

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The October follow up meeting to the April meeting with Breckland leaders was badged as Thetford Neighbourhood Forum. Numbers were slightly down on the initial meeting and the meeting took the format of presentations from the Moving Thetford Forward Team and the Thetford Task Force which was put in place following the April meeting. Questions from the floor included the lack of progress with regard to a skatepark, a new bus station, the Abbey Barns and football pitch provision. I have met with Trevor Holden to pass on a number of comments which were made to me regarding the format and content of the evening. The next 'Forum' is earmarked for Tuesday 14th April 2009.

Whilst I realise that the idea of using a Task Force trying to solve problems which may cross a number of authority boundaries can be useful, I am dismayed at why everyday problems obvious to anyone walking around the town are not being dealt with. Is it that people are too apathetic to report them or is it thought that somebody else must have reported them, or have individuals been worn down over the years with little action forthcoming? I must speak as I find in that once a routine matter, whether it be a replacement sign or faulty street light, has been reported it is usually dealt with. When there is something that doesn't have an easy solution or will involve extra cost above routine maintenance then we find things dragging on eternally. Stuart Wilson and I quickly compiled a 120 photograph taster of basic problems in and around the Town Centre that should be being dealt with and passed these on, let's hope the Task Force can show its worth and get these matters resolved. Something which I have suggested to Trevor Holden is a website with a list of problems already reported so people know if their particular issue needs a phone call. This would then act as a good checklist for the authorities and the Task Force to ensure matters were being dealt with. One of the options may be to utilise the existing www.fixmystreet.com, however, how this fits with the Council's internal reporting will require further discussion. We all have our part to play in improving the town, let's get reporting. Telephone Street Scene on 01362 656878 or email streetscene@breckland.gov.uk.

Two football pitches have been marked out on Barnham Common and are available for use. There are no changing facilities but at least it is a start. Further use of the Common may have to have an impact study carried out in case birds on the adjoining wildlife area may be disturbed by displaced walkers. There are still hopes that an improved football facility can be developed within the Charles Burrell School site.

The Moving Thetford Forward Issues & Options Questionnaire received almost 1,000 responses. The results can be seen on www.movingthetfordforward.com. The three priorities identified were a new Bus Station, a new community hall and improvements to historic buildings. The results will be used, along with the evidence base reports on various issues such as water, transport and energy, in the production of the next stage of the Thetford Area Action Plan. These 'Preferred Options' will be published in February 2009 and will give more idea where things are going to be put. Something which has restricted the amount of choice there is in respect of the location of various aspects of housing, employment and recreation is a report on the Stone Curlew which effectively rules out any development to the south east. There will be a six week consultation period before the final Plan is prepared for publication at the end of 2009. A theme of Thetford: Historic Past - Healthy Future has been chosen and this fits with Thetford's recent award of £900k from central government to encourage health, wellbeing, exercise and diet over a three year period.

The plans for 2009 Thomas Paine Bicentenary are progressing well with a programme of events centred on the weekend of the 6th/7th June and a formal Dinner on 8th June.

(Continued on page 2)

Future Activities

Meetings

All at the United Reformed Church at 7.30pm unless stated

- Jan 6th Flying an Airbus - Shaun Manning
- Feb 3rd A character I have met - Sqdn Ldr John Bloomfield
- Mar 3rd Thetford Municipal Charities - Danny Jeffrey & David Osborne
- Mar 10th (*Special Meeting*) Moving Thetford Forward, Preferred Options - Richard Kay
- Apr 7th Vernacular Buildings Study - Breckland Society

Outings & Events

- Jan 3rd Xmas Social - Music by Martin Williams - Carnegie Room 7.30pm Cost £10
- Jan 31st Thomas Paine Dinner, Bell Hotel. Tickets £22 from Stuart Wright

We have many new members and in order to get to know one another and the Committee we are holding a Cheese & Wine 'mixer' evening on 21st March in the United Reformed Church. Cost £5 each, proceeds to St Nicholas Hospice.

Proposed outings for the spring include a conducted tour of Cambridge, followed by a visit to the Fitzwilliam Museum; a visit to the Marble Hall at Norwich Union followed by a tour round the Cathedral and another trip to the Kensington Museums.

Anyone interested in any of these trips please contact Danny Jeffrey (01842) 753770 to express an interest.

ACTIVITIES REPORT

Meetings

At the AGM in September the committee were elected en bloc, however we did not gain much from the talk on Highways Strategy but one or two points were clarified. The October talk by David Clayton from Radio Norfolk was very professional and was enjoyed by all. In November the talk about Bury Samaritans by Patti & Rita was also well received. In December Geoff Hinchcliffe gave a talk on Northern Canada with some excellent slides.

Outings

The September sausage supper & quiz went well with £230 being raised for the Children's Hospices. Thanks to Corinne Brindle & Barbara Crowther for the cooking, Vince Gregory for the entertainment and John Mayes as quiz master. In November 45 attended the Thursford Spectacular.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Continued from page 1)

An autumn lecture programme will run from September to the first week of November with speakers including Martin Rowson of the Guardian and Tony Benn. A specially commissioned community play, *Citizen of the World* is planned for the end of October. Meanwhile, current details of the Celebrations and the developing programme are available at www.tompaine200.org.uk or contact John Weeks, the co-ordinator - 01842 820060 or email johnweeks@madasafish.com.

The long awaited improvements to Castle Park play area are under way.

There are still a few copies of the excellent 2009 Thetford Society calendar available. Contact Wendy Raphael 01842 755962 to reserve a copy.

ENVIRONMENT

Cottage Hospital: NHS Norfolk submitted a planning application to Breckland Council which proposed the demolition of the Hospital which would be replaced with fourteen houses. Local residents, the Town Council and our Society opposed the application. On Monday 3rd November the Town Council and the Society were able to speak at the determination meeting and we are delighted to report that Breckland's Development Control Committee REFUSED the application. A resolution was passed stating that any future development of the site would have to include the retention of the original Cottage Hospital building.

This is the first hurdle overcome, the next, and possibly the more difficult, will be to find an alternative, viable use for the site. A dental surgery, care home, offices or simply flats have been suggested. If you have any other suggestions then we would be pleased to hear from you.

Abbey Barns: The battle for the Barns continues with the developer re-submitting an identical application to the original which stalled at the High Court. The Society has been encouraged by the support it has received from various corners. For example, the Town Council has opposed any residential development of the site, the Ancient Monuments Society's letter of objection stated that "...Thetford has an unrivalled historic asset of great value to the town" and the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society highlighted the national importance of the Barns.

Our Society have been proactive by: writing a letter of objection, writing individually to our Town Councillors, writing individually to the English Heritage Commissioners, to Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport and to Christopher Fraser MP (who has been very supportive). We have also written to Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, inviting him to meet with members of the Society. When the application is determined we will be represented along with the Town Council.

St Mary's the Less: English Heritage and Breckland seem incapable of carrying out their duties with regard to this fine Grade II* building. They keep talking to the owner but there never appears to be any action to even make the Church weather tight. We will continue to nag.

River Corridor: Following the questionnaires about the River Corridor a discussion document of improvements to be made has been prepared and this can be viewed on the Society website. It is hoped that some of the issues around Bitten Island and Bridges' Walk will be resolved with the £100k worth of improvements earmarked from Moving Thetford Forward. Any comments/suggestions to Stuart Wright.

Bus Station: The toilets were reopened in the summer after the Town Council had to have a trench dug across the car park in order to reconnect the water supply! Breckland have purchased the Anchor site and demolished part of the 20th century additions and put up fencing around part of the area. The car park area is still open and needs tidying up, there is still an uncertain future for the historic old part of the building that remains. A new Bus Station is earmarked for the St Nicholas Street/Minstergate area.

The proposed further education college for the town seems to be progressing; however we have concerns with the idea of it incorporating a community hall to replace the Carnegie which will not offer what we have now. We will shortly be seeking the Society's views on the preferred location of the College.