



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.

There will be no meeting in July.

Thursday, August 20th:
Mike Rowland, 'A Tale of Two Cities; Bristol and Bath'.

Wednesday, September 9th, coach trip to Sidmouth, to be guests of the **Sid Vale Association**. Please return the slip on page 4 if you want to be part of it.

Thursday, September 17th, Graham Love, Taunton Town Centre Manager.

Thursday, September 24th, at 6.15pm: A tour of the Aspect development in Corporation Street, led by architect Stephen Major.

NEW, Monday 19 October at 7.30 pm at **Wiveliscombe Community Centre**, a talk about the likely impact of the Severn Barrage.

We won't be visiting the Hyde, Dillington's new studio and accommodation block, because we cannot get the architect along, and without that interpretation we don't think it will be a worthwhile trip. But if you get the chance, do take a look.

IS THERE NEW ENTHUSIASM IN THE AIR?

The May and June meetings drew an unprecedented number of positive comments – perhaps because we appreciated the passion and eloquence of the speakers for their subjects, both of which looked forwards towards a better way of life. June's Joshua Hart was so impressed by his reception that he sent us this:

Driven to Excess: How Motor Traffic Erodes Residential Quality of Life and How 20mph Can Begin to Restore it

Thank you for inviting me to give a talk. I presented findings from my research in Bristol examining the social and quality of life impacts of rising levels of motor traffic on residential life. Confirming the results of a study by Prof. Donald Appleyard in the 1970's in San Francisco, I found that people living on a busy street in Bristol have less than a quarter the number of local friends as their neighbours who live on a quiet, low traffic street. Considering the other well documented side effects of excessive motor vehicle traffic, such as air pollution, noise, carbon emissions and road casualties, at Living Streets we feel there is now a strong case to make 20mph the default speed limit wherever people live, work, or play throughout the UK.



Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians, working to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets where people want to walk. We have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In 1934 (when there were 2 million cars on UK roads, as opposed to

28 million in 2009), our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and a 30mph default speed limit. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk, and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces. We would be happy to welcome Taunton Civic Society as an affiliated organization, and are keen to support a new Living Streets group forming in Taunton to focus specifically on issues that affect walking.

In June we are launching a new national campaign, working to support our network of local groups and affiliated organizations lobbying their councils for a saner speed in our cities, towns, and villages. A 20mph limit has been shown to improve the sociability of residential streets, improve road safety, and reduce pollution and noise. You

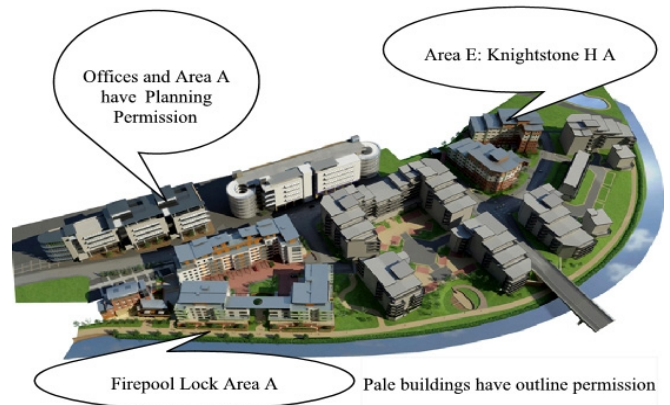
can download a copy of our campaign pack (with all the facts and evidence backing a lower limit) at www.livingstreets.org.uk. To read more about the Driven to Excess research, download a copy of the full report and the new poster, go to www.driventoexcess.org.

If you share our vision of safe, attractive and enjoyable streets across the UK, then please join us as a member or supporter at the Living Streets website, or ring 0207 3774900.

Planning Group News Brief

A Quiet Time

Few substantial planning applications have been made in May and June. But when all the main national builders have run away, our local firms keep going: apart from Pegasus at the Cricket Club the main developments this year have been Summerfield's 22 flats at Compass Hill and Gadd's Aspect development in Corporation Street – available by the end of the year despite delays due to vandalism by late night rowdies. Gadd Homes also hopes to start soon on the 100 apartments



and 4 houses of Firepool Lock Area A, and have submitted an application on behalf of Knightstone Housing Association for 108 affordable apartments.

Knightstone Housing Association at Area E, Firepool Lock (38/09/0190)

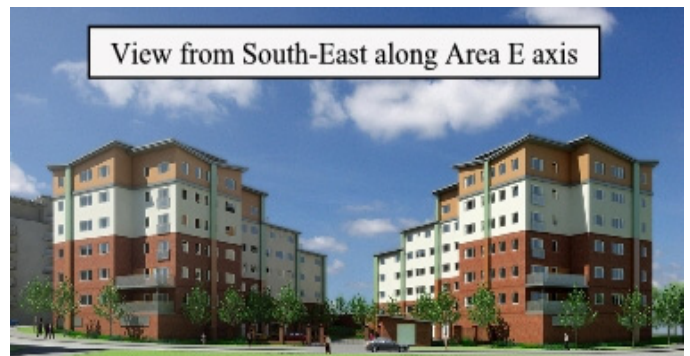
The basic layout and sizes of all the blocks that make up Firepool Lock has been fixed by the outline planning permission given last year. Area E is made up of 2 high density blocks of 5 rising to 7 storeys plus another storey for the service core, set with the low end of each block close to the railway. The western block borders the Northern Inner Distributor Road, so with the railway as well residents will be exposed to a fair bit of transport noise.

There are 32 one-bed and 72 two-bed apartments, and 4 two-bed units fitted for disabled people. Parking is mostly in a ground level undercroft, with 66 places (serving 60% of the apartments).

You now see such massive and tall apartment blocks in many

towns, as a direct result of government instructions to achieve high density (this proposal manages 275 beds per acre) and to produce much needed affordable dwellings. High-rise towers went out of favour after manifestations of social problems and poor building practice like Ronan Point, so this is the new urban solution. It may be appropriate for cities, but the results seem out of character for medium sized towns – and might they also fall victim to social problems?

Other government guidance emphasises the importance of place-making and local character, but Whitehall man speak with forked tongue, for there is, in practice if not in principle, a hierarchy of priorities, and both high density (as an aid to sustainability, and an antidote to urban sprawl) and affordability seem to trump character issues – and of course factors such as return on investment affect decisions: the market housing in Area A can afford a more costly design treatment – and it shows.



Castle Green.

Project Taunton submitted this application a month ago, but since a flood report is awaited it has not yet appeared. They say “plans for Castle Green, which is surrounded by historical buildings...were developed by LDA Design following considerable consultation with the public, stakeholders and local experts. The public exhibition held earlier this year at the Brewhouse enabled people to see proposals for Castle Green and voice their opinions. The de-

signers also worked with local schools via the Project Taunton Young Champions programme where pupils put forward their ideas for how the area should be developed.” They hope for approval by the end of September and to start redevelopment by early 2010.

[Pictures courtesy of Gadd Homes and Project Taunton]
Comments to Graham Ward at 01823 289605, planning@tauntoncivic.co.uk

Over the past fifty years, our streets have been designed to facilitate motor traffic flow, often at the expense of pedestrian safety, convenience, and enjoyment. We deserve communities where we have travel options, where our children have safe places to play, and where we know our neighbours. Join our growing community for change and let's make it happen!

*Joshua Hart,
Network Development Manager, Living Streets*

The effectiveness of de-cluttering streets, blurring the edges between pedestrian and traffic and lowering the speed limit in town centres and residential areas has been proved consistently in several Northern European towns, and has been extensively reported

in the British press. Taunton's main example of this sort of street, St James, has been heavily criticised over the years, but significantly there have been no accidents there since it was altered.

Members at the meeting indicated a willingness to join Living Streets and, and some have agreed to take an active part if we do. The committee will discuss it at the beginning of July.

Coincidentally, several of the Living Streets concerns, such as cluttered streets, are cited by English Heritage as reasons for the decline in Conservation areas. They have just launched a campaign to try to halt that decline—see below.

Comments to Fran Pitt at 01823 337188, info@tauntoncivic.co.uk, 10 Wellington Road, Taunton, TA1 4EG

English Heritage launches Conservation Areas at Risk campaign



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Conservation areas are one of the great successes of the civic society movement and there are over 9,300 across the country. They were only introduced in the 1960s after a concerted campaign led by Duncan Sandys and have been key to protecting the character of villages, towns and cities everywhere. A large number of civic societies contributed to the survey and civic societies are featured in the report.

The headline results of the English Heritage survey are that 1 in 7 conservation areas is in decline or expected to be so, whilst 1 in 6 conservation areas is improving. Urban areas are twice as likely to be at risk as rural ones.

The main causes of decline are:

- unsympathetic replacement doors and windows (83% of conservation areas)
- poorly maintained roads and pavements (60%)
- street clutter (45%)
- loss of boundary walls, fences or hedges (43%)
- unsightly satellite dishes (38%)

- effects of traffic calming or traffic management (36%)
- alterations to front elevations, roofs and chimneys (34%)
- unsympathetic new extensions (31%)
- advertisements (23%)
- neglected green spaces (18%)

Conservation areas with community support are more than twice as likely to improve – but only half of all areas have such support.

English Heritage's Conservation Areas at Risk campaign encourages local authorities to make much wider use of their powers to control developments. Local civic societies can lobby local authorities to use Article 4 Directions and enforce against illegal development, promote good practice to local residents to help avoid the spread of UPVC windows and loss of traditional front doors and front gardens, identify local landmarks and audit street clutter as evidence for campaigning.

Go to www.english-heritage.org.uk/conservationareas for more information.

Taken from a bulletin published Tuesday 23rd June, 2009.

After the Civic Trust (CT)

The CT's failure made Civic Societies re-examine their need for mutual support and a collective voice, and at least two alternatives are emerging.

Some of the Regional Civic Society groupings established by the Trust want to offer a stronger focus for their local societies than was ever available from the CT. We belonged to the Outer South West federation which has become the South West Association of Civic Societies (SWACS), chaired by Peter Berman (Wiveliscombe CS).

SWACS has begun to produce new benefits for member societies, such as a quarterly planning update from a professional planning consultant.

Meanwhile two former trustees of the Civic Trust have created the Civic Societies Initiative (CSI), a temporary

organisation that aims to see if a national body can be re-created. The CSI is backed by the National Trust (funding a year's salary for a director), by CPRE and RIBA (loaning offices in London and Liverpool) and the North of England Civic Trust (providing website and financial services). The director is Tony Burton, a former deputy director of the CPRE and strategy director at the National Trust. Griff Rhys Jones is a front man and is appealing for £50,000.

The CT had lost sight of its original role and paid little attention to local societies. No one wants a Civic Trust mark 2. The CSI says that "the future needs to be rooted in what the societies want and they need to drive the way forward". SWACS and some other regions agree but argue that one way to ensure this would be to route funding for any central body through the regional bodies, and do much more at the regional level.

We believe that it is essential that any new body is driven by the needs of societies – providing things like training, membership initiatives, low-cost access to professional resources, support for societies fighting major issues – and that the movement is "bottom-up" rather than "top-down".

However, we recognise that the old regional organisations were even less visible than the Trust and did very little, so our position is that both of these initiatives have a lot to prove, and that both will find it very difficult to get sufficient funding. Individual societies will probably have to pay more – the test of success will be if we get better value for money than we got from the CT.

Comments to Graham Ward 01823 289605 or Fran Pitt 01823 337188

The Civic Sense
82 Lisieux Way,
Taunton, TA1 2LF
info@tauntoncivic.org.uk

A Thundering Good Tour

A thunderstorm marked the start of our visit to the old Castle Museum site, but the surprises were the popularity of the event (with over 30 attending, there were not enough hard hats and fluorescent vests), and the impressive reception committee.

Pollard & Sons' Director Martin Blake was there as arranged, with site manager Geoff Cann who explained the structural matters. However, I was delighted to see our good friend Tom Mayberry, and he had come with the key members of his team to take us from the newly exposed archaeology, through the future use of every room, and explain the funding. We were privileged to go into areas only just opened up, and the enthusiasm of our hosts was so infectious that I for one felt more excited by this project than ever before.

The undercroft and the previously

private south range will be stunning, whilst the thematic treatment of displays such as 'Discovering', 'Coming and Going' (the impact of transport on the county), and 'Gathering' (from Harvest Home to Glastonbury Festival) is likely to prove a unique solution to the problem of too much Somerset history to tell chronologically.

I cannot hope to do justice here to the excellent hour spent with these wonderful people, so if you missed it, determine to come to the next tour in spring 2010. In the meantime, keep up to date on the website, www.somerset.gov.uk/museums.

The Museum of Somerset hopes to open simultaneously with the new Castle Green in spring 2011.

One of the nicest rooms is in the tower: the circular 'Reflecting' room will be for quiet meditation, it's walls covered with Somerset related quotations. **We have been asked to furnish some of these**, so thinking caps on. Send to: Fran Pitt, at info@tauntoncivic.org.uk, or 10 Wellington Road, Taunton, TA1 4EG.

David Gale: "a Breath of Fresh Air"...

Or so he was described after his talk in April. There are no half measures in the Gale and Snowden sustainable machine for living, with construction of the highest quality to the most scientifically proven design. Those prepared to live in a completely airtight house enjoy a 24/7/12 stable temperature achieved without central heating, at a cost of only 8p a day—what it takes to recover heat from the environment.

David's talk impressed with energy statistics: each of us is a 200-300 watt heat source: the energy to make building materials varies greatly: taking wood as 1, brick needs 4 times the energy, glass 14, steel 24 while lead needs over 300 times more energy.

Children's bronchial problems are exacerbated by the mites that live in the hard-to reach and clean bits of fitted carpets under radiators. And didn't we just know that it was a retrograde step to build kitchens without a north-wall larder?

Everything was well explained and backed up with evidence. It all seems to be good sense, and there are plenty of buildings in Europe built on these lines. The drawback is that there doesn't seem to be the will in Britain to make such specifications the norm. Consequently both skills and materials are scarce. And there does appear to be an awful lot of wood cladding. Fran Pitt

The Diary in Detail

Thursday, August 20th: Mike Rowland. *Bristol and Bath, twin cities on the same river, just 11 miles apart: an exploration of their many differences - and their many similarities.* Mike Rowland talked to us about Brunel and the Clifton Suspension Bridge in 2006, and returns by request of Joyce Samson.



Thurs. September 17th: Graham Love, the new Town Centre Manager. Apart from the last incumbent, whose tenure was so brief he had time only to wave goodbye, we have been addressed by every new Manager since the post was introduced. Each of them has outlined their plans and hopes for the Town Centre, shown their different styles of management, and we have always found it a good opportunity to make observations and forge links.

Thurs. September 24th, at 6.15pm: Stephen Major, the Aspect development in Corporation Street. Meet in the Cider Press Garden for a chance to look around the new shops, one bed and studio apartments and the 'street in the sky'. [photo-montage courtesy of Gadd Homes]

Wednesday, September 9th: the Sidmouth trip as guests of the Sid Vale Association (SVA). **The Berrys coach will leave Tangier coach park at 9am**, to arrive in Sidmouth at latest 10.30am. Refreshments will be provided and then we split into two groups to explore, from either end, Margaret's Meadow and the Byes along the River Sid. After lunch (bring a picnic, or try a sea front café), we have a guided tour of Regency Sidmouth, a visit to the town's museum and a talk on the Jurassic coastline as we take a seafront stroll. A packed and interesting day.

This trip will be advertised to at least three other groups a week after the *Civic Sense* is sent out. Given the level of interest already shown, please return the slip below as soon as possible to secure a place.

Wednesday, 9th September: coach trip to Sidmouth – only £10.00 per head

No. attending.....Name(s).....Tel No.....

I enclose a cheque (payable to 'Taunton & District Civic Society') for £.....

Post to Fran Pitt, 10, Wellington Road, Taunton, TA1 4EG