



www.leamingtonsociety.org

The Leamington Society Newsletter

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

February 2022

Chairman's Notes

I am delighted to introduce the first Newsletter of 2022, which is also my first Newsletter since taking over from Sidney Syson in December 2021. We are grateful to Sidney for her hard work and vision, which have left the Society well prepared for the busy time ahead.

Last year ended on a high note, with an inspiring Awards Evening in November at All Saints' Church, followed by our Christmas Party at Audley Binswood. We can now see progress being made on important projects such as the Creative Quarter, with work continuing on the Spencer Street Methodist Chapel.

The redevelopment of the station forecourt will be completed in time for the start of the Commonwealth Games in July and welcome changes to the pedestrian underpass have been announced. The Royal Leamington Spa Colour Palettes artwork will transform this, celebrating the aspects of the town seen as most important by residents.

The Commonwealth Games will be the highlight of the year. The town is hosting the Lawn Bowls and Para-Lawn Bowls Events, from 29th July to 6th August and will be one

Events and Talks

HMOs in Leamington
Rebecca Frazer
and Kalvan Birk

Warwick District Council
Thursday, March 10th **2.30pm**
[Talk on Zoom](#)

CultureFest
Johnathan Branson
Warwick District Council
Thursday March 31st 2.30pm
[Talk on Zoom](#)

April: talk to be arranged

AGM
Thursday 19th May 7.00pm
venue tba

of the venues for the Cycling Road Race on 7th August, as the contestants sweep through the town on the way back to Warwick. Leamington's own Motionhouse will open the 6-month cultural programme in March with several spectacular performances in Centenary Square, to which all are invited. Admission to these will be free. We are delighted that Johnathan Branson of Warwick District Council will talk about this festival on 31st March. To keep up with plans, go to www.birmingham2022.com/festival. More details will become available soon so watch this space.

I look forward to an interesting year and hope to meet as many of our members as possible in the next few months, whether virtually or in person.

Barbara Lynn,
Acting Chair

Forthcoming talks and events:

For venues, dates and times see front page of this Newsletter

HMOs in Leamington

Students living in Leamington during term time bring prosperity to the town and most of them behave responsibly but there are problems. Solving some of these problems is the responsibility of Warwick District Council. Rebecca Frazer, the Student Housing Enforcement Officer and her colleague Kalvan Birk will be talking about the steps the Council has taken and is taking in respect of HMOs.

CultureFest

CultureFest will run from July 16th to August 21st during which time Leamington will be hosting the Commonwealth Games Lawn Bowls, Para-Lawn Bowls and the Cycling road races. It will showcase and celebrate some of the arts and heritage venues, artists, and creatives in the area, with events and activities taking place across the district. Johnathan Branson, WDC's Arts Project and Development Manager, will be explaining what's on offer and how to get involved.

These presentations will be by Zoom, with the link sent to members by MailChimp in advance of the meeting.

Leamington's HMO Problem: Ten Years On

Most members will know of the issues associated with Leamington's HMO student accommodation (especially night noise and refuse management). The impact of high concentrations of 18-21 year olds, is regularly debated in social media and the local press.

For local people the problem is that their student neighbours are always new, always learning how to live independently in multi-occupation accommodation.

Students themselves are often struggling with their first experiences of household management -often unaware of how noisy party life-styles leak through the party-walls of terraced houses.

At the heart of all this is the matter of how a sustainable and knowable community can be (re)built. In some streets the majority of what were previously purpose-built family homes have become HMOs. How can it be right that family homes in close proximity to community schools and playgrounds continue to leak into the HMO market?

That student HMOs are exempt from Council Tax and that landlords do not pay a business rate adds to local resentment.

In 2020/21 our Council granted £2,569,685 worth of exemptions for properties occupied exclusively by students. *Mill St photo courtesy G Fyfe* (NB by then government had phased out compensation by way of a Revenue Support Grant).



Three things need saying:

- (i) what is **NOT** at issue is the welcome presence of students with their positive contributions to local life;
- (ii) what **IS** at issue is Warwick District Council's (WDC) obligation to properly manage competing claims on the housing stock and to reduce conflict between 'town and gown';
- (iii) WDC must do more by way of regulation and enforcement.

Two WDC teams have their parts to play -Planning and Private Sector Housing.

Planning: In 2012 Warwick District Council (WDC) withdrew permitted development rights for HMOs. Housing Policy H6, underpinned by an Article Four Direction means that in Leamington conversion of family homes (use-class C3) into HMOs (C4) requires planning permission.

This is refused if among other things:

- (i) the application would take the concentration of HMO dwellings above 10% within 100m;
- (ii) if a family dwelling will be sandwiched between two HMOs.

Private Sector Housing (PSH): WDC ensures that HMOs meet legal standards of safety and amenity. PSH regulates large HMOs by means of inspections and licences. But note, licences cover matters such as refuse management that relate to the amenity of neighbours. And also note that smaller HMOs, often the most problematic, are classed as non-licensable. Lists for both categories are published online at WDC's website.

Ten years have passed. The landscape is changing.

1. The number of Warwick University students living in Leamington is now **6,011**, compared with **1,610** 22 years ago and **5,205** in 2015. In Leamington there are approximately **1,205** HMOs.

2. HMO occupation has been intensified with landlords building extensions to accommodate additional bedrooms.

3. Developers have been investing in large PurposeBuilt Student Accommodation (PBSAs). These often come with untested claims about taking the pressure off family accommodation.



4. Developers are opting for smaller units, splitting existing dwellings into smaller student dwellings, and building blocks of two-bedroom flats for student occupation.

Most landlords do the right thing. However, a minority fail their tenants and should not be in the housing business. It is in the interests of all of us, students included, that WDC tightens HMO regulation and devises a proper Student Housing Policy.

The interests of students and locals are more closely aligned than many people think.

- **WDC must block further conversion of family homes to HMOs whilst making sensitive neighbourhood-friendly use of the PBSA model.**
- **All HMOs should be subject to licensing with licences revoked in cases of refuse mismanagement and anti-social behaviour.**
- **HMO landlords should be subject to a business rate (To this end WDC must lobby the government in partnership with other Councils).**
- **For the benefit of students HMO managers must be located in Leamington.**

G. J. Fyfe

Any Questions? What is a Student Housing Enforcement Officer?

Having read Gordon Fyfe's article you may well have questions which you will be able to ask Rebecca Frazer, The Student Housing Enforcement Officer, and her colleague on 10th March. Here Rebecca briefly describes her role:

"The Student Housing Enforcement Officer role was created in October 2019 to help the Private Sector Housing Team investigate student housing complaints from, students, residents and landlords. It also allowed the opportunity for greater partnership working with Warwick University on housing issues.

The first 2 years were spent predominantly in the South Leamington area with a combination of property inspections, disrepair complaints, management investigations, liaison with the local community and University of Warwick. This year the work is more evenly split between North Leamington and South Leamington.

I provide advice and guidance to students and landlords on their responsibilities and housing standards, and have recently re-written the *HMO Landlords Guide*, *HMO Landlords Guide to Anti-Social Behaviour* and plan to create a new *Students Guide to HMO* this year."

Tree planting in Warwick District

Early plans for the Trees for our Future project were confirmed by Warwick District Council in October 2020 in support of our ambitious target of planting 160, 000 trees by 2030.

Since then, the Council has undertaken a district-wide mapping exercise to identify where trees will deliver the greatest benefit, reviewed our land holdings to identify sites where planting can quickly commence and developed working relationships with organisations such as The Heart of England Forest and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, to see how we can potentially work together. We've also been investigating various funding opportunities that could support the delivery of such a large-scale project.

By the end of this planting season, March 2022, we'll have planted around 5,000 trees, with plans for even bigger schemes at sites such as Newbold Comyn and the emerging Tachbrook Country Park.

In Leamington Spa you may have noticed almost 600 trees appearing at sites including Radford Road Meadow, Victoria Park and York Walk - greening up these spaces, improving air quality, contributing to health and wellbeing improvements and playing a part in tackling the impacts of climate change.



We've learnt a lot over the past year, and it's clear that planting this volume of trees will be highly challenging. National policy stresses the importance of 'right tree, right place' and this is something we're keen to implement.



Trees are a key part of our environment and ecosystems, however in some cases, planting trees can have a negative impact and it can be better to leave open grassland areas.

Trees also need space to grow, and we expect to need at least 111 hectares to hit our target – that's about 154 football pitches!

While we can use our land for some of this, we need to find more.

So, if anyone reading this has access to land suitable for large scale planting and they're willing to let it be used for this purpose we'd love to hear from you.

Alan Rhead, WDC Portfolio Holder for Climate Change alan.rhead@warwickdc.gov.uk

More tree stories: a tree for Archie Pitts and the loss of a cedar

In early February the Society was delighted to sponsor a tree in the Pump Room Gardens in recognition of Archie Pitts' outstanding contribution to the town and in particular for his work enabling the restoration of the Pump Room Gardens.

The photo shows Archie planting 'his' Sweet Gum (Liquidambar) at the far end of The Pump Room Gardens.

It is hoped that one day it will be as spectacular as these in Jephson Gardens, showing their autumn glory.



Alas one tree we shall not see next autumn is the mighty Cedar of Lebanon at the junction of Willes Road and Newbold Terrace; a victim of honey fungus, due to be felled this month.



The Station Gardens

Monday 22nd November was a red-letter day in the diary for The Friends of Leamington Station. Why?

Because for the second time this year, seven young volunteers from Network Rail were due to spend the day assisting the Friends with tackling some of the heavier jobs on the garden.



Most, if not all of them had been before and they quickly got stuck into a multitude of tasks including pruning large shrubs, cutting down rampant ivy and digging out invasive plants.



It was a beautiful sunny day, which made all the hard work so much more pleasurable.

The volunteers were heartily thanked for their efforts and it was clear that they had gained a lot of satisfaction from what had been achieved.

As they left, they promised they would be back to spend another day with us next spring. Hooray!

Robin Adams



A celebration of the Big Four by Kevin Parrish.

The “Railways Act” was passed by Royal Assent in 1921 enabling the formation of the “Big Four” private railway companies from January 1923, namely the GWR (Great Western Railway), LMS (London Midland and Scottish Railway), LNER (London North Eastern Railway) , and SR (Southern Railway).

The “Big Four” live on in Steam Heritage and Preservation and as a local railway artist and lover of steam trains, Kevin felt compelled to create and paint examples of the “Big Four”, namely the Duchess of Sutherland no 6233 LMS, shown on the left, and Sir Nigel Gresley no 4498 LNER, on the right, to celebrate the centenary of the 1921 Act.



Both are depicted at night visiting Leamington Spa Station, after recent rain.

The backdrop of Leamington Spa Station Platform 2 portrays the gardens maintained by The Friends of Leamington Station. Kevin is one of their volunteers. The station building can be seen in the distance on the right in both paintings. It was originally built in 1852, but rebuilt by the Great Western Railway in 1939 and listed as Grade II in 2003 thanks to the efforts of many.

To see more of Kevin’s railway paintings visit

<http://www.kevinparrish.co.uk/category/uncategorized/galleries/peace-projects-original-oil-paintings/transport-gallery/steam-locomotives-in-monochrome-oils/>

Repainting of the railway bridge in Princes Drive

At last! The railway bridge in Princes Drive is being repaired and refurbished by Network Rail, in preparation for welcoming spectators to next summer's Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. It is appreciated that the queues are very frustrating.



photo courtesy of Mark Adams

The artwork has been created by Jennie Moncur, the Creative Director of furniture company Vitsoe, whose headquarters are adjacent to the bridge, and who have funded Jennie's design. Warwick District Council is providing funding to cover the additional time and costs associated with the installation of the artwork.

Jennie was selected to work on the project given her previous successful designs for railway bridges in other parts of the country, particularly Gateshead where she designed artwork specifically for low bridges. It is worth noting that since they were painted high lorries haven't crashed into them.



photos courtesy of Jennie Moncur

Lord Leycester Hospital receives £1.42m from National Lottery Heritage Fund Success and immediate closure.

This is a summary of the message from Heidi Meyer, Master, to the Friends of the Lord Leycester:

“We close everything to the public to undertake critical building works and major restoration, starting now (January 2022), and reopening in 2023 with a much more enticing site for more visitors and more revenue.

As well as full funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we have received grants and donations from local authorities at all levels; Warwick charities, including (of course) the Warwick Society; famous national and international foundations and generous local benefactors. Without all these organizations, and the Friends, we would not have reached our Partner Funding Goal of £1 million to qualify for full Lottery funding.

By closing we lose 75% of our revenue but we are confident we can take austerity measures and keep going. The Friends’ monthly donation will help to provide a home for the Brethren and fund-raising will continue with the sale of named granite pavers for our Pathway of Support in the Master’s garden:



[Pathway of Support - lordleycester.co.uk](http://lordleycester.co.uk)

We also hope to arrange a few special events to compensate – a picnic in the garden, and possibly a hard hat tour of the site to inspect the work in progress.”

Additional note: Individual Leamington Society members have supported the Lord Leycester since Heidi’s talk in April 2018. Julia Engwell has been Secretary to the very successful fund-raising Committee and Marianne Pitts co-authored the book “*Masters and Brethren*” published 2021, about these men over 450 years. Available in Warwick at £7-50 and profits to the Hospital.

Remembering Iain Smith 1939-2021

Dr Iain Smith, a longstanding member of the Leamington Society, died on December 7th. Iain was a History Lecturer at Warwick University with a particular interest in the history of Africa and he retired in 2006. On his retirement he agreed to chair the committee of the newly formed Leamington Music Society and oversaw the organising of 350 events, many at the Pump Rooms, and developed a thriving education programme.

Iain loved Leamington and followed all new developments with great interest, always keen to join in the debates. He had a rich cultural life and enjoyed travelling abroad and fell walking in Scotland. He and his wife, Teresa, who died in 2020, will be much missed. Both contributed so much to the life of our town.

Margaret Begg

Christchurch Gardens Community Noticeboard

In January the Friends of Christchurch Gardens were awarded £1936.80 from the Town Council's Community Grant Fund for a Community Noticeboard.



Another improvement to Christchurch Gardens, thanks to the Friends.

Virtual Reality, the last medium?

Alex Harvey, co-founder and creative director at RiVR, 18th November 2021

Making a presentation about a technology as revolutionary as Virtual Reality to an audience who were probably not the most up-to-date with new technologies was never going to be easy. However, Alex Harvey's enthusiasm and eclectic collection of visual resources soon had everyone engaged and impressed by the range of applications he showed us. He began with giving us glimpses of training applications in which students could gain experience of fire scene or crime scene investigations by 'walking' around virtual environments, created from thousands of photographs taken from many different angles. But I think most of us were most engaged by the use of

the same technology to capture detailed 3-dimensional images of objects from the Leamington Museum's collections which can be explored in detail without them leaving the safety of the museum. The presentation ended with two short videos showing further applications, giving an 'owl's eye view' of Compton Verney, and exploring hidden tunnels beneath Warwick town centre. Alex has promised to make another visit bringing headsets which will allow us to experience Virtual Reality first-hand, and I for one can't wait!

Janet Ainley

Additional note: Google 'RiVR YouTube' to see examples of their work. The recording of the talk is on our website.

Sustainable Energy and Life in Refugee Camps.

Dr. Sarah Rosenberg-Jansen January 13th 2022

In strong reliable African sunshine solar panels are the obvious sustainable source of energy.

Tiny A4 panels power lamps and mobile phone chargers; larger panels fuel fridges and cookers, air conditioners and hospital equipment.



Solar powered street light on the High Street

In emergencies, refugees are given tents, torches and firewood, but as weeks and months pass tents are replaced by huts and energy provided by small diesel generators, 11 million world-wide, producing noise, fumes and carbon dioxide.

Today there are some 84 million displaced people: about half still in their native country, the others classified as refugees or asylum seekers, or – for political reasons – displaced.

4 million Palestinians, descendants of those expelled from Israel in 1947, were originally distinguished from refugees – a title then reserved for victims of World War II, and fugitive Venezuelans are regarded by their government as voluntarily displaced as it is now "safe to go home".



Sarah works in the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University and advises the United Nations as a world expert on alternative sustainable sources of energy.

She has spent months living in long-term camps, housing 200,000+ people, mainly in Rwanda and Kenya.

Refugees include all sorts and conditions of men and women, many with great entrepreneurial talent and initiative and all speaking more than one language (local, national and possibly international).

Inevitably a High Street develops with shops and businesses: a grinder for hire to crush grain into flour; a pan of hot fat producing delicious small doughnuts; repair and maintenance of essential mobile phones (see photo); hairdressers; lighted cafes with communal TV and delicatessen, selling spaghetti and mozzarella to Somalians who traditionally celebrate birthdays with an Italian meal. The UN does not supply sources of energy but people find it.

We heard some uncomfortable truths. Apart from Germany, refugees live in Middle East and African developing countries, not in the affluent west. The number of asylum seekers entering Britain hardly features on the pie-chart of immigration. Turkey shelters more than 3.5 million, the UK less than 134,000.

The best way to help financially is not through the UN, with its anomalies and bureaucracy, but through national charities (Oxfam or Save the Children), or through [Loans that change lives | Kiva](#). Sainsbury's charitable fund [Ashden Trust](#) sponsors sustainable energy.

Sarah's talk was fluent, first class and fascinating. The recording is on our website! Aren't we lucky?

Marianne Pitts

New members

We welcome to the Society:

Jim and Ruth Staunton

Ann Morrison

Jo Meakin

Officers and Committee

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

Vice Chairman: 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
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Clive Engwell	01926 420 454	Gary Jones	07866 602 507
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Co-opted members:

Archie Pitts	01926 885523	Bruno Eurich	
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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

www.leamingtonsociety.org

Formed 1956

Reg Charity No 516078



The
Leamington
Society

February 2022

Notice is hereby given that the **Annual General Meeting** of the Leamington Society for 2022 will be held on **Thursday, 19th May, starting at 7.00pm**. The venue is to be arranged.

Barbara Lynn, Acting Chairman

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 13th May 2021
3. Matters arising from the Minutes not included elsewhere
4. To receive reports from the Chairman and Sub Committees
5. To receive the independently examined Accounts of the Society for 2021-22
6. Election of Officers: Chairman, Vice Chairmen, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer
7. Election of four Committee Members
8. Election of Independent Examiner for 2022-23
9. Any other Business

PLEASE NOTE: **Nominations** of candidates for Officers and Committee must be forwarded to the **Acting Chairman not later than Thursday, 22nd April 2022**. Any voting will be by Secret Ballot at the Meeting. **Nominations for the committee are welcomed**.

Any motions for consideration at the meeting should also be received by this date. Nominations or motions will **not** be accepted at the Meeting. Nomination forms may be obtained from the Acting Chairman.

If there is to be an election or if any motion is received, notice will be sent to members seven days before the Annual General Meeting.