lived here all his life. As a result of his deep knowledge and love of the town's local history, he is Chairman of the Local History Group and regularly presents his discoveries to Friday Focus, local history groups and Warwick District Council.

Come and remember what used to be on our High Streets

Never underestimate the Power of a Flower

Sarah Horne is a three times Chelsea gold medal winning florist. She runs two businesses in the town: Sarah Horne Flowers, in its 39th year, and Sarah Horne Botanicals, a new giftware business featuring Sarah's botanical illustrations. Immersing herself in all things creative, her original pen and ink botanical drawings adorn the walls of the flower gallery on Warwick Street. Sarah can be found at www.sarahhornebotanicals.com and @sh_botanicals on Instagram.

Website

The society would like to hear from any member who is willing to provide *occasional* help or guidance on the routine maintenance of our website. If you can help, please contact Archie Pitts (01926 885532) or ArchiePitts@gmail.com.

Christmas Party

Members are invited to the Leamington Society Christmas Party

at the Real Tennis Court

50 Bedford Street, Leamington Spa, CV32 5DT

December 12, 18.00

A tour of the Real Tennis Club will be followed by a Buffet Supper

Cost: £15 pp

MENU

Beef Stroganoff

Mushroom Stroganoff (V)

Chicken with paprika cream sauce

All served with rice

Food to be chosen on arrival and includes a glass of wine or prosecco

Further drinks at the bar

Admission by ticket only from, Marianne.Pitts@gmail.com

7 Kineton Hall, Leamington Spa, CV32 5DR

Cheques payable to the **Leamington Society**, please with s.a.e., or

directly to Lloyds bank a/c 30-94-93, account 00184791,

stating **Party and your name**

Closing date for application: December 6th

Poor Air Quality in Leamington

Did you know that new research from the University of Warwick shows that human memory is adversely affected by air pollution (nitrogen dioxide and particulates)?

Professors Powdthavee and Oswald recently sampled 34,000 English citizens, giving them a simple memory test. Those who lived in polluted towns performed markedly worse. This serious finding is in addition to the better known increased incidence of stroke, heart attacks and asthma.

An Air Quality Summit was chaired by Matt Western MP at Leamington Town Hall on October 18th.

There were half a dozen speakers who made interesting contributions. A public health consultant spoke on the impact of poor air quality. Dr Oliver Lawton, a local GP, emphasised the health benefits of replacing cars with bicycles. An Oxford City councillor described their zero emission zone.

A majority of car journeys are less than 2 kilometres and many cars contain only one person. Incidentally these drivers are not escaping the pollution, which is worse inside a car than outside.

Mr. Western himself proposed a transport hub at Leamington station, with an electric bus interchange, charging points, bicycle storage and a rented bicycle scheme.

It seems clear that there is no single magic solution. A range of major initiatives will be needed to promote and accommodate changes in personal habits, including realistic and joined up cycle lanes as well as more frequent and convenient buses. These policies will require strong leadership to move from talk to effective action.

Gitta Ashworth

Leamington Creative Quarter update (1)

The current 'Creative Quarter' initiative depends on handing over the town's public buildings to a Coventry-based property developer, CDP Ltd, for commercial 'repurposing' and possible sale, with various re-jigged 'regeneration' ideas given a faddish 'digital enterprise' gloss. To leave options open and reduce anticipated opposition, no detailed plans have been offered. But once CDP fulfils basic requirements, Phase 2 of a 10-year Collaboration Agreement with Warwick District Council will start, and they will be able to craft specific proposals to meet commercial investors' wishes.

All investment for local authorities is now greatly reduced, so obtaining a return from

WDC's assets needs 'cross finance' from profitable development. CDP's plans for speculative building on the 'Clubland' area of Riverside had to be dropped after a chorus of dissent early this year. Phase 2 approval now rests on finding alternatives, which increases pressure for higher capital yields from other sites. We need to know what they propose and get an opportunity to respond.

Despite feeble assurances, CDP still has its eyes set on the Library in the Pump Rooms and the Town Hall for the food halls and gyms of a trendy new South Town neighbourhood. The Pump Rooms have been in public ownership since 1868, while the Library's location already makes it a beacon of self-improvement and digital



Leamington Town Hall

skills for South Town's **existing** residents. What's more, there could be a potentially very different future for these buildings, to the generic "downtown" that property developers aim to 'cut and paste' into the town.

Contrary to what CDP's 'Big Picture' may suggest, the Pump Rooms and the Town Hall are in the town centre, rather than in 'South Town' (which for most of us is south of the river). Any other description by CDP or WDC just causes confusion.

The Gulbenkian Foundation's innovative scheme linking arts organisations with civic challenges has a programme actually called 'Town Hall', whilst Wellcome, Wolfson and other major grant-makers support libraries, health providers and digital business to find ways to work together: investment in people, rather than real estate portfolios.

To safeguard our civic values and community opportunities for current and **future** generations, the Pump Rooms, Library and Town Hall must be completely removed from CDP's *Big Picture* (as they're now calling their plans). We have set up a petition to keep these iconic public buildings in public use and public ownership. If you share

our fears and want a better way forward, you can sign it by going to 38degrees.org.uk and searching for 'Leamington'.

STOP PRESS

October 18th. A group of residents has referred complaints about the 'Creative Quarter' public consultation last December/January to the Local Government Ombudsman. If you want to know more about the complaint and our campaign, follow us on Facebook @leamtogether.

Charles Bourne and Carrie Terry, Leamington Together

Leamington Creative Quarter (2). A painfully slow gestation

On 13th November the WDC Executive discussed a Phase One report by CDP (Complex Development Projects Ltd). During 2018 CDP were commissioned to produce a Masterplan for parts of South Leamington including: Spencer Yard and the United Reform Church building; Bath Place car park; Court Street car park and the derelict Stoneleigh Arms. Tacked on to these sites were the old Post Office building; the Pump Rooms; and the Town Hall.

This unwieldy and controversial list of properties has been whittled down for the new report.

The Town Hall will be looked at again before deciding on its possible role. Also "no proposals for the Pump Rooms will be taken forward as part of the Creative Quarter at the present time with CDP". The Post Office was also omitted, not being owned by the Council.

The meeting opened with Cllr Bill Gifford, speaking for the Town Council, although he also has of course long experience both as a District and County councillor. He expressed strong concerns about the need for proper consultation over the Town Hall, with the Town as a real partner with priority over CDP, and for it to be kept as a public building. If it could be leased by WDC at a peppercorn rent to CDP (their option 2) then why not to the Town?

First, the opposition Members for Audit and Scrutiny, who sounded rather sceptical. "It's at a very early stage, after a long period, and with no real site plans." There were various queries, including concern about the ownership deals with CDP and financial

risks on old buildings in a poor state. Should CDP be commissioned one site at a time? But a Council officer clearly indicated that it was a package deal with CDP being recommended for approval.

Then it was the turn of Executive Members. Several old hands welcomed the report then competed with memories of 20 years and more of WDC in pursuit of a Creative Quarter, so "pleased at last something is happening". Finally Cllr Rhead the portfolio holder. The Town Council was promised consultation and there will be – he was disappointed that Cllr Gifford has raised this again.

Buildings deteriorate and there are risks if we delay even further. Cllr Rhead asserted that we must have a positive spin and no negative comments.

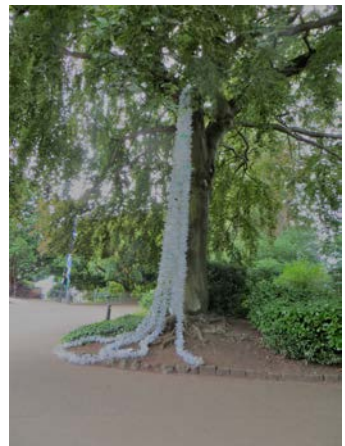
CDP's report anticipates that Spencer Yard will be its initial project, with "rejuvenation and repurposing" of the listed and deteriorating United Reform Church building as a priority. The details are uncertain, but they suggest "flexible workplaces for creative industries".

The recommendations were carried unanimously.

Richard Ashworth

Leamington's Art in the Park Festival 2019

This was our most successful to date as the park was buzzing with over 45,5000 visitors, 240 artists, 42 workshops and 18 bands. The theme of 'Water' wove its way in a myriad of forms: the Society provided samples of the town's genuine spa water; Trinity School creating a giant water bottle installation; and Arts Council England funding providing 14 performances, ranging from a giant mermaid in a show globe to synchronised swimmers who delighted and amused everyone. ACE funding also enabled an economic evaluation from local company Earthen Lamp. Highlights include that 51% of people were visiting to buy an art or craft item; 84% of people were more likely to visit the town due



Water fall

to their experience of the festival; 36% attended both days; it scored an impressive NPS score of 82.25, and over the weekend £1.5 million was added to the town's purse.

It was an incredible achievement for local artists, our delivery team and army of 65 yellow T-shirted volunteers. The festival has been shortlisted in The Leamington Business awards for 'Outstanding Achievement Award of 2019' and we will hear the outcome on November 15th. On this very positive note, I have decided to step down as Festival Director after six years and am delighted to announce that Kate Livingston is the new director. The theme for next year is '2020 Vision' which was the inspiration of Marianne Pitts! Meanwhile I am the new Warwick District Council Arts Officer and will be able to support all arts, cultural, education and heritage events. So a big thank you to the Society which has continually supported what is now Warwickshire's largest weekend Arts Festival and a key cultural destination.

Carole Sleight, AITP Festival Director 2014-19

Peacocks

Application (W/18/2387) to redevelop the site of Peacocks store on corner of Warwick Street and Guy Street has been approved by WDC Planning Committee. There will be



Existing site

26 apartments on five floors above the ground floor retail (or other commercial purpose). There will be no parking for residents, justified by the town centre location of the site. There will also be no affordable housing. The development will be subject to the CIL which requires a contribution to local Infrastructure.

The existing building will be demolished; the new building will rise to six floors in place of the current four. The site is larger than is obvious from the frontage.



View along Warwick Street, from the Parade; and down Guy Street, from Clarendon Avenue

Care has been taken to follow the traditional Regency architectural style and fenestration along Warwick Street and around the corner into Guy Street. Further along Guy Street and to the rear, the structure will adopt a contemporary style. To reduce the visual effect of additional height as seen from Warwick Street, the fifth floor will be set back, and the sixth floor set back even further.

The floors above Peacocks have been disused for many years. An earlier redevelopment application approved in 2003 never led to anything, suggesting the difficulty of developing a viable proposal for the site. The developers are TAG Urban Properties who were responsible for bringing the Old Library back to use, as well as the Royal Terrace in Newbold Terrace.

Archie Pitts

Expansion and new projects at Action 21

Action 21 is an environmental charity which aims to help local residents lead a more sustainable lifestyle by providing a recycling shop to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, and supporting projects which promote green travel, energy and re-use of materials.

The recycling shop in Court Street, off High Street in South Leamington, has proved very popular, and its success has enabled Action 21 to open a new vintage shop “The Emporium” under the railway bridge by the junction with Bath Place. This new shop also includes a workshop for restoring old furniture which is sold in the shop and online.

Re-use is the theme of another project at the Pump Rooms where members of the community re-use materials to make new craft items. Action 21 also supports the Repair Café at the Sydenham Centre where items are repaired rather than thrown away and ending up in landfill.

Action 21 benefits the local community by helping people into employment. The organisation depends largely on volunteers and aims to help people who are finding it difficult to take on paid employment to gain experience so that they can move on to paid work. The recycling shop is a good launch pad for those experiencing problems in their everyday lives.

Action 21 ran an event called Eco Fun Day for two years in the Pump Rooms promoting sustainable living with stalls and activities involving all the green organisations in the local community. This May, Action 21 decided to lend support to the District Council's Eco Fest – an event like Eco Fun Day but with a larger reach and combined with a celebration of the restoration of the Gardens. The event attracted large numbers of families and coincided with the issue of climate change being highlighted in the media.

The latest project in the pipeline is research by Warwick University students into local environmental needs, to consider air pollution, energy use, waste generation, opportunities for walking, cycling and using the bus, as well as changing public attitudes.

Margaret Begg, Trustee of Action 21

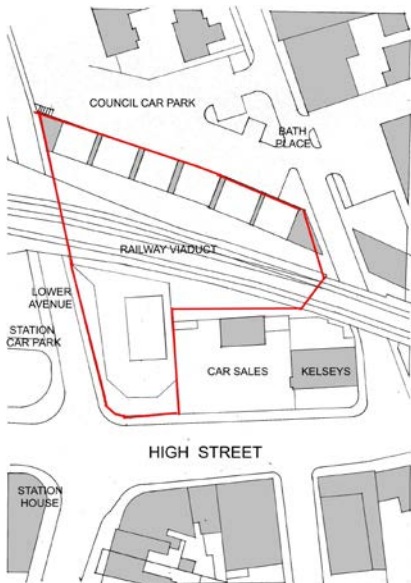
Another PBSA?

Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) is intended to relieve pressure on the conversion of family homes to HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupancy). In Leamington, the first PBSAs were Station House (opposite the station) and The Union (built by Alumno in Althorpe Street). Permission has been granted, on appeal, to another PBSA in Wise Street. An application has been submitted for a second in Althorpe Street; this has yet to be decided. These are all south of the river, in postal area CV31. Each PBSA provides rooms for about 200 students, with communal social areas.

It is estimated that currently there are more than 6,000 Warwick University students living in Leamington (population 50,000-60,000); at vacation time, when the students leave town, the effect is noticeable. Two thirds of the students live in CV31 and one

third in CV32.

Developers APT are proposing another PBSA in Old Town, adjacent to Lower Avenue, built as two linked blocks (A and B) for about 200 more students. Block A will be south of the rail line to Marylebone, while B will be built on the site of the line that once went to Rugby and was decommissioned in the 1960s. Block B will be adjacent to, but not encroaching on, the WDC carpark in Bath Place.



Site location

Pedestrian access between the two blocks will be through the arches, to be opened-up, below the active railway line. Each Block will be five floors; Block A will be no higher than Kelsey's bar, just along High Street. The ground floor of both Blocks is proposed for retail or commercial use.

No car parking will be provided – on the grounds that there is easy public transport to the university and elsewhere. There is no residential housing because family homes require outdoor



Block A (cgi): Left: with Kelseys bar in foreground and Right: looking towards the railway arches

space like gardens. The windows will incorporate technology to reduce noise and vibration as well as pollution filtration systems.



APT have provided some computer generated images (cgi) that give an indication of how the proposed developments might look.

No planning application has yet been submitted.

Archie Pitts

Block B (cgi): Viewed from Spencer Street looking towards Tachbrook Road

Station Gardens

Yet another excellent year for the team of stalwart gardeners known as the Friends of Leamington Station who have been maintaining and improving the gardens for the last 15 years.

In the RHS It's Your Neighbourhood event the Assessors commented favourably on the Community Participation, Environmental Responsibility and the Gardening Achievements. In aggregate the Friends were given a score of 92 per cent, putting the gardens easily in the Outstanding category.

The judges for the Leamington in Bloom competition visited the gardens as part of their tour of our town. Their comments included

- “the gardens and raised beds at Leamington Station – great results from a passionate group of gardeners;
- “examples of water-harvesting and a wealth of recycling encountered along the route – noticeably at Leamington Station;
- “the school geranium growing campaign involving 14 schools – for the trains at Jephson Gardens and Leamington Station.”

Well done to all who have worked hard to achieve these results.

Queen Victoria in Portraits, with Dr Gillian White

Portraits are political, particularly when you are in line for the Throne of England. Almost the earliest shows a baby Victoria, held by her mother and clutching a miniature of the dear dead father who legitimised her claim to the British crown. She was fourth in line then. In 1830 when she was eleven she became heir presumptive and subject to an extraordinary regime of care and control: the 'Kensington System' of her mother and her 'advisor' John Conroy. She dismissed them as soon as she could – when she became Queen at eighteen. She is depicted as young and fair in full regalia with great prospects. Her coronation was an unrehearsed muddle, but not – of course – depicted as such.



Young Victoria, and in later life

Background views show the Royal Palaces and the Highland scenery Victoria and Albert fell in love with. Few of the pictures are Great Art, but all have a message about their subject. After Albert's death the Queen is shown on horseback, attended by her favourite John Brown, conscientiously and improbably attending to the Royal despatches with a large heap of (presumably read) documents on the road. Children are shown in increasing numbers. On the last portrait she looks like an imperial ghost on the throne in House of Lords

Dr White knew her stuff and both educated and entertained us. We all enjoyed it.

Marianne Pitts

A reporter in Afghanistan

50 people – and a quiet dog – listened enthralled as David Heathfield struggled with

primitive Dormer Place technology to show us how he spent his time reporting in Afghanistan. His brief was funded by the Danes – to report activity other than the kinetic (aka fighting) by NATO forces from 53 nationalities stationed all over the country. There were Italians teaching Afghans to scale mountains; the confiscation and destruction of a large cache of weapons; the opening of a school for children – which had cost almost as much in bribes as the building itself. The contrast between life inside the stations – safe, well-supplied and enclosed – and life outside with perpetual danger and obstruction was stark. David was lucky; his post-graduate year at Westminster University training to be a photo-journalist was just before the building and the state-of-the art equipment burnt to the ground; he was selected for this unique adventure and allowed to take the opportunity by his partner (now wife) and parents; he suffered no damage or injury.

His donation for the talk is to go to the Halo Trust, which he filmed clearing old but still active Russian landmines around a village right up to the school walls.

Marianne Pitts

Photographing Railway Architecture

The annual talk of the Friends of Leamington Station was given this year by Paul Childs who trained as an architect and worked for British Rail. His change of career to professional photography was the result of both luck and skill. He showed us examples of over 30 years taking pictures, first with analogue cameras, which looked like strange monster robots, and then digital, which are smaller and lighter. For the perfect shot you need the right season, as well as patience to wait for sunlight and that pesky car to move away.

His main opus is railway photography, not only of their architecture and engineering but also of fittings, memorials, passengers, decay and revival. Many of the slides were effectively abstract art and a joy to behold. Just one of his major projects was recording the reconstruction of St. Pancras to accommodate HS1 / Eurostar.

This involved several acres of railway over a frightening range of heights and depths. Commemorative books of such projects are given to HM the Queen, even if the project is sometimes incomplete at the Ceremonial Opening. Nothing is permanent and his pictures form part of an essential archive to show what has been gained and what lost.

He left us with much to think about.



St. Pancras

Paul Childs

Marianne Pitts

New members

We are pleased to welcome to our society:

Lesley Campbell

Chris and Antoinette Davis

Susanne Dobson and Roger Twiney

Caroline Lane

Janet Williams

Correction

The Felix Dennis bequest to the Heart of England Forest was not £500,000, but a great deal more. It is not easy to put an exact figure on the value because it came in a variety of tranches. One was the ongoing income from his successful publishing empire. The Trust is a registered charity 1097110 and so must publish annual audited accounts.

Officers and Committee

Chairman: Sidney Syson, 11 Astley Close, CV32 6PT, 01926 423 140

Vice Chairmen: Barbara Lynn, Apt. 53 Manor House, Avenue Road, CV31 3ND
01926 831 414

Richard Ward, 3 Bell Court, The Maltings, CV32 5FH, 01926 422 750

Hon. Secretary and Membership Secretary: Margaret Begg, The Garden House,
Clarendon Crescent, CV32 5NR, 01926 423 822

Hon. Treasurer: Marianne Pitts, 7 Kineton Hall, Lillington Avenue, CV32 5DR,
01926 885 532

Other Committee Members:

Richard Ashworth	01926 316 703	Clive Engwell	01926 420 454
Archie Pitts	01926 885 532	Carole Sleight	07768 617 081
Jef Tuyn	01926 339 085		

The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is a member of the West Midlands Amenity Societies Association and the National Organisation of Residents' Associations. It exists to preserve the heritage and improve the character of Royal Leamington Spa and to encourage high standards of planning and architecture.

Charity No. 516078

Unless otherwise indicated, views expressed in these newsletters are the contributors' own and not necessarily the corporate view of the Society.