



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

# The Leamington Society Newsletter

February 2021

## Chairman's Notes

I am delighted that our online talks continue to be popular; any you missed can be watched on our website. I particularly recommend Andrew Day's presentation which Marianne has written about below. There may be some topical online afternoon talks this Spring. We may live stream meetings when we are back to normal, for those unable to attend in person. Is there anyone willing to advise us how we might best achieve this?

Our online talks are open to anyone, so please pass on the details to your friends and neighbours. We hope that some might then decide to join the Society of more than 400 members and growing – a cause for celebration.

Now to trees. Peter James, a member of the Society, has long had a passion for street trees in Leamington and a vision for a Street Tree Fund. He is no longer able to promote this, but the Leamington Society will, and we thank him for his inspiration. We are already in discussion with key providers, so watch this space but please be patient!

Not a street tree, but a special specimen tree – a Foxglove Tree (*Paulownia Tomentosa*), will be planted soon in Jephson Gardens on the top lawn near the path parallel to Newbold Terrace. This is being given by the Leamington Society to commemorate Paul Edward's 20 plus years' service representing the Society on the

## Events and Talks

### **The Past and the Future of 1 Mill Street**

Nigel Shanahan,  
Thursday, February 18th, 7.30

### **Game Development and Diversity**

Abbey Plumb  
Thursday, March 18th, 7.30

### **Re-vision 2021 – Supporting Positive Change in Our Town Centre**

Stephanie Kerr  
Thursday, April 8th, 7.30

### **AGM**

Thursday, May 13th, 7.00  
tba

District Council's Conservation Advisory Forum. There is another Foxglove Tree flourishing in Leam Street, but I do not know of any others in the town.

Thank you to those of you who wrote to the Chief Executive of Network Rail about the railway bridge on Princes Drive. The District Council has now taken this up as an important issue, and we wish it success.

Finally we were very sad to learn of the death of Mota Singh on 31 January. He loved Leamington, was highly active in the community, was the first Asian County Councillor, later becoming WCC Chairman and was Mayor of Leamington in 2004. An obituary will follow in our next newsletter.

***Sidney Syson***

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**Coming talks. These will be conducted using Zoom. The necessary code to connect will be circulated to members by MailChimp in advance of each meeting.**

**The Past and the Future of 1 Mill Street.** Nigel Shanahan will tell us how he and his wife Dessie have transformed the interior of this elegant building to provide a valuable community asset for the town.

**Game Development and Diversity.** Abbey Plumb, Senior Technical Program Manager at Unity Technologies, will talk about what it is like to work in the games industry and how diversity impacts development. Abbey will discuss why the games industry is growing in Leamington Spa and how the industry is striving to be more diverse and benefitting from doing so.

**Re-vision 2021 – Supporting Positive Change in Our Town Centre.** Stephanie Kerr, Executive Director of BID Leamington, asks what do we want our town to look and feel like in future? What values are important and who decides? Stephanie, with 10 years' experience at BID Leamington, and a recent Masters in Public Administration, is well placed to explore these questions.

**AGM, 2021.** Details will be announced when we know whether we are still in a state of lockdown.

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## Newsletter distribution

While the country remains in lockdown, the Society will distribute its Newsletter by MailChimp. A small number of hardcopies will be printed and delivered for members who do not use email.

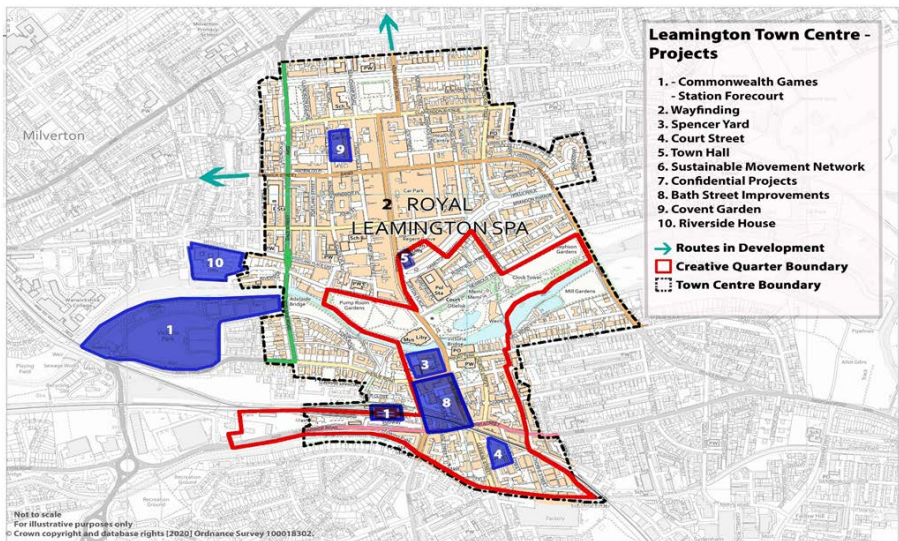
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## The vision and hopes of Royal Leamington Town in 2021

Councillor Andrew Day, Leader of WDC, told us about the ambitious and optimistic council plans to take advantage of the coming opportunities for our town on two counts:

- The 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, with events scheduled in Leamington;
- Coventry as City of Culture in 2021.

Leamington Spa is likely to receive £10 million grant from the Future High Street Fund, from the Treasury, in competition with hundreds of other towns.



Ten projects in progress or under consideration

The Commonwealth Bowls events will take place in Victoria Park so there are plans for repairs and major improvements; not only to the Park itself, including floodlighting,

but also for access from the Railway Station for the expected 5-10,000 spectators a day. The Station forecourt is to be more of a park and less of a carpark, the underpass is to be radically improved and wayfinding all over town modernised and made consistent. Cycling is high priority – there will be new cycle tracks in town and possibly even Boris bikes to hire at the station. There is talk of a Commonwealth Park – consisting of a strip of reclaimed land along the north bank of the river Leam to Warwick.

Coventry is to have electric buses. If they come to Leamington, charging facilities will be needed and with FHSF, we may acquire the same infrastructure – improving the air quality in the Town Centre. The Town Hall needs a better lift and one bolted onto the outside at the back is a possible idea. Another ambition is to improve the rail link to Coventry by dualling the track. More frequent trains will help local students in particular – perhaps even a University Station?

Long-held dreams may come true: a Creative Quarter, using Spencer Yard and the dilapidated United Reform Church as well as the Town Hall and even the Post Office. CPD (Complex Projects Design) has already submitted plans for the URC to become a glamorous open plan office for a major digital games company, preserving the handsome exterior, fine windows and ceiling for posterity. The open-air courtyard of Spencer Yard might stage pop-up cultural events and the red brick buildings within the yard, already much improved by lively murals, would house more creative workshops. If the Post Office sorting office is persuaded to move out to one of the nearby industrial estates, the function of the whole building is open to more ideas – flats; businesses offices; a hotel perhaps?

Andrew also discussed administrative issues. WDC may merge with Stratford DC to form a bigger district with economies of scale. A new joint ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) Head of Service has already been appointed to promote home working. The Riverside Road site will be redeveloped with 40% social housing and preserving the copper beeches (cheers!) Covid has taught us that WDC does not need large offices, though there should be a central meeting point for the public to see staff – perhaps in the Spa Centre. Having destroyed the two big hotels we once had, Leamington is “underbedded” – and now there is no room for a large new hotel in the Town Centre.

What do we feel about the closure of the Parade? He felt that at least the cross roads

(Warwick and Regent Streets) should be reopened as soon as possible, but explained that this was a County Traffic decision and not in his power.

He wanted our opinion on these and other issues and offered his email address ([Andrew.Day@warwickdc.gov.uk](mailto:Andrew.Day@warwickdc.gov.uk)) for us to contact him afterwards. When the time came for “chat” many and various questions and suggestions came up:

**NEW COMMONWEALTH PARK**  
**ELECTRIC BUSES**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**EXTENSION OF**  
**NATIONAL**  
**CYCLE ROUTE**  
**NEWBOLD COMYN**  
**MASTERPLAN**  
**BATH STREET AND THE**  
**EMSCOTE ROAD CORRIDOR**

**MEGA LAB**

**PUMP ROOM**  
**GARDENS**  
**PAINTING**  
**PRINCESS**  
**DRIVE**  
**RAIL**  
**BRIDGE**

**INITIATIVES**  
**CYCLEWAY**

#### Themes

- WDC could learn by example: from Kidderminster locally and from European towns
- Why not illuminate Mill Bridge, Victoria Bridge and All Saints’ Church with LED lighting?
- Could access to Spencer’s Yard be via the Colonnade? No, because of private developments there. The old idea of a footbridge between the Pump Rooms and North Hall has been revived.
- Will the Parade revert to residential buildings?
- Where can concerts be held in the town? The Spa Centre was one possibility.
- Could we have a Green Wall on the new Covent Garden carpark?

There was so much material that about 100 people were engaged and entertained for more than an hour and we say “Thank you” on their behalf.

***Marianne Pitts***

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## 2020 locally with special thanks to CPRE

While the world was paralysed by the coronavirus pandemic much Local Authority work continued last year, thanks to Zoom and other video conferencing techniques.

The Leamington Neighbourhood Plan, prepared by the Town Council, is ready to go to a referendum when elections are resumed.

CPRE (rebranded as The countryside charity) strongly supports Neighbourhood Plans across the country, saying “The status and scope of Neighbourhood Planning should be enhanced as a major building block of pro-active community level planning”.

Locally, CPRE has argued that [the predicted housing numbers for Coventry were unrealistically high](#), by a massive margin. This has caused distortion to both the Warwick District and Coventry local plans, forcing both authorities to allocate major amounts of greenbelt and open farmland for urban development.

The Office for Statistics Regulation has taken CPRE arguments seriously and has agreed to [review the numbers](#). This is a major achievement, with local and national implications. At the national level CPRE has also produced a detailed response critical of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) white paper [Planning for the Future](#) launched in August. [CPRE’s response](#) contained many misgivings and reservations arguing that it would favour large house builders at the expense of local democracy. CPRE also argued “There is already enough land in the system to meet the government’s target for 300,000 new houses a year for the duration of this Parliament. There is enough brownfield land for 1.3 million homes, 500,000 of which already have planning permission.”

We can only hope MHCLG will see sense and change its plans. Thanks to all at CPRE working on our behalf.

Other news: the District Council has approved a Masterplan for Newbold Comyn and is making plans for a Creative Quarter starting with Spencer Yard and the United Reform Church, boosted by the provisional £10 million government funding announced at Christmas 2020 for this and the town centre.

The County Council approved funding for a dedicated cycle route from Kenilworth to Leamington at the end of 2019 and, a year later, for another route from Warwick to Leamington. In June 2020 WCC imposed a three-week trial closure of the Parade to

enable social distancing, a period which has been extended without any end date or public consultation, as yet.

The County is redesigning the Leamington Station forecourt to encourage green travel, linking bus, taxi, cycle and rail.

A Megalab was announced in November 2020, one of two in the UK, to be situated at the previous Wolseley distribution warehouse off Tachbrook Road; the other lab will be in Scotland. The lab, opening early in 2021 and working 24/7, will initially test Covid-19 samples and employ up to 2,000 people – from scientists and lab technicians to administrative and warehouse roles. It will bring a huge boost to local employment and supply chain businesses. Warwick University is supportive and expects to be involved in the working of the lab.

***Archie Pitts***

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### **Cycling on Newbold Comyn**

The District Council's revised plan for Newbold Comyn is very disappointing. Though it claims to be based on what residents want, it is actually based on what sports cyclists want.

No less than six cycle tracks are proposed. The resulting spaghetti junction of tracks running all over the Comyn, including through several of the areas designated as nature



Is this what the public want for the nature reserve?

reserves, seriously clashes with the stated goals of attracting wildlife and preserving open space. It seems the planners have not quite grasped the meaning of "reserve" in the term "nature reserve".

The cycle tracks will also form a barrier between walkers and the nature reserve areas. While cyclists are prioritised, walkers are treated very much as second-class citizens. No new paths for walkers are planned. Walkers are restricted to the existing path that follows the perimeter of the Comyn. Walkers actually gain nothing from the plan, but will lose the peace and beauty of open views.

It is also disturbing that walkers will share their only path with cyclists, as at present. As a frequent walker on the Comyn I am regularly scared witless by cyclists overtaking me from behind at high speed and in complete silence. Under my nose I have seen an eight-year-old child hit from behind by a cyclist. She was thrown forward onto her face and lost her newly acquired adult front teeth. The cyclist did not stop. There should be more paths, reserved for walkers only.

This issue of keeping pedestrians safe from irresponsible cyclists is an ever-growing problem in the district as a whole. Some time ago in Leamington an elderly woman stepped out of her front gate onto the pavement and was immediately hit by a fast moving cyclist. She was so badly injured that she nearly died. Yet neither the District Council nor the County Council seem willing to recognise, much less address, the problem.

If the Council had not been captured by cycling interests, there are many inexpensive changes to the Comyn that would maintain its environment attractiveness and appeal to a wider public. Re-opening the pitch and putt golf area would provide a gentle leisure activity that people of all ages could enjoy together. A new play-area for older children, and the refurbishment of the existing toddlers' play area, would also benefit many local people, as would provision of toilets and a small snack bar. None of these features would break the bank and would truly serve the council's stated intention of serving local residents.

***Geoff Renshaw***

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## Heating Historic Buildings in a Carbon Neutral World

Three quarters of municipal councils in the UK have declared a 'Climate Emergency', committing them to Carbon Net Zero; WDC is aiming to achieve this by 2030.

If so, how can we ensure that period buildings can be heated affordably to achieve Carbon Neutrality? Leamington has several thousand 19th century homes, mainly in its central Conservation Areas. Externally, these are part of Leamington's heritage as a Regency town; internally these are spacious, comfortable and valued homes. Listed properties are already subject to constraints on alterations and most historic housing is difficult to adapt to "green" heating systems.

Most homes are heated by natural gas, mainly methane, with a high proportion of carbon dioxide in its exhaust. Around 15% of UK greenhouse gases come from home heating; so what can we do? In new properties, heat pumps may provide an answer: e.g. ground source heating from a deep bored system of pipes beneath the new Newbold Terrace apartment block opposite the Spa Centre. But ground sourced heat delivers water at considerably lower temperature than a gas boiler. In modern flats this is circulated via a network of under floor pipes, combined with a high level of thermal insulation; the initial cost is repaid by much lower heating bills.

Unfortunately, conventional wall mounted radiators do not deliver effective heating with cooler water. Conversion to ground source heating in any existing house also requires new radiators and a new network of underfloor heating at great disturbance and cost. Even that is only half the job, since effective conversion would also depend on radical upgrading of the insulation. Even in modern houses this requires considerable work; in a 19th century property it is a huge challenge. Solid walls will require external or internal cladding compromising their appearance; another problem is the double glazing of large Georgian or Victorian windows. Apart from conservation, this would mean massive disturbance and immense cost; how is this to be negotiated with multiple occupants in historic terraces and crescents? (Think of the cladding problems following the Grenfell tower disaster.)

Air-sourced heat pumps are also possible but require bulky machinery and create noise (like air conditioners) and may need powered back-up for winter. Electrical heating is notoriously expensive (and likely to become more so). Solar panels are a useful source of green electricity, but least effective in winter and even on a sunny day on a house, they only generate the equivalent of a three-bar electric fire.

A radical approach might suggest demolition of old properties, replacing them with new buildings of the highest modern technical standards. This would be vandalism of our heritage and involve huge cost. Even this is not a solution. Existing houses incorporate great amounts of embodied energy and materials: bricks and cement are highly energy intensive in production; new joists and floorboards require acres of timber. The loss of energy from demolition is estimated at 35-50 years' worth of savings in reduced carbon output by the lower energy replacement.

Hydrogen is a cleaner fuel than natural gas. But its production entails either electrolysis using electricity or extraction from methane combined with carbon capture and storage. In the short term, hydrogen might be added to natural gas, up to 30%, which apparently can be burned in a modern gas boiler without modification. Just one of many strategies to clean up the output of our collective domestic heating systems.

There is no single smart solution: this is a complex problem, requiring a combination of techniques to reduce the carbon burden.

**Richard Ashworth**

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### **Finbar Hawkins on *Witch* (Joint meeting with the Leamington Literary Society)**

While working on his day-job at Aardman Animations, creators of Wallace and Gromit, Finbar wrote, illustrated and completed this, his first, beautiful, almost magical book.



He paid generous tribute to those who had inspired and helped him, from past authors (Ursula Le Guin, Rosemary Sutcliffe); the tutors and students at the Arvon Creative Writing and Bath Spa MA courses at Corsham Court; his publisher Zephyr; editor Fiona Kennedy and Edward Bettison, designer of the wonderful cover.

He is creative and gifted in both language and drawing but emphasized that the writing of a book is not only sudden inspiration but also hard work. At least

300 words a day, revised over and over again, lead step by step to achievement.

“Witch” went through 9 drafts and radical changes in plot before it was printed. The themes are universal: propaganda, hysteria, fear, cruelty (the book starts with a murder) responsibility, redemption, love and jealousy (sibling rivalry in particular).

Many of the audience had read and enjoyed it – another proof that the best children’s books are good for all ages. It was an inspiring evening and I will certainly buy Finbar’s next book – not “Witch II”, but linked.

### **Marianne Pitts**

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#### **New members**

We welcome the following to our Society:

George Burton	James Ingham	Liz Weston
Bonny Landsborough	Lesley Marsh	Esther Peers
Jim and Margaret Weir	Neil and Gaylita Bradley	
Andrew and Julie Day		

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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, 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	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.*