



CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

Meetings usually take place at the Library Meetings Room on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30pm. More details on page 4.

Thursday, 18th March:

not the 25th as previously advertised: AGM followed by our annual party, including a quiz with a twist.

Thursday, 15th April:

Pedestrian Matters and Street Audits with Hannah Fountain and Emma Cockburn, SCC.

Thursday, 22nd April, at

5.30 pm: a second guided tour of the Museum of Somerset for 20 quick-off-the-mark members. Booking closes on March 18th.

Thursday, 13th May, 2 pm: book now for a visit to historic Norton Manor.

Thursday, 20th May: *From Carthorses to Computers – the Story of Farming in the 20th Century*, with Colin Pady.

Saturday, 5th June, 2pm: John Brunson of Glastonbury Conservation Society will show us around this unusual small town.

2009-10: And the Winner Is?...All of Us

As I write the BAFTA's are on TV, so here are my nominations for the Civic Society year: box office smash was Pat Hase, whose *Christmas Day in the Workhouse* attracted the most members; best return act was our favourite duo, Ralph and Mark with their TDBC update, closely followed by Mike Rowland with his talk about Bristol and Bath; Tom Coleman's *West Country Farmhouses* exceeded all expectations and Joshua Hart's talk prompted the setting-up of our *Living Streets* sub-group.

The audience participation award goes to ...yourselves, for making the 2009 AGM and Party such a success.

Left sitting at the tables, politely clapping, are Graham Love (Taunton Town Centre Manager), David Gale (sustainable development) and Frazier Osment (Design Code & TCAAP), whose excellent talks surprisingly drew smaller audiences, even though their subjects seemed to be particularly in keeping with Civic Society ethos.

Building of the year must be the Beacon Centre at Musgrove Park Hospital, although Open Door's conversion of Mary Street Schoolrooms and the Castle Museum renovation were hot on its heels. Sidmouth wins visit of the year for a wonderful and much appreciated day, and a rosette goes to Wiveliscombe Civic

Society for the Severn Barrage talk, plus a blue ribbon for all members who attended.

The winner of the multi tasking medal is Graham Ward; honours for research go to Elizabeth Tansley, whilst Paula Ward and Pat Bazley win Really Useful Committee Members gold stars. Alexander Ferguson gets a statuette for charring and hosting Planning Group meetings; the members of the Planning Group gain distinctions and Max and Felicity Hebditch are Mentioned in



Dispatches for setting up our Living Streets group. Elizabeth mounts the podium again to claim her sash for tea-making, her army of helpers all get monitors' badges; and Robin Cassell takes honours for driving Graham and me to SWACS meetings at Launceston. My thanks go to every one of you.

The demise of the Civic Trust and the tentative first steps of the CSI (now calling itself Civic Voice) have been a constant theme. Also considered were the Public Art and Design Policy, English Heritage's Conservation Areas at Risk Campaign, and most recently the Core Strategy. Plans for Castle Green have received a lot of attention, as well as Firepool Lock – with sadness that Gadd will no longer be working in that area. The Pig Market has been turned into Orchard – lighter and fresher, but no pigs, no seats, no character? The Cricket Club completed the West Stand and the (undistinguished) Club Hub, and

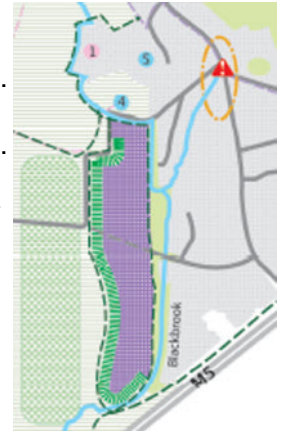
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Planning News

Our January Meeting and the Core Strategy

Ralph Willoughby-Foster put on a virtuoso performance outlining the Core Strategy draft: 338 pages apparently all memorised. His team, no matter the current economic circumstances or what they think ideal, has to produce a strategy conformant to Government guidance and consistent with the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Its targets are patently unachievable by 2026: a further 10 or 20 years might be more realistic.

Ralph highlighted Taunton's problems – tight geography and inadequate or inappropriate allocation of development and employment land in the past. Consequently the council doesn't have the required 5 year stock of housing land, which could lead to developers applying to build anywhere they like, even in a Green Wedge, and getting permission on appeal. Potential employers are being turned away because suitable land isn't available. The Core Strategy seeks to remedy those issues. Some proposals are controversial, e.g. allocating part of the Vivary Green Wedge for 600 houses and small workshops at Killams [see picture]. On the plus side, new Green Wedges or corridors are proposed for the urban extensions.



Questions largely centred on employment, the economy and transport. Where would jobs come from? How could congestion be relieved so that growth doesn't make the town seize up? How could people in the new urban areas get to the shops and to work? Would the necessary distributor roads get built?

Project Taunton's Mark Green remains optimistic, even after a year of financial storms. He told us of plans for offices on Priory Bridge car park in May, with possibly more by the end of the year. Work on plans for the new retail centre in the High Street area is progressing well. But there are funding problems: Taunton's New Growth Point money has been cut by more than 40%, there's no money to complete the NIDR (although it was hoped for enough to build it up to Area E of Firepool Lock where there is planning permission for 100+ apartments), and the Third Way contractor is sitting on his hands until he sees that the County Council has got the money!

The Planning Group's view of the Core Strategy

The Group thinks there is quite a bit that's good (e.g. the proposals for Wellington), but also some real issues. The strategy talks of "distinctive communities with their own role and character" then proposes housing densities of 20 to 24 dwellings per acre for the urban extensions, and District Heating or Combined Heat & Power, which only works economically with large housing units. What chance local character there?

Taunton is said to need a more highly skilled workforce – but their families will want good houses, not dense estates and apartments. There's little obvious provision for expanding higher educational facilities, or encouraging research organisations, and no mention of incentives for employers to invest. And why are we planning for lots of high skill jobs when 30% of our population have few or poor qualifications? The strategy appears too rigid and prescriptive (like the last local plan) to cope with future economic development needs.

The mantras about improving public transport are unaccompanied by ideas as to how this can be achieved at an acceptable cost, and the focus on cycling ignores the fact that most families will still need the use of a car. This may lead to under-provision of both residential and town centre parking – and the latter will worsen our economic performance. A northern bypass is proposed, but there is still no southern road to link South Road and Honiton Road, let alone provide a southern route that avoids the town centre.

We feel that the Core Strategy seeks to square too many circles, and contains too many contradictions. Perhaps more radical thinking is needed, such as concentrating growth into a "new town" close to Taunton, large enough to have its own identity and enough shops and services to be self-contained. That might be preferable to scattering estates around the fringes of Taunton, none of which are big enough to be a "place".

Snapping paper on the public, TDBC also issued 5 more strategies: Village Halls, Green Spaces, Allotments, Sports Facilities and Affordable Housing (333 pages) and the sustainability assessment (714 pages).

Planning Applications

Public Realm works along the Tone –St Modwen – 38/09/0400

St Modwen won the contract for the former Cattle Market site and the Priory Bridge car park across the Tone – i.e. Firepool. Clearance and remediation work progresses in the former market area, but this application seeks to improve the riverbanks downstream from Priory Bridge to Firepool. The south bank will have extensive landscaping, creating a pleasant space well integrated with the existing large willows.



[cont. P3]

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 2010

Please note that only members whose annual subscriptions for 2010 are fully paid up may speak or vote at the meeting.

Agenda

- Apologies for absence
- Minutes of AGM 2009 (issued at meeting)
- Matters arising
- Chairman's report 2009-2010
- Treasurer's report
- Election of Officers, Committee & Sub-Committees
- Any other business

This business meeting is scheduled to last no longer than 30 minutes.

Again, we ask for nominations in advance for the Executive Committee.

Those willing to stand for re-election are Fran Pitt (chair), Graham Ward (secretary), Paula Ward (now nominated for minutes secretary) and Elizabeth Tansley.

Roger Gilbraith will reluctantly stand for treasurer, should there be no other nominee. Pat Bazley will stand down.

We are still in great need of a programme organiser, and this year we hope for a chairman in waiting to take over the role

in 2011. We also need ordinary committee members.

We ask you to contact Fran or Graham with your nominations for the following posts, before March 16th, please.

- Chairman
- Vice Chairman
- Secretary
- Minutes Secretary
- Treasurer
- Programme organiser
- Membership secretary
- Publicity rep.
- Committee members without portfolio

We are also asking for a Civic Sense editor, or someone prepared to help write articles etc.

You can also hand your nomination in at the start of the meeting, and you can nominate yourself. If you can include the name of a member willing to second your nomination please do so. Fran Pitt is at 10 Wellington Road, Taunton, TA1 4EG, 01823 337188, info@tauntoncivic.org.uk; Graham Ward's details are below.

Planning Applications *[Continued]*

Cades Farm Phase 2: 43/10/0003 & 0004 – 72 homes by Persimmon

Another segment of this estate, just on the Wellington side of Cades Farm, and bordering the main road into Wellington town centre. There are 29 affordable and 43 market dwellings, a mix of 2 and 3 bed terraced housing, and 3 and 4 bed detached houses. It is in typical modern estate style, tightly packed with a lot of wiggly little cul-de-sacs, but at least the scene below shows that you can garage your car.



Ruskin Close – demolish 37, build 46 (38/10/0050)

Knightstone Housing Association recently had Boon Brown design a very “contemporary” block of flats at 49 Wordsworth Drive. Now, on a connecting site some quite interesting designs in the same vein *[also see front page picture]* are proposed to replace 35 one bed apartments and a two bed house in Council ownership with 2 one bed, 24 two bed apartments and 19 houses (2 with two, 16 with three and 3 with four beds), all to be owned by Knightstone. One privately owned apartment will be replaced. Car parking is 1.2 spaces per house. The designs drew favourable comments at our February meeting. The downside is that the site is very tight, with minimal green space and landscaping.



Other Applications

The makeover of Castle Green as the main public space in the centre of Taunton (38/09/0388 & 0389LB) has been approved. In general we support it, but feel the proposed bridge over the Castle Moat is both unsympathetic to the Castle, intrusive and a waste of public money. There is still no satisfactory resolution to the problems created by removing the bus stops and car parking from the existing area – they are not “material planning considerations”.

The Winchester Arms has just put in applications to enclose an extended outside seating area, blocking off part of the Green (31/10/0039). Surely against the idea of this open space?

Blue Cedar Homes gained approval for 14 homes at Compass Hill (38/09/0366). Blue Cedar went to considerable lengths to win over nearby residents, and tried hard to accommodate their concerns: altogether an exemplary example of how to manage an application to infill a site.

Comments to Graham Ward at 01823 289605, planning@tauntoncivic.org.uk

Review: Jill to the Rescue!

In February, Jon Upsher was unable to give his talk on Stone and Partners. Instead, Jill Cooper stepped into the breach at very short notice and gave us a brilliantly illustrated guide to the London 2012 venues (copyright precludes use of certain terms).

Whether you agree with holding the Games in England or not, it was all fresh and interesting stuff - how the site was chosen and the heavily polluted land prepared; the 'green' theme - somewhat at odds with Zaha Hadid's iconic aquatics building; what will happen to the buildings and the district afterwards; where to go to see the sites and much more.

Superb...

and many thanks to Jill.

A new National Body for Civic Societies

You will know from previous articles that, after the loss of the Civic Trust, Civic Societies wanted an overarching national organisation, but one that paid attention to their needs and was of real help. The CSI has responded with sound ideas for both structure and objectives.

The big stumbling block that emerged was cost – could Civic Societies adequately fund it? Nearly all Societies are (like us) financial tiddlers. A compromise has been reached – for the first year the new body will run with a budget about half the ideal size, and try to prove that it provides sufficient value to justify Societies paying more.

They are now on the brink of launching the new body, to be called Civic Voice, and we are invited to join. We should and will think about it – at the AGM.

Missing - £400!!

Members' subscriptions for 2010 were due in January. Thank you to the 54 members who paid the correct amount at the right time - and a reminder to the other 44 (you know who you are - don't you?) who are still delinquent, in whole or in part.

Please don't force me to chase you individually - I really do have better things to do! Send your cheque now, for £12 or £18 (single or family membership) or less if you have paid by an out-of-date Standing Order, made out to Taunton & District Civic Society, to me,

**Roger Gilbraith,
12 Manor Road, Taunton TA1 5BD**

The Diary in Detail

The programme for the year will be sent out to paid-up members in May, along with details of this year's executive committee.

Thursday 18th March: AGM and party. We apologise for getting the date wrong in the last Civic Sense - please try to come and have a convivial time over wine, nibbles and raffle. This year, Stephen Major's quiz will follow an adapted 'Who wants to be a Millionaire' format and will cover Taunton and District trivia – sounds interesting.

The latest tour of the *Museum of Somerset* project is on **Thursday 22nd April** at 5.30pm. The last tour attracted so many that the museum team felt swamped, and were horrified by some inappropriate footwear, so they have stipulated no more than 20 this

time – and anyone not in sturdy shoes will be sent home! It's strictly first come, first served, paid-up members only. Graham will take the names of the first 20 to book. Ring him on 01823 289605, before 18th March.

On **Thursday 15th April** a talk by Hannah Fountain & Emma Cockburn of SCC Highways will focus on Pedestrian matters & Street Audits, and we will be leaving the Library Meetings Room for a short walk to audit a Town Centre street or two.

Thursday, 13th May, from 2pm we will have a privileged peek at Norton Manor (inside Norton Manor Camp). For security reasons, names and car registrations are needed in advance, so if you want to come you must submit the booking form below.

Project Taunton talks to the Town

From 8th – 12th March between 12.30 and 1.30pm at 'Our Place, Your Place: Taunton' in the High St, next to Past Times, there will be lunch time talks about Project Taunton, including Meet the Firepool Developer (Tuesday) and The Future of the Brewhouse (Thursday). Also guided walks around Taunton's regeneration areas, starting at 1.45pm. All free but **booking is essential**. Contact Hayley Bell at Project Taunton, 01823 250809 or email

hayley.bell@projecttaunton.co.uk
to book your place.

Chairman's report, continued from page 1.

Somerset Square opened...with a whimper and a safety problem. Probably the best news was the plan for turning Longrun Meadows into a public leisure amenity (when funds allow). All of these have kept the Planning Group exercised, as you will know from Graham's page 2 reports.

Finally, I would like to thank those retiring at this AGM: Executive committee member Pat Bazley for 10 years of first-rate commitment; Living Streets' Max and Felicity Hebditch and Planning Group member David Crawford.

On 18th March I shall raise a glass to you all and to the Civic Society in 2010. Let us all make it a good year.

I/we wish to Visit Norton Manor [please enter all names below]

Vehicle registration no.....

Send to Graham Ward, 37 Haines Park, Taunton, TA1 4RQ