

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Thetford Area Action Plan Preferred Options consultation document was published in February. The responses to this document will shape the Masterplan for Thetford's Growth which will be submitted to the independent examiner in 2010. The key change of emphasis since the Issues and Options Questionnaire is the land to the South East which was put forward as an area for development has been ruled out due to the proximity of the Stone Curlew nesting sites. Concern has been expressed by many members that all the new growth and investment to the north will give little benefit to the residential areas in the south west and the promised town centre regeneration should occur before any new houses are built otherwise a secondary centre to the north will evolve, leading to a 'them and us' scenario.



As I mentioned in the December newsletter, 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 to the Task Force last November. We had a follow up meeting in January to assess progress in relation to these matters. As expected some had been addressed whilst many were taking considerable amounts of effort to get resolved. A further list of issues were also submitted and it is clear that only with continued support and resources from the all agencies involved will we get the results desired. I must reiterate the need to keep reporting matters as I am still surprised that issues that appear obvious to the man in the street still do not seem to be getting into the system. I don't know if this because of the lack of local presence by the authorities or whether local councillors and residents feel that someone must have reported them, probably a mixture of both. There is a great tendency for the 'powers that be', when visiting the town, to drive in for their meetings and leave without actually walking round the town; as such we need to be their eyes and ears.

The next Thetford Neighbourhood Forum is at the Carnegie Room on 21st April at 7pm not the 14th as previously indicated. Please encourage others to attend.

It is with sadness that Woolworth's closed and the Typewriter shop is closing after nearly 40years and Edge's the butcher is also closing its shop. It is ever more important to support our town centre traders where we can. On a more positive note the Library has had a facelift and now has a small notice board inside for Thetford events.

The Castle Park play area has been completed and is proving very popular and after seven years of campaigning a replacement town sign was unveiled in January on the plinth of the original in Icknield Way.

TOM PAINE 200
Celebrations

The programme for 2009 Thomas Paine Bicentenary has been published and is available from the Library and the Tourist Information

Centre. Further information at www.tompaine200.org.uk.

Volunteers are needed for the weekend of the 6th and 7th June. Please contact John Weeks 01842 820060 or email johnweeks@madasafish.com if you can spare some time.

Future Activities

Meetings

All at the United Reformed Church at 7.30pm unless stated

- Apr 7th Vernacular Building Study - The Breckland Society
- May 5th How we used to live - David Grimes
- Jun 2nd Moscow today - Digby Smith

Outings & Events

- Jun 20th Hatfield House Cost Bus £10 House & Gardens £14
- Jun 28th Strawberry Tea
- Jul 1st Royal Norfolk Show Cost £6 for the bus if full
- Aug 15th The Cromer Pier Show Cost £24 incl bus
- Dec 15th Thursford Christmas Show Cost £33

All on first come, first served basis. Contact Danny Jeffrey 01842 753770 to express an interest.

Other Travel News

We have been notified that holders of Bus Passes can use a new coach service for the summer months, beginning April, to Gt Yarmouth, Cromer/Sheringham & Lowestoft all for a booking fee of £1. Contact the TIC 01842 751975.

Other Events in Thetford

- Apr 12th - Burrell Museum Miniature Engine Rally 10am-4pm Wilkinson's Car Park
- Apr 21st Thetford Forum - Carnegie Room
- Apr 25th St George's Day Concert - Carnegie Room 7.30pm
- May 23rd Red Beans'n'Rice Jazz Band - Carnegie Room 7.30pm
- Jun 6th & 7th Thomas Paine Celebrations - see programme for details
- June 8th Thomas Paine Bicentennial Dinner

The Ancient House Museum has a series of afternoon talks of local interest - for details contact 01842 752599.

ACTIVITIES REPORT

Meetings

We were given a splendid account of how to fly an Airbus by Shaun Manning in January.



Airbus

Members will be pleased to hear that he is willing to give another talk relating to aeroplanes next year. The February talk was cancelled due to the weather and the speaker having to drive from Hadleigh in the snow. This talk will now be given in August. In March we had a duet. David Osborne gave an interesting historical



Plaque commemorating Sir Richard Fulmerston's charitable donation in support of the Grammar School.

account of the Thetford Municipal & United Charities and I gave an update of the current situation. Also in March we had a special meeting where Richard Kay presented the Thetford Area Action Plan and members asked many questions on the subject.

Outings

There was not enough interest in the proposed visit to the Marble Hall at Norwich Union to run it.

The trip to the London Museums was full and everyone seemed to enjoy their day.

We are still trying to fix up the Cambridge trip. The Christmas Social was a success though not as many members attended as last year. There was a disappointing response to the Cheese & Wine evening.

ENVIRONMENT

The saga of the Abbey Barns runs on. Last month the planning officers of Breckland Council wrote to the Society, English Heritage, the Town Council, SPAB, NHBT, et al asking if we had alternative plans, to a residential development, for the Barns site. Apparently, the District Valuation Officer had studied the financial aspects of the proposed residential development and concluded that it was unviable. Two committee members met with Breckland Council officials to ascertain a way forward for the site. As a result the Society is putting forward proposals for a Heritage/Visitor Centre, toilets, cafe/restaurant, short term accommodation lets, office space, workshops, allotments and a cycle hire business linked to the 'Thetford Loop'. Saving the Barns and financing the scheme are obviously our main concerns. We are awaiting replies from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and others to offer support for the proposals.

The news regarding St Mary the Less is less heartening. The owner doesn't have the resources to repair and develop the building and is trying to sell it. The repair and conversion of the building into a four bed roomed home would cost £750,000 yet once converted would only retail at less than £600,000. Breckland are attempting to resolve the situation and we will continue to liaise with them in the hope that a buyer can be found or legal action taken to force the owner to act. Meanwhile the hole in the roof gets bigger and the site continues to deteriorate.

On behalf of the Society, the Environmental Committee responded to the Moving Thetford Forward consultation. Our comments can be viewed on line at <http://consult.breckland.gov.uk/portal>. The 'Preferred Options' consultation closed on 3rd April.

It is pleasing to see the removal of the scaffolding from St Cuthbert's, the repainting of the Red Lion and work underway transforming the Angel. We understand that the Market Place itself is scheduled for long overdue improvements to its surface and surrounding footpaths over the forthcoming months. Let us hope others are spurred on to improve the appearance of the streetscape.

Following the award of funding from the Moving Thetford Forward Green Grants Scheme, the Thetford Society has set up a River Corridor Work Party. The aim of the group is to maintain and improve areas of the town's riverside which require attention. Major works



The Old Coffee Mill in the River Corridor

will continue to be carried out by the various authorities but this scheme should allow a reactive solution to minor issues arising along the town's river and highlight areas where major investment is required. Anyone wishing to volunteer or provide tools, etc should contact the volunteer coordinator, Digby Smith on 01842 760369.

We have also been successful in obtaining a grant for a new planter in the town centre.