



November - December 2010

CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

Meetings usually take place at the Library Meetings Room on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30pm.

Thursday, November 18th:

County archaeologist **Bob Croft** will update us on the latest finds in Somerset. Bob's meetings are always a delight, and there have been many exciting discoveries since he last spoke to us in May 2004.

December: There was insufficient response to the idea of a Special General Meeting about our future, so no meeting.

CHANGE TO PROGRAMME

Thursday, January 20th:

Ian Boswall of Taunton and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust updates us on Musgrove Park Hospital's Plans & Projects.

Thursday February 17th:

Ralph Willoughby-Foster on Taunton's core strategy.

Carol Service

7 pm, Monday 13th December

Did you know that when the Civic Society started in the 1970s, it found a home in the Unitarian Schoolrooms, next to the Chapel in Mary Street?

Once again, members are invited to attend the Chapel's candle-lit Carol service (park in the usual car park).

Try a Christmas service with a twist and belt out familiar carols under the magnificent chandelier. Then over coffee and mince pies you can look around this fine eighteenth-century building.

Why I joined Taunton and District Civic Society (even though I live in Milverton) - by **Caroline Corfe**

Asked why I was interested in Taunton and District Civic Society, I reflected on the role the society plays within Taunton and what I, as a member, could offer.

As the ramifications of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill come to light, there could be more opportunities for grass roots community groups such as Civic Societies to lead, or at least contribute further to, local development plans and I would like to see our Civic Society rise to this challenge.

Although Taunton's growth has decelerated over the past two years with the recession, we are still witnessing some important developments within the townscape. Two well-designed wooden footbridges have made a huge difference in opening up Longrun Meadows, the Third Way Bridge is looking white and shiny (will it remain that colour?) and at Firepool, a number of intriguing old railway buildings have gone, cleared for the first phase of residential development.

I am also looking forward to the opening of the Museum of Somerset, although I think we need to keep an eye on Castle Green developments to ensure the quality of the design indicated in the plans transfers across to reality on the ground. The Civic Society should continue to support Project Taunton, Taunton Cultural Consortium, and the two Councils' efforts to create a civic space which has many uses - markets, music events, shared formal events, everyday socialising, relaxation - bringing residents and visitors into the town.

As arts officer for TDBC for seven years until March this year, I was appreciative of the support of the Civic Society while we developed the Public Art and Design Policy. Representing the Civic Society on the Public Art and Design Panel, Graham Ward has been a stalwart and constructive critical friend throughout the process which resulted in Taunton Deane's public art policy **The Public Life of Public Space**.

This states that any development of 15+ residential units or 2500 m² of commercial development must integrate public art into the design of the development from the outset. Exceptionally, for developments with little visual impact, an alternative contribution of 1% of construction costs will be required for general public realm improvements. We need to examine the design statements in planning applications for details of public art contributions. Public art is not all about a finished fixed 3D object - it also includes working creatively with planners and architects, stimulating community consultation and encouraging a range of diverse contributions to the design and function of a particular place or site.

Civic Society members have been active throughout Taunton's envisaging and planning process, attending consultation workshops and exhibitions and providing constructive feedback. I have pledged some of my time and energy in order to support this proactive stance and debate about good design of our public places, and to help create a sustainable heritage for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

A Hotel at the Cricket Club?

At the Project Taunton exhibition day at the Brewhouse the Cricket Club flew an interesting kite – the replacement of the Old Pavilion by a 50-bedroom hotel with extensive bar and dining facilities. In putting this project together they have been helped by the Castle Hotel, but at this stage they are inviting interest (and finance) from other hotel operators. The (still speculative) design is for 3 rectangular blocks forming a crescent round the pitch, with blocks linked by glass and steel wedges giving access to lifts and stairs. Two blocks are 5 storeys; the one nearest St James is 4. The Club points out that their new conference centre in the Colin Atkinson Pavilion may have more than 1000 delegates – potential customers – a week. St Modwen are hoping to develop another hotel just across the road on the Priory Bridge Road car park site: synergy or deadly competition?



(Also see the picture behind the title on page 1)

One cut not made!

Planning Group News Brief

Probably the best bit of news in these unconfident days of retrenchment is that Taunton will get central government money for the NIDR, including the Tone Bridge to connect with Priory Avenue roundabout.

There still aren't many planning applications but there are signs that the housebuilders are beginning to gear up to do more in future. For example, David Wilson Homes has held a consultation in Monkton Heathfield about a proposed 170 home development north of Avinghill's Farm (south of Yallands Hill).

At Norton Fitzwarren Barratt & Bellway have put in an application (25/10/0024) to improve the flood channels in the Ford Farm area, with a stated intention to follow up with a housing development at Ford Farm (which raises the possibility that Norton Fitzwarren would then finally get a by-pass). We note that residents of Norton Fitzwarren seem sceptical of the scheme's adequacy – we (and most planning officers) don't have the skills to evaluate that – let's hope that TDBC will engage people with the requisite expertise.

Abbey Manor Homes obtained outline permission in 2007 for 152 dwellings on the Mill Rise site (corner of Silk Mills Road and Staplegrove Road). Now Arc Homes, Crest Nicholson, Knightstone Housing Association and Abbey Manor Homes have jointly put in a reserved matters application to build 136 dwellings there (34/10/0029). The lower number of homes perhaps reflects a shift in market need – profit margins may be better if there is a higher proportion of the larger homes wanted by

people moving up the housing ladder.

Strategic Land Partnerships got outline permission in 2009 for a 113 dwellings and 3100 sq m of B1 or B8 employment land (that means non-office usage) development at Rylands Nurseries and Sunnymead on the western edge of Rockwell Green, and now Redrow are taking this forward (43/10/0113) by applying for reserved matters permission. The proposal includes an imaginative play space.

At Sellicks Green (just on the Taunton side of Blagdon village) H Tottle & Son want to redevelop their builder's yard plus some empty houses, and are hedging their bets by offering two alternative applications – one purely residential (30/10/0032) and the other mixed (30/10/0031). The parish council is against mixed-use as being suburban and out of character, and they feel there is little need for employment premises. The TDBC strategy team are against both proposals as violating the current Local Plan but feel that the residential plan is worse as it removes allocated employment land.

The hotel on the Park Street/ Wellington Road corner wants to revise its signage. Swan Paul have designed a scheme (38/10/0355 & 0357LB) that is intended to be "more modest, subtle and more in keeping with the building style". It is a definite improvement, as it removes signs that partially obscure the building. Mind you, given that the Corner House Hotel is fanciful Victorian Gothic, perhaps it's just as well the new restrained signs are not *exactly* aligned with the building's style.

Comments to Graham Ward on 01823 289605

Sweeping Away Clutter

It seems that Civic Voice's Street Pride campaign to reduce street clutter, together with earlier campaigning by Living Streets and other groups, has made an impression. The government is prompting councils to look at the problem, and Somerset County Council wants your help to pinpoint superfluous clutter. They are asking you to ring the Roads and Transport team on **0845 345 9155** if you know of:

- Any road signs, lines, bollards or railings that are no longer needed. For example, where a school has closed, but there is still a school warning sign for motorists in place.
- Road signs that you believe are unnecessary and clutter the environment.
- Signs displayed on a post when they could be sited on a street light column.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our Readers