

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I write this as the news that Tulip is shifting production from its Thetford plant has recently been announced. The closure will hit many in the town and one wonders what future there is for many of our other manufacturing and processing industries. This comes as the plans for Thetford's next stage of growth are being drawn up for 5,000 new homes and only 1,500-2,000 new jobs (per Breckland's Local Development Framework document). Being a little sceptical I believe that if this mix is correct, instead of making the town more sustainable we will become a dormitory town for the surrounding larger centres. Great emphasis is being put on encouraging better paid jobs to the town and the REV project is spearheading this move, however it will take a large number of niche engineering firms to set up to replace the jobs that will inevitably be lost as manufacturing declines further in the town reflecting the national trend. If these better quality jobs can be secured, then a higher skilled workforce will be required. This raises the question of education and training. Our existing population will need to be trained to the levels required to fill some of the jobs and we will require an inward migration of young well qualified workers to fill the remainder. These people will only choose to settle here if a high quality education is in place for their issue. Whilst I appreciate the efforts that have and continue to be made in raising standards in our schools, the thorny subject of education in the town will not be solved overnight and we should continue to demand the resources and attention of the authorities to assist in this matter. The town centre regeneration is being looked at as part of the plans, this means unfortunately we will have to wait even longer for a new bus station and development of vacant buildings in the town centre. I know many members require action now but this needs to be balanced with the need for the correct solution for the issues that will result from expansion. There is a long and winding road ahead.

The Charles Burrell & Rosemary Musker High Schools appeals for Specialist School status continue. The deadline of the end February has been extended. Anyone wishing to donate or help with the appeal should contact David Napier on (01953) 498554.

One of the objects of Keystone Development Trust's activities is the preservation of historic buildings. With this in mind Keystone has set up the Keystone Historic Buildings Foundation, this will be a separate division of the Trust as a whole. The Foundation aims to save, secure,

refurbish and find sustainable uses for historic buildings at risk. The Foundation will raise money through public subscription and grants to save and secure buildings. However it aims to ensure any property obtained will generate income to ensure its own future.



As a first project Keystone is keen to save the disused St Peter's Church in the town centre and to ensure that it does not go same way as St Mary the Less. The Thetford Society is supportive of this endeavour and will give what help it can to ensure that this landmark building in the town is preserved and brought back into playing a part in the day to day life of the town. In order for the project to proceed, Keystone requires sufficient funding in the first instance to secure and make the building watertight. Once the building is secured the future uses and funding required will be explored to ensure a suitable and sustainable use for the building is found.

The initial task therefore will be to raise sufficient funding to enable the project to proceed. With this in mind The Thetford Society in association with Keystone will be seeking for members of the public to help in a fund raising effort to ensure the building can be secured. A special meeting will be called for anyone interested in helping with the project on Tuesday 10 April at The United Reformed Church, Earls Street, Thetford at 7.30pm.

Also on the heritage side, the BBC have added a short film on their website about Thomas Paine and his links with the abolition of Slavery see www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/abolition

Calling all ex Scouts & Guides, I have had a request to publicise Thetford's Trefoil Guild who are looking for new members. They have a varied social programme and meet 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm at King's Court. Anyone wishing to find out more should contact Shirley Croker on 01842 752022

ENVIRONMENT

The issue of the proposed traveller's site adjacent to the Abbey Estate has been well reported in the press and it is heartening to see people getting involved in the debate, so often the people of Thetford are tarred with being "apathetic" by those outside the town, meaning decisions

are made without reference to local residents. On the subject matter itself I think most people would find it preferable that a dedicated managed site screened from public view would be preferable to the incursions on common land we have experienced over the years. The question is where? Breckland's lip service of consultation of a stealthily parked white trailer, completely unadvertised, purporting to give locals the choice of sites when a planning application for the Abbey site was in progress is completely unacceptable.

On 20 March, Digby Smith and other Society members attended an introductory meeting for the new Community Rangers scheme. For the last 2 years Digby and his team of observers has been working to get remedial action in Thetford on litter, river pollution, fly-tipping, vandalism, abandoned cars, etc. The Rangers scheme builds on this and is backed by an `Enforcer` who tracks down sinners and prosecutes if feasible. It is stressed that the Rangers will be called upon merely to observe and report, not to confront. Volunteers will receive a handbook and contact details of whom to report things to. The time volunteers dedicate to the task will vary upon the individual but it may be worthwhile registering if only to receive the contact details for reporting matters arising. Anybody interested in becoming a community ranger should call 01362 656878.

It is good to see the growth of residents associations within the town, with the town growing the need for these local groups is essential in demanding improvement for their neighbourhoods. I would urge members to join their local group so that links between the Thetford Society and these groups are strengthened further.

ACTIVITIES REPORT

Meetings

The Xmas buffet was a great success 110 people attended and Mr Groom, the caterer and his team put on an excellent buffet and David Freeman entertained us at the keyboard. Perhaps three quizzes were one too many. Mr Preston's table won two and Mr Wilson's the other. For the first time we had a cash bar run by the British legion. Some of us attended the Thomas Paine Society dinner which was quite a successful event. With the bicentennial of his death coming up in 2009 we can expect more lead in events.

On 9th January Rodney Back from the St Matthew Society told us how it became established and what it does. Despite the fact it has been present in Thetford for about 20 years only a few members were aware of it and were quite impressed with the work it does.



On February 2nd our local MP Christopher Fraser spoke to us. Mr Fraser made a good impression and offered to organise a visit to the Houses of Parliament. If anyone wishes to go the dates we have been offered are the 15th or 16th of October. We have to book 6 months in advance so we need to know numbers now!

The March meeting was very well attended, Ed Chambers, the Town Clerk chaired it and there were contributions from Susan Glossop, Town Manager, the new growth point planners Nick Vass-Bowen and Natalie Beal, Mark Stanton the Economic Development Officer from Breckland and Paul Crick from Norfolk County Highways Department. All spoke about their part in Moving Thetford Forward.

Outings

The December visit to London was shared with Terry Jermy's Go Further Travel. Members could choose their own activity, sight seeing, shopping, etc. but most attended the Velasquez exhibition at the National Gallery. This was the most popular exhibition ever held there. On 10th February 21 members attended a symphony concert at St Andrews Hall in Norwich. The programme was the Flying Dutchman overture, the Mozart Clarinet Concerto and Holst's Planet Suite. The concert was enjoyed by all and we have been asked to organise another visit later in the year.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Meetings:

All are at the United Reformed Church at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

- Apr 3rd Father of the Brontes - Corinne Turner
- Apr 10th Special Meeting - The future of St Peter's Church
- May 1st Wayland Prison - Mike Wabe
- June 5th East Anglian Air Ambulance - Letitia Hilling
- July 3rd Importance of Heritage in Norfolk - Victor Morgan

Outings & Events



- May 5th Spalding Flower Festival - Need to know if anyone interested. Cost will depend on numbers.
 - May 11th Opening of Bury Festival, featuring Brigade of Ghurkhas beating the retreat. Bus depart Thetford 5.45pm. Costs will depend on numbers.
 - May 12th Anglesey Abbey House, Gardens & Mill.
- Anyone interested in any of the trips should contact Danny Jeffrey (01842) 753770

The barbeque scheduled for May 11th has had to be postponed until Friday July 6th

The Strawberry Tea is on June 17th (Father's Day), so bring your Dad along!

Other Forthcoming Events in Thetford

- Apr 19th Mrs Pat's Coffee Morning - United Reformed Church 10-12.
- Apr 21st Thetford Concert Club - St George's Day Concert, Carnegie Room 7.30pm.