



CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

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

Thursday, September 16th: History that Hurts:

Dr Todd Gray on slavery, blackshirts and looting in Devon.

Thursday, October 28th*:

Joint Meeting with Wellington Museum & Local History Society:

Paul Saturley, Parks Supervisor at TDBC on Wellington Park, a late Victorian foundation which has recently been restored. Meet at Wellington Junior School, South Street at 7.30pm

***On the fourth Thursday.**

Thursday, November 18th:

The ever popular county archaeologist, **Bob Croft**, will update us on the latest finds in Somerset

Do you want a Special General Meeting?

If members wish to discuss measures that can be taken to keep the society viable, then we will arrange a meeting in November or December. However, our constitution states that such a meeting should be attended by no less than 20 members, so we need names and commitment in advance. Please ring Fran (01823 337188) by 18th Sept, to allow for booking a room.

And if anyone feels that in Graham's absence they can take over for a few months as secretary, please ring me on the same number. FP

Double-whammy Hits Committee: Society cannot continue without immediate commitment and help

Fran Pitt, Chairman

With much sadness I have to report that the outcome forecast so strongly at the AGM in March is about to overtake us.

I said at the time that a committee of 5 was unsustainable, and we will soon be down to three: Graham's health has suffered recently and he is forced to stand down - I am pleading for an immediate stand-in Secretary to finish the year. And after nearly three years trying, Roger is at last selling his house and moving away - he will be relinquishing the post of Treasurer at the end of September.

No one came forward at the last AGM to commit to taking on these key roles of chairman, treasurer and secretary and no one has since approached us to enquire about them. **Unless volunteers can be found very quickly, the society will be formally disbanded at the AGM in March.** If members wish, there could be a *Special General Meeting* to discuss what steps should be taken to find new officers (from inside or outside the current membership).

If you disagree with the society folding, please understand that this is not a committee decision: we cannot legally continue without the main officers of an Executive Committee. And I am not in a position to change my mind about stepping down from the Chair in March.

But please don't cancel your standing orders just yet – if the Society is wound up at the AGM, the refunding of 2011 subscriptions on a pro rata basis will form part of the process.

Circumstances can change if people are prepared to work on them - members might come forward at an SGM. **You** might find someone who is prepared, not just to join, but to give the society commitment. Over the next two months we need help to hold a recruitment drive. In October a planned display in the Library will go ahead, but it will now state plainly that we need people to rescue the society and we will not sign up any new members unless they are prepared to be proactive from the beginning.

If, however, there is no longer any enthusiasm to keep the Society running, then we must bow to the inevitable. Perhaps one day a planning cause will arise to prompt younger people to start a new, vibrant and relevant civic society in Taunton, just as it did to start this one back in the 70s. A young phoenix can only arise from the ashes of the old one; it is possibly, however sadly, our duty to burn up this tired old bird and hope that we don't have to wait too long for a revival.

Longrun Bridge and Meadows Opened *(see photograph above):*

Mayor Jefferson Horsley officially opened this new leisure facility across the river from French Weir Park. With jazz from The Albion Horns, circus skills and other activities, Project Taunton's Robbie Lowes arranged a great party for all ages.

The new park and wildlife haven, reaching almost to Silk Mills Park and Ride, will allow access to Somerset College and Castle School. When roofed, the wooden construction in the picture will be an open-sided barn for the staging of community events. **FP**

The economic recovery is still patchy and weak, so developers don't -often can't - move. It must be maddening to watch plan dates slip into the past while nothing much happens. Recently we learned that funding has been secured, at last, to develop the "public domain" on the south bank of the Tone by the Priory Bridge car park. Work should start in the autumn, a year after it was trumpeted. It is all part of St Modwen's Firepool Development, and an outline application is in (later than expected) for offices, apartments and a hotel on the Priory Bridge car park. Detailed applications for the site will probably wait for clients to sign up to guarantee use of a building – and these prospects appear for a while and then seem to evaporate like morning mist.

Meanwhile the north bank former cattle market site is a desert of concrete and rubble, and likely to stay that way for some time. The Northern Inner Distributor road (NIDR) will (we hope) be completed via developer contributions as far as the social housing at the east end of Firepool Lock, but the NIDR's new Tone bridge to connect to the roundabout in Priory Avenue is unfunded (SCC and government cutbacks) – and that calls into question the adequacy of access to the whole Firepool site. SCC cuts will also indefinitely postpone the plan to pedestrianise North St. That will please some people!



Project Taunton team want to find interim uses for their unused sites. They are considering using the Cattle Market for visiting fairs, the circus and the annual vintage vehicle rally, possibly for allotments on raised beds (that strikes us as a really good idea – perhaps the guerrilla gardening movement could be encouraged to help). Other possibilities are Five-a-side football pitches on "plastic grass". Does anyone have further ideas?

Time for a Second Take on the Vision for Taunton?

When the original Vision was launched, the economy seemed healthy, the South-west Regional Development people were telling us that Taunton must grow, and fast. The plans that emerged, while ambitious, were still quite moderate in terms of the scale and massing of developments. Since then the SW Regional Strategy has pressed the accelerator down harder, and after the Public examination the Secretary of State said more, even more! Nearly everyone was unhappy to be compelled to build so much.

All this growth pressure forced the Forward Planners to allow for buildings that were generally substantially bigger (higher and denser) than the original Vision, and developers put in proposals (and sometimes got permission) for even larger buildings.

It would all be funded by firms and – particularly – government departments moving into the town. Council leaders of all persuasions liked that idea. Now, as cuts loom, and Taunton is found to be overly dependant on the public sector, the idea of government tenants is "out". Meantime, the Regional Strategy is a dead duck, and local government is supposed to have more freedom to set its own targets and agenda. So perhaps we are *not* compelled to try and make the best of it, but can try for what we think is good for Taunton.



We have seen that as the pressure to do more on less land mounted, the planning applications produced sites that had virtually no trace of local identity (could have been any large town centre anywhere) and damaged the feel of Taunton as a market town and county seat.

Isn't it time that we said, well, it ain't all gonna happen soon, so lets take another look at what the Vision ought to be, and hold to it better next time around?

What do you think? Tell us! **GW**

Knock 1 down, get 2 soon - social housing at Victoria Gate (38/10/0263)

Concern over people who will be moved out of the 31 properties to be demolished, and then moved back into some of the 64 dwellings that will replace them, put this on the Gazette front page.



Figure 13: Section through site along Somerset Place Frontage

We have looked at this Knightstone/Boon Brown application simply from a planning perspective. It shows many similarities to their other proposals approved in the last 2 years. Quite distinctly modern, but not obtrusively different from the older housing nearby. We feel that the proposal delivers substantially more good affordable housing than the existing rather mundane buildings, and will not harm the general ambiance of this southern edge of Victoria Park.



Comments to Alex Ferguson at 01823 336165, pgchair@tauntoncivic.org.uk