

Chairman's Report

As I write, the news on the Anchor is concerning, the staff are being made redundant and we await what plans the new owners have for the site. As has been well reported in the press we were opposed to the plans



From a postcard, c1905

to demolish the site and use it for housing and we believed that battle was won when that appeal was withdrawn, negating the need for a public enquiry in Dereham! The identity of the ultimate purchaser has yet to be ascertained. I have stated on many occasions what a loss to the town the Anchor would be. We have a shortage of hotel provision in the town, it has a good sized function room and to lose another building of character and heritage seems we have not learnt our lessons from the decimation of the town centre following the overspill. One good thing to come out of this process is that Breckland Council have agreed that any future public enquiry of this nature should be held in Thetford.

The town council have appointed consultants to work up plans for the Guildhall/Carnegie site and they should be reporting back with their proposals in 3 months time. This is part of the 'Moving Thetford Forward' project to regenerate the town centre, the official launch of which in February was to provide some positive publicity for the town. The BBC crew however seemed hell bent on dragging up any negative aspect of the town they could and they ended their piece that evening with the question "Does anyone have a good word to say about Thetford?" I was pleased to say sufficient callers made them think again and fellow Thetford Society member Basil Jacobs and myself were offered a 1 minute 45 second piece the following day to give a response. This was only broadcast to the east of the region, so viewers west of Thetford were still left with the tainted Thursday report, so much for balanced reporting!

The positive thing for me was that sufficient people had the spirit to contact the BBC and defend the town. So often the media indoctrinate us with bad news stories and after a while we are ground down and accept what we are told. I am a great believer in talking the town up

and this theme was echoed at the recent Community Awards evening. This successful celebration of the efforts of many working for the good of the town was especially pleasing when long term Society member David Osborne, received the judges' special award, recognising his tireless work recording the town's history.

Thetford had a 20 minute slot in Parliament at the end of February thanks to local MP Christopher Fraser. He praised the good work that was going on in the town whilst pressing for further resources for the town. During February, the Thetford Excellence Partnership held a conference with the head of Norfolk Children's Services in attendance. This celebrated the initiatives that have been put in place to raise educational standards in the town. Once again it was felt that so much more could be achieved if we were more positive about our achievements rather than always thinking the glass were half empty.

We recently lost one of the planters provided by the Society to vandalism in Riverside Walk, this is the same area where the Christmas lights were damaged in December. I reiterate my belief that we should be expecting more from the CCTV coverage and community policing. This is the same area as where a new nightclub is planned so I hope that a slightly higher police profile will ensure this venture gets off the ground without problems.



The Ancient House Museum refurbishment continues, but opening is now likely to be late summer 2006. The Burrell museum has a program of regular openings for 2006. A small exhibition about the archaeological dig at Redcastle will be on display in the library during April. The funding for the Tourist Information Centre runs out toward the end of this year and its future seems uncertain. It would seem such a waste of the time, effort and money if this were to cease. The centre is now firmly established and there is a continual growth in visitors contacting the centre. The centre opened in mid 2004 and had nearly 3,000 contacts in that first six months. This figure had risen to nearly 10,000 for 2005 and early indications for 2006 are that visitor numbers are continuing to grow. Let's hope some kind of package can be worked out to ensure the centre continues.

Environment

The Thetford Litter Campaign gathers momentum and Society member Margaret Ince recently told the March meeting about the campaign's plans and the forthcoming litter Awareness Day on April 4th. The Society strongly supports the group's activities and any member wishing to help in anyway should contact Margaret.



The Brecks
Countryside
Project
based in

King's House continues to raise the profile of the area and plans are afoot to have the area designated a Regional Country Park.

Keystone's Innovation Centre was recently topped out and work continues on the fitting out, the office space will be available to let from the end of April. It is a striking building but I think I speak for many members who would have liked something a little more traditional in style and with a pitched roof. The adjoining Health Centre is starting to grow alongside and the PFI Project for the Sports Centre is well under way. The Cricket Club's new changing rooms are being built, let us hope that finances can be found for a replacement clubhouse in the near future. We recently were asked to comment on the amount and type of open space we have in the town. I hope that our councils will look to replace the loss of managed recreation space from the development mentioned earlier and seek to provide further areas that can be utilised in close proximity to the housing areas both existing and proposed.

The plans for a skatepark are moving forward but until a site can be agreed the funding process is stalled. There is a current craze by some destructive members of the community to damage old walls in the town by prising out pieces of bricks and flint. The Bell Hotel was one example but there are numerous others around the town. I would urge members to keep alert to this damage and report it so that repairs can be made before further damage ensues. The Priory has a growing problem of anti social behaviour and residents in the area are seeking for a concerted effort by the police, English Heritage and other bodies to improve security and maintain the ancient monument.

The dispute over the old garage site on Bury Road seems to have been resolved and proposed plans for the retirement flats have won approval. This should tidy up this high profile site. Plans have been submitted for a development of 61 houses on Norwich Road between the Ark and Lime Kiln Lane.

Activities Report

Meetings

It seems a long time ago, but we had a very enjoyable Xmas Buffet in the Carnegie Rooms on January 6th

with over 100 members in attendance. In February we had a good turn out for Neil Stott who updated us on Keystone's activities. In March Baroness Shephard gave a very professional talk on the House of Lords to a packed room. Margaret Ince also updated us on the Thetford Litter Campaign.

Some members attended the forum on the Healthy Living Centre and the March meeting at the Breckland Leisure Centre regarding transport to and from Bury Hospital.

Outings

The outing to the Archant Printworks in February went well.

Future Activities

Meetings – United Reformed Church at 7.30 pm unless stated otherwise

- April 4th Ron Overton - St Nicholas Hospice.
May 2nd Tara McEnenay & Stuart Wright – Thetford Tourism & Heritage Partnership Update, including Dad's Army 'Extra Time' DVD & Exhibition
June 6th TBA

Outings

- April 9th ILPH Snetterton. At least 6 more people needed to have guided tour.
With the loss of the Keystone minibus, cars may be required for this trip
April 30th Heritage walk around Victorian Thetford with David Osborne. Meet Burrell Museum 2pm.
May 10th Barbecue, William Gentle Land, Spring Walk in aid of St Nicholas Hospice. 6.30pm. Volunteers required to put up the marquee.
May 13th Time & Tide Museum, Great Yarmouth. Ten members interested so far; another 20 required to make it worthwhile running the trip.
June 18th Strawberry Tea, King's House Gardens. 3pm.
Anyone interested please contact Danny Jeffrey (01842) 753770.

Other Forthcoming Events in Thetford

- April 4th Litter Awareness Day
April 16th Burrell Museum Miniature Engine Rally 10am - 4pm, Somerfield Car Park
April 19th Butterfly Recording Day 10am – 3.30pm, Barnham Village Hall & Barnham Common. Free but pre book (01638) 731648.
April 22nd Mayor's Ball
April 23rd Concert Club - Cawston Band St George's Day Concert
May 21st Thetford Grammar School Band, Riversdale 2.30pm
June 25th Cawston Band, King's House Gardens, 2.30pm.