

Chairman's Report

The Anchor is now shut and boarded up. The site is becoming untidy and unkempt. I suspect this is the intention of the owners so that at some point in the future any plans for developing the site will be welcomed with open arms by planners. I have been assured by Breckland planning department that although not listed, the building is in a conservation area and any plans to demolish would have to be passed by them.



Whilst the Society would like the site to remain in commercial use, ideally as a hotel, any development on the site should not proceed until the plans for the adjoining bus station & car park are determined and the strategic potential for the combined area should be viewed as a whole. What we do not want is piecemeal residential development of town centre sites such that there is no space for the facilities that will be required to service the expected increase in population earmarked for the town over the next few years. Otherwise we will have a large population with no facilities in the town centre, meaning residents will continue to look to neighbouring population centres for their entertainment and recreation.

I am aware of concerns being expressed by people in the vicinity of the Priory about the Family Activity Day on August 13th the focal point of which will be the Dragon Boat races on the river. As I understand, the major concern is the licence the town council has requested to allow the sale of alcohol at this and future events in the town centre and the message that may be perceived about encouraging drinking in the grounds of the Priory and the related anti social behaviour that may follow. I write this as my personal view and not that of the Society or its committee. The town council are applying for the licence to allow legitimate refreshment facilities for the event. I feel those currently using the Priory as a drinking den will continue their activities irrespective of this one off event. Under new licensing arrangements the council has applied for a large area of the town centre to be covered so that similar events such as fetes, markets, carnivals & concerts can be easily provided for, as has happened in the past. The event is a one off and the licensed bar will only be incidental to the

expected number of activities and attractions that are being planned. In deed the Society in conjunction with the Ancient House Museum has obtained clearance to use the remainder of the money awarded in respect of the Archaeological Dig at Redcastle last year to have a tent with "hands on" archaeological related activities for children. I know Sure Start, Keystone and others are also looking to provide children focused activities. I do hope that this furore will not detract from what promises to be an entertaining day for all. If anyone is interested in entering a team for the Dragon Boat races they should contact the Town Manager Susan Glossop for details (Tel. 754038). The boats are provided, so all you need is a crew of 10 and the entrance fee of £100 per boat. Volunteer Stewards are also required so if any members would like to help, please contact Susan.

We are looking to replace the planter lost to vandalism in Riverside Walk and we have sponsored two hanging baskets in the town centre once again this year. Whilst attempts to beautify the town centre are applauded, the lack of housekeeping with regard weeds, detritus and rubbish still gives me a feeling of despair as I guide visitors around the town.

On a more positive note it is encouraging to see Rosemary Musker School coming out of special measures in record time and the improving standards at Charles Burrell School reported recently in the press. Well done to all involved and let us hope these improvements can continue.



More good news, I have been informed by our membership secretary, Mrs Pat Pearson that our membership now stands at 300 members, thank you for your continued support and please mention the Society to friends as we are always keen to broaden the Society's membership base.

The Ancient House Museum is scheduled to reopen in September and there is to be a targeted marketing campaign to raise the profile of the museum as a tourist destination. It is ironical that as result of this opening, there will be an increase in visitor numbers to the town and surrounding area yet the future of the tourist information centre is uncertain with funding scheduled to end at the end of September. I would hope that Breckland Council would at least offer to allow the tourist information centre to use the existing building, especially as other Breckland owned

units in the street still remain empty! The growth in visitor numbers already recorded, the refurbished Ancient House and the growing profile of The Brecks as tourist destinations coupled with the continued success of the Dad's Army tours all point to the demand for such a facility. The TIC does not only serve Thetford but the ever increasing number of attractions in the area e.g. The Forest Park, The Tank Museum at Barnham, the proposed new visitor attractions at Grimes Graves and the Distillery at Harling. We are the gateway to Norfolk and if we are really serious about tourism then a TIC is a must. We have so much more potential to capitalise on.

Environment

The Thetford Litter Campaign held its Litter Awareness Day on April 4th and received a good piece of coverage by Anglia TV, well done to all involved. Keystone's Innovation Centre is now complete and potential tenants are being sought. The Society will be visiting the building on Thursday 22nd June; meet at 7pm. The Priory has had some new interpretation boards installed in its grounds and work is continuing with an enhancement to the car park entrance area. These long overdue improvements should encourage visitors and local residents alike a better appreciation of this ancient monument.

Clearance has begun on the old garage site on Bury Road. Plans for a residential development of the old car lot between Minstergate and St Nicholas Street have been put forward along with a new development in the gardens off Earl's Street. Also plans for dwellings to the rear of 51 Castle Street are also tabled. We understand that the developers of this site wished to incorporate flint into the development but were told that it was not necessary by Breckland's conservation officer. Surely we should be encouraging the use of such building materials that are sympathetic to the surrounding area even if these are not immediately on view from the main street! We recently met with representatives for the developers of the land on Norwich Road and we stressed the importance of quality building and a design that was sympathetic to other buildings in the area along with an area of open space. As many of you may have read the Breckland planning committee has turned down this application and it was refreshing to hear that they said they did not want to be dictated to by developers. We await a revised application in due course.

Activities Report

Meetings

Our three talks in April, May and June were well attended and appreciated. Ron Overton gave a polished talk about the work of the St Nicholas Hospice. Tara McEnaney and our own Stuart Wright spoke about the success of the Tourist Information Centre and the fact it was under threat of closure towards the end of the year followed by the Dad's Army Extra Time DVD featuring some local extras who took part in various episodes. Pip Wright gave an interesting light hearted look at some of the stories which had appeared in local newspapers from the

18th century up to the near present. The audience were well entertained.

Outings

The barbeque in aid of St Nicholas Hospice on the William Gentle land was a great success raising £280 for this just cause. Eight people went to the ILPH and we



managed to get a guided tour. David Osborne took people on a walk on Victorian Thetford and 26 people went to the Time & Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth, despite the inclement weather they enjoyed the trip. A few members went to the Nunnery Stud open evening. The Strawberry Tea looks as if it will be well attended and there are only a few seats left for the Royal Norfolk Show on June 29th.

Future Activities

Meetings – In the United Reformed Church, starting at 7.30 pm, unless stated otherwise.

- July 4th Gilbert Addison - Tree & Countryside Officer, Breckland Council
- August 1st Dr Ian Shepherd - CPRE Norfolk - Planned Growth for Norfolk
- September 5th AGM & update on town redevelopment by Susan Glossop
- October 3rd Visit to the BTO Headquarters at the Nunnery & look round the new buildings.
Meet at The Nunnery 7.30pm
- November 7th East Anglian Ambulance Service - Seamus Elliott

Outings

- June 29th Royal Norfolk Show
- July 15th Visit to Lincoln
- August 12th End of the Pier Show, Cromer
- TBA Visit to Southwold & Adnams Brewery

If interested please contact Danny Jeffrey (01842) 753770

Other Forthcoming Events in Thetford

- July 23rd Bridgham & Harling Band, King's House Gardens, 2.30pm.
- August 13th Family Fun Day featuring Dragon Boat Racing and family activities at The Priory & Abbey Meadows – All Day.
- September 9th and 10th - Heritage Open Days. Tours of Bell Hotel, Keystone Innovation Centre, Burrell & Ancient House Museums open. Victorian Thetford Guided Walk.
- September 23rd Anglo Sikh Heritage Display, Ancient House Museum & Thetford Library

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