



[www.leamingtonsociety.org](http://www.leamingtonsociety.org)

# The Leamington Society Newsletter

May 2020

## Chairman's Notes

These days Zooming around has taken on a new meaning. I apologise for the lack of access to our scheduled Zoom AGM but am delighted that so many of you took advantage of the online voting. Thank you for adapting to the times. There is more about the AGM in this newsletter.

I single out Jef Tuyn for special thanks for his years of service on the Committee and welcome Ian Bradbury in his place. Both have been heavily involved in the over-long saga of the Pump Room Gardens restoration, which continues.

Though I recognise that, for too many, lockdown has brought pain, grief, deep anxiety and financial insecurity, it is not all bad news. Many of us have had far more fresh air than usual and have been able to appreciate the beauties of Leamington's parks and graceful tree lined streets. Air pollution in Leamington has dropped dramatically, while traffic free roads have made cycling a pleasure once more and encouraged the hesitant to take to their wheels. Hopefully the government boost for cycling will see more permanent provision for cyclists locally, particularly in the town centre and on routes to schools. This is important given that climate change is still with us.

In February, every member of the Council, across all parties, agreed to reduce not only the Council's carbon footprint to zero by 2025, but also to help the district become carbon neutral by 2030. The referendum on the proposed Council tax increase was abandoned, but the Council has not lost sight of its aims, and has appointed a

## Talks and Events

All the society's public meeting and activities are on hold until we can be confident it is safe to return to normal.

In the meantime we are investigating the possibility of organising virtual meeting using Zoom

Programme Director for Climate Change, Dave Barber. We wish him well in his challenging task ahead.

***Sidney Syson***

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## **AGM 2020**

Our AGM opened with a technical problem required a last-minute fix. Our apologies to all prevented from participating.

The Chairman, Sidney Syson, welcomed those present and proceeded to the business. First she thanked Archie Pitts and Ross Sleight for setting up the online voting.

Sidney invited presentations on three areas of the Society's activities.

Pump Room Garden restoration project. Archie regretted that, after 12 years, the project was still not complete. Some major improvements had been achieved: the Linden Arches; drainage at the west end into the new raingarden and rockery; flower beds protected by low fences and opening the view of the river west of York Bridge.

But much still needs to be done: the path surfaces are already failing; the bandstand steps up to the deck needing rebuilding yet again; the plinth render needing replacing; and ...

Archie warmly thanked Ian Bradbury, a retired civil engineer, for his technical guidance on what needs to be done and how, and welcomed Ian as a Friend of the Pump Room Gardens.

Jef Tuyn, one of the original Friends, is shortly leaving the district. He has been involved in this project since 2008 with the restoration of the Linden Arches, and Archie thanked him on behalf of the Society for all his efforts.

Society Accounts. Marianne Pitts reported that the Society was financially healthy. She said the accounts look poorer than last year because the Committee agreed to invest in the website and social media. She was pleased to report that nearly all members had updated their subscriptions to the new rate.

Marianne thanked Ian Salvin for examining the accounts this year, and for agreeing to be our Independent Examiner for 2020-21.

Programme. Carole Sleight, looking ahead, said she planned a talk by Mark Adams

from Vitsø on running a business in lockdown; and one by Mr Cross Stitch, a now celebrated embroiderer who thought it would intrigue other passengers to see a man embroidering on a flight. Lily Crowther would be talking on Making Histories, the new exhibition at the Art Gallery, currently available as an online tour. Carole also suggested that we should hold an online meeting for all members soon.

For 2020-21 the following were elected as Officers and Committee.

Chairman: Sidney Syson

Vice Chairmen: Barbara Lynn, Richard Ward

Honorary Secretary: Margaret Begg; Honorary Treasurer: Marianne Pitts

Committee Members: Ian Bradbury, Clive Engwell, Archie Pitts, and Carole Sleight

Richard Ashworth will continue as an *ex officio* member of the Committee.

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## **Website**

In the era of Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing, electronic communication has become crucial to know what is happening, whether at global, national, or local voluntary group level.

At present this is our only way to communicate with members: we cannot ask our stalwart team of newsletter deliverers to deliver house-to-house. So this newsletter is being sent by Mailchimp to all members who have given us their email address – approximately 98% of members. There are about 10 members who do not use email; if you know such a person please tell them of any recent communication from the society that might interest them.

We urge all members to check that Mailchimp messages from the society do not go to their spam or junk boxes, or the Society has an out-of-date address.

Lastly, we are delighted that it is now possible to join the society online either by using your bank card or by PayPal.

As ever, it continues to be possible to download and complete a membership application form, and then send it to our membership secretary.

***Archie Pitts***

## Newbold Comyn – the Society’s response to WDC consultation

The Newbold Comyn consultation is now open until *30 June 2020*.



Wide track, north edge Newbold Comyn,  
cc Robin Stott, <https://www.geograph.org.uk/>

This area of 300 acres (120 hectares) is much valued by local residents as demonstrated by the large response to recent WDC consultations. Using these responses and the guidance of consultants The Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy (SLC), the council has produced a [draft masterplan](#).

The Leamington Society has submitted its [response](#).

In summary the Society:

- welcomes the new Nature Reserve area but felt the cycle track within it would be intrusive
- believes the provision for cycling is excessive; cycling should be restricted to the north edge of the site
- recognises the importance of physical fitness with a variety of facilities suitable for all ages
- believe there is little future for golf on Newbold Comyn but there might be value in a pitch and putt facility
- recognises the value of an artificial turf football pitch
- is concerned about possible vandalism to new structures and nature hubs
- questions the thinking on access to the site and provision of additional car spaces, and deplores the apparent absence of improved public transport and cycle parks.
- The Masterplan is a pre-Covid-19 document; a post-Covid-19 version is needed.

Everyone is encouraged to respond individually to WDC by June 30.

***Leamington Society***

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## **How is Covid-19 affecting Leamington business?**

It is a privilege to write for the Leamington Society. This is a time of great uncertainty and ambiguity, as well as of great transition, calling for flexibility and reflection. Individual experiences of the Covid-19 'lockdown' vary immensely, as does the level of vulnerability.

This variation extends to our business community. All the local businesses we enjoy are affected, and the transition out will be harder for some than others. We have been inspired as businesses have bravely and generously stepped up to help the most vulnerable, with thousands of meals and gifts for key workers.

Supporting this, our strategy first focused on 'money matters' — providing business with critical information. We then supported the 'meanwhile space' by showcasing how businesses are adapting on [www.loveleamington.com](http://www.loveleamington.com). Now, as well as lobbying for those left unsupported, we are planning for 'life after lockdown' and welcoming our community back.

Reflecting on the challenges ahead, there are many things that Leamington Society members will relate to and be able to help with.

The DNA of our town is strong, and we stand on great shoulders. It is not beautiful and vibrant by accident, but rather due to the passion, hard work, creativity and care of our community. We must call on these same qualities again as we revert to 'really supporting local'.

Since 2011, our approach has stemmed from viewing 'our town centre as our community centre'. Building resilience through strong partnerships, which offer many 'touch-points' for people to help, is part of what will see us through. The Leamington Society is a key part of this.

Our challenge is to ensure that our community continues to stay connected, and that we support our businesses, their staff and customers. Kindness, cooperation and understanding are going to be important ingredients.

If people lose their jobs, can we ensure they stay connected and their skills are used in new areas? Space is at a premium as we maintain 2 metres social distance, so can we share more spaces? This may be the carriage way and footpath, business spaces for queues, or parks for school classes.

Our creative community can help to ensure our interventions inspire and reduce anxiety, as well as navigate new boundaries. We may need a ‘new social dialogue’ to manage transgressions, so ‘checking in’ on social boundaries needs to be as innocuous as asking for water. People also adapt and socialise quickly, that’s our gift – so as we embrace a ‘new normal’ the question of ‘who decides’ what we adapt to and ‘how’ is important. Also, what are the values and morals that should accompany this?

I am inspired by nature as I think about adaption, resilience and supporting others. Connection and collaboration are important because when we ‘share’ we build magical bridges. So please join me to make space for new conversations and let’s continue to connect, create, collaborate, and also celebrate, as we support our town centre.

***Steph Kerr, Executive Director, BID Leamington***

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### **A better deal for cyclists and pedestrians?**

Transport secretary Grant Shapps announced in May a £250 million investment to immediately create pop-up cycle lanes, wider pavements, safer junctions and bus-only corridors in England. This money is part of the £5 billion of funding announced in February, so is not new money.

Levels of walking and cycling have increased during the coronavirus pandemic, when we were told to avoid public transport and stay at home. The government wants to enact these changes to encourage more people to choose alternatives to public transport and reinforce healthier habits.

The government will work with local authorities (Warwickshire County Council for us) to make it easier for people to cycle and walk.

Statutory guidance tells councils to reallocate road space to accommodate “significantly increased numbers” of cyclists and pedestrians. Trialling e-scooters is being brought forward to this year; Birmingham and Coventry will assess the benefits of this mode of transport.

The benefits of improved cycle lanes, wider pavements, and bus only corridors must be set against other costs, like difficulties for delivery to and from businesses. Shopping online is growing, and at an increasing speed due to the pandemic.

We should remember that cycling is a short journey activity for only a minority –1% of

journeys by distance travelled, or 1.7% by number of journeys made: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/statistics>), but we are all pedestrians for life.

How much of the £250 million will trickle down to Leamington? And how much will go to improving the quality of our pavements?

**Archie Pitts**

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### **COVID-19 postscript?**

Every cloud has a silver lining and Covid-19 is no exception: the homeless are off the streets; lonely pensioners are cherished; there are far more volunteers and the tyranny and expense of commuting has been demonstrably and effectively replaced by home-working. This is good for all long-distance workers, especially women and the disabled.

Less commuting means less crowded roads and trains and buses and less pollution. It also means we need less office space, some of which could be converted to housing, which is needed, especially in prosperous city centres.

If and when WDC reconsider their HQ, after experiencing total homeworking for some months, perhaps their much-reduced office space could be fitted into the Town Hall?



Town Hall, cc Julian Osley

<https://www.geograph.org.uk/>

There is a lot of wasted space in that building, which “only” needs money and a good architect to convert the roof space and cubby holes into a modern HQ – central and accessible to all by public transport (which Riverside House never was). Some of the money raised by selling Riverside House site for housing should be spent on turning this “white elephant” into an asset we could again be proud of, with its magnificent staircase. There might even be enough money

left over to rebuild the Covent Garden carpark – who knows? Let us hope that Covid-19 yields another good result.

***Marianne Pitts***

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## **Lockdown at Leamington Station**



Station forecourt at April midday; Chiltern staff caring for garden

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## **We are all getting richer ... in social capital.**

One of my favourite economists (another is Andrew Oswald of Warwick University because neither is Dismal), Andrew Haldane, Chief Economist of the Bank of England, has written an article in the Financial Times of April 25-26, affirming that the Covid-19 crisis has increased our “network of relationships across communities that support and strengthen societies” a.k.a. social capital.

In spite of social distancing, people have pursued togetherness: “we see this daily on our doorsteps through small acts of neighbourly kindness ... and the vastly increased numbers of people volunteering to help.” You may remember (but probably not) that I wrote an article in the November 2014 newsletter summarising Haldane’s attempt to put a money value on the work of volunteers. He worked in layers: the cash value of the work done; the value gained by the volunteer in terms of skills and self-esteem and mental health; and the value to the community of the work that would otherwise require police and doctors and paid carers. The sums were startling. His estimated total was £200 BILLION, or 10% of the UK’s Gross Domestic Product.

However, volunteers are statistically invisible, so it is easy for any government to overlook this vital contribution to our prosperity, and now charities require financial support. (Not the Leamington Society – because our only on-going commitment is the maintenance of Leamington’s station garden and Chiltern staff have taken this on during lockdown.) The government has offered to fill this gap with a country-wide grant of £750m, but the lost income is estimated as £4+bn. All local and national fund-raising events – fairs, shows, matches, exhibitions – have stopped. No-one is visiting National Trust properties and buying teas and gifts there; all charity shops are shut ... The Chelsea Flower Show (and all the others) are cancelled. The local dance group Motionhouse cannot perform anywhere.

Some of us are in the fortunate position of being financially secure, well housed, and well looked after, while some of us are unable to help others and are receiving rather than giving just now. Might some members of the first group donate to their pet cause(s) – whether that be Myton Hospice, the National Trust, Guide Dogs for the Blind, the RHS, a football club, whatever – and feel the better for it? Don’t forget to add Gift Aid!

***Marianne Pitts***

## **Airbnb – a pain or a blessing?**

The Society recently received a report from the National Organisation for Residents' Associations on the knotty question of Airbnbs. These short term lets of premises in town centres offer useful cheap accommodation for visitors, but at the Airbnb roadshow residents from Bath pointed out that they can also cause disturbance to neighbours.

Originally Airbnb was a chance to let out a spare room but in recent times this has changed, and flats and houses are often let out without the owner being on the premises. Bath has experienced "party houses" where loud parties till the early hours have caused noise nuisance, and they can find half a terrace occupied by temporary visitors which is not conducive to community life. It also reduces the availability of long-term accommodation for local people.

At the roadshow there was a call for compulsory registration of Airbnbs with a new planning use category being introduced to control the number in each area and to ensure they are properly run. The Society would be interested to hear the views of members on this subject.

***Margaret Begg***

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## **Now or Never 2018-2020**

Clean-Up Britain launched the *Now or Never Campaign* in April 2018 at the Leamington Town Assembly, as reported in the May 2018 Newsletter. The striking "Litter Kills" posters appeared soon after. Since then the campaign organisers have used a variety of approaches to spread the message. Successful sessions have been held in 23 local schools. North Leamington School (North Leam) went further, with notices on all their litter bins and teachers helping to create a campaign anthem and video.

The organisers are pleased with the recent award of Government funding in support of the Green Business Recognition Scheme. Stickers showing their participation can be seen in the windows of many local cafés and other businesses.

Other activities such as the 2 Minute Litter Picks will continue when these are safe. The busy Street Activist Project is an important part of the campaign, focussing on local environmental pollution like fly-tipping and single-use plastic. See

[facebook.com@StreetActivistsLeam](https://www.facebook.com/StreetActivistsLeam). Focus groups and street publicity have addressed the problems caused by smoking. Behind the scenes work continues, like challenging McDonalds on litter. Angela Owen now hopes for more support from local organisations and councils to increase the impact of this important campaign.

For more information see [www.itsnowornever.org.uk](http://www.itsnowornever.org.uk)

**Barbara Lynn**

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### **Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum opens their virtual doors**

The Arts services team have been busy creating content for remote access to their art collection and exhibitions. Their current temporary one is *Making Histories: New*



Ceramics by Rhian Malin, Atherstone-on-Stour

*Responses to the Ceramics Collection* exhibition and shows the work of seven ceramic artists from across the Midlands who were invited to select and respond to objects from our ceramics collection.

Lilly Crowther, the Gallery History curator, gives a wonderful and informative online guided exhibition tour about the artists, their personal stories, their response and creation. Chloe Johnson, Collections and Engagement Officer alongside colleagues narrates the story behind their personal 'Curator's Choice' from the gallery collection while Huw Jones launched 'Museums at Home'. Sally Larke can be found in fancy dress for Arty tots and in her potters' apron for Art at Home workshops. Meanwhile Friday Focus continues to be a source of great inspiration, intrigue and insights. So visit the

[virtual art gallery](#) for more visual treats or head to Facebook and join WDC Arts News for regular updated information on online entertainment across all artistic and cultural organisations. Stay home, stay safe and enjoy.

***Carole Sleight, WDC Arts Officer.***

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### **Never underestimate the Power of a Flower**

Sarah Horne's talk titled 'Never underestimate the Power of Flowers' revealed what a creative and driven woman she is. This July she will be celebrating 40 years of trading in Leamington Spa. While creating five imaginative and intricate flower displays Sarah led us on her floristry journey which began when her mother Jenny took her to silk flower arranging classes. Now she is an internationally renowned creative florist with



Two of Sarah's creations made during her talk

three Chelsea Gold medals and the prestigious title of *Chelsea Florist of the Year* in 2011. Her floral creations have ranged from woven wedding corsets to a full-sized arbour picnic!

Her shop has also reached *UK Flower Shop of the Year* finals four times and her passion for demonstrating her artistry has taken her all over the world. Sarah developed her

skills into pen and ink drawings inspired by vintage and botanical engravings. These drawings are printed on fine china and she displayed samples of her gorgeous china and candle products decorated with her distinctive designs.

Like many local retailers, Sarah's shop is currently closed and her plans to hold a fund-raising celebratory party on hold. However you can still buy her china, courses and vouchers online and she will continue inspiring and sharing her love for all things floral and this town.

### **Carole Sleight**

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#### **New members**

Paula Fletcher

Tanya Newby

Andrew Cooke

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#### **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,  
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**Hon. Treasurer:** Marianne Pitts, 7 Kineton Hall, Lillington Avenue, CV32 5DR,  
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#### **Other Committee Members:**

Richard Ashworth      01926 316 703      Ian Bradbury      07905 122 340

Clive Engwell      01926 420 454      Archie Pitts      01926 885 532

Carole Sleight      07768 617 081

*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.*