

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Moving Thetford Forward event in the Carnegie in January was well attended and showed what projects are in the offing. Badged as a 'consultation' event I believe many members felt this was a misnomer and felt it was more of 'this is what is planned', with little chance of influencing many of the projects. That said, many were grateful that there was promise of some action although there were many reservations with regard to the College on the Anchor site. Many people were angry that this was the first public declaration to demolish the Anchor and listed Chinese Restaurant for the scheme. The use of the old tyre depot adjoining the station for flats is indicative of the lack of strategic planning for the town where there is on one hand a drive to get people to use the railway, but then not providing parking in the vicinity. One of my overall concerns with some of the ideas being mooted is affordability for local people; what is not always appreciated by external consultants is the lack of disposable income many of Thetford residents have and the lack of populated hinterland around the town. This is born out with the news that a rebuild of the Charles Burrell School will not include a swimming pool meaning the future of The Dolphins swimming club is at risk due to the charges and availability of Waterworld. This will also have a negative effect on the 400 young swimmers who use the facility each week, so much for Healthy Town & Growth Point, I thought these were supposed to provide more facilities for the town not take them away!



The Anchor in happier times

With the current economic climate little development is likely to happen in the short term and it is time we learnt from the overspill and how other towns have embraced their history, we need to keep pressing for a heritage led regeneration making the most of our historic assets rather than seeing them as a barrier to a blank canvass approach to install brash characterless boxes with no soul. I have been heartened to hear many groups and individuals echo our sentiments with regard to our historic buildings under threat, the greater the voice the greater the possibility our decision makers may listen. It is also pleasing to think that the Society is in touch with the views of the residents of the town, not a bunch of dreamers as some in the town would make us out. Many people have asked when is the next opportunity to ask questions of our local Councils. As was indicated to me, there was to be an autumn 2009 'forum', this was then put back to January and then cancelled because of the MTF event. We will seek to get another session organised.

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Future Activities

Meetings

All at the United Reformed Church at 7.30pm unless stated

- Apr 6th The Moon - Rod Telfer
- May 4th Edwardian Norfolk - David Grimes
- Jun 1st My ride across India - Claire Treadwell
- July 6th The 'Norkies' - Ian Hingley
- Aug 3rd Views of Norfolk - Trevor Burlingham

Outings

- Apr 13 'Moving Stories' exhibition at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life. Thetford Society private viewing - meet at the Museum from 7pm
 - Apr 24 Conducted Tour of Cambridge. Depart Bus Station 9.30am. Cost £15.
- Anyone interested in events or trips please contact Danny Jeffrey (01842) 753770.

Other Forthcoming Events in Thetford

- Apr 4 Burrell Museum Miniature Engine Rally 10am-4pm Wilkinson's Car Park
- Apr 23 St George's Day Concert - Carnegie Room 7.30pm
- May 14 Celebratory Organ Recital - St Cuthbert's Church

For details of the many other events in the town visit the calendar of events on:

www.exploretHetford.co.uk/events

or check in the About Thetford magazine.

Contact Tourist Information (01842) 751975 for details.

ACTIVITIES REPORT

Meetings

In January, the 'Face to Face' with Thomas Paine at the Grammar School was dogged by bad weather but some 30 intrepid souls turned up to watch a sterling display by Colin Orbell and Mike Brindle.

Jo Van der Hulks gave an insight into the Cambridge University Library, which contains some 7 million books, in February.



Weeting Heath

In March, Darrell Stevens, Field Officer for Breckland Area with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, showed some slides of the management of Breckland wildlife in particular showing how rabbits were an integral part and grass cutting provided habitats for different flora and fauna.

Outings & Events

The Xmas party was a social success as usual.

The spring Cheese & Wine, booked for March 27th has been postponed to 17th April due to clashes with other events.

The Strawberry Tea has been booked for June 20th at King's House and the summer Barbeque is scheduled for August 20th at Paul Clark's house.

The autumn quiz is booked for October 2nd.

ENVIRONMENT

Abbey Barns: the Secretary of State decided that residential conversion of the buildings was the only viable scheme and so the Society's alternative for a Heritage Centre was consigned to the dustbin. This was such a shame for all the members and Thetford residents who had written supporting the Heritage scheme and objecting to a housing development in such an important historical site.

The team who represented the Society and the Town Council together with the experts from the Ancient Monuments Society put up robust and well-reasoned arguments at the Public Inquiry but were unable to convince the Inspector that the Heritage scheme was financially viable. The Inspector's decision is somewhat strange as the residential development was itself not financially viable. The Planning Permission has thirty-one conditions attached to it and with the developers (actually speculators) asking £950,000 for the site it seems unlikely that anyone will see the site as an opportunity to make money. Our main concern is that the buildings do not deteriorate further and local residents and members will keep a watchful eye on the site.

Cottage Hospital: The concerns of the Society and the owner of the Snooker Club convinced the planners to have a rethink and a modified planning application has been asked for.

Public Consultation Days: The Society has responded to the proposals offered by the Moving Thetford Forward Board. Briefly, our issues were: *Skate Park* – great idea for the youth of the town, perhaps a larger facility would serve them better; *Forum/Academy* – Anchor site not favoured due to restrictions on future expansion; *Bus Station* – route needs changing, coach access needs modifying; *Old ATS tyre site in Canterbury Way* – this would be an ideal site for extra car parking for the railway station rather than for more housing; *North Thetford housing development* – need for a garden suburb with low density housing, concern that this should become part of Thetford rather than a separate entity.

Renewable Energy Plant, A134, Mundford Road: the Society intends to object to the siting of this unit on the following grounds – *environmental impact, traffic congestion, carbon footprint, aesthetic impact on countryside proximity of sub-station*. We feel it is the right idea but in the wrong place.

St. Mary the Less: Following pressure from the Environmental Committee, Breckland Council have finally acted to stop the rot of this landmark building. With the aid of a grant from English Heritage, Breckland are in the process of issuing an Urgent Repairs Notice on the owner. The cost of the works is in the order of £40,000 and will only protect the Church from further deterioration.



On a more optimistic note, there are reports of renewed interest in the Church and an offer has been made to the current owner which is above his own purchase price. If the offer is accepted then the new owner intends to convert the building into a home.

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Unfortunately the Abbey Barns inquiry granted permission for housing. This does not mean that the idea of our alternative scheme linked with the Priory could still not go happen just that we need £1m to secure the site! Any anonymous offers of help most welcome. (see Environment Committee report).

The proposed unitary council for Norfolk looks to have fallen by the wayside with Norwich being put forward as a unitary with the remainder of the county left with the two tier system. May I continue to ask members to report pot holes, graffiti, litter, etc as unless the items get in the system then nothing will be done? Even where litter is on private land such as the Ashwell land on Cloverfield, Breckland will seek to help clear these problem areas. However in order for the problem not to become too huge a job it would be good if we could nip the problems in the bud by getting them on the radar at an early stage. Contact Breckland on (01362) 656870.

The Tom Paine 200 committee, a sub-committee of the Thetford Society, has been wound up and reconstituted as the Thomas Paine Legacy Committee. It is looking to organise an autumn series of lectures under the banner of the 'Common Sense Club', Thetford's answer to the Headstrong Club in Lewes.

The Thetford Tourism & Heritage Partnership (TTHP) is co-ordinating a Thetford Festival from 27th August - 5th September. The intention is for individual groups to deliver their own events during the festival period with the TTHP providing an umbrella to promote the festival. For more information contact David Brooks on (01842) 751975.