

# Berwick upon Tweed Civic Society



## Newsletter

February 2013



## FROM THE CHAIR

January 25th and the first aconite and hair-thin snowdrops were to be seen on the path up to Devon Terrace. A week later and there are swathes of snowdrops on the high ground by Coastguard House and the Pier. And the pier itself is open again. This must be encouraging; the days are longer and we can look forward to Spring.



If I am in danger of sounding too much like Pollyanna, then an attempt to find information on the Council's Planning website will bring me back to reality. What should be a relatively simple task, finding the relevant documents attached to an application, often cannot be completed. It is important that for a decision to be made by the planning committee rather than a delegated decision being made by the planning office, at least five letters of objection must be lodged. An attempt to find letters written and their status within the system can prove futile. In some cases we know at least five letters have been written but finding a record of them can be elusive.

In March this year the National Planning Policy Framework will have been in place for a year. From that date national planning guidelines will take precedence over pre-2004 local plans. Northumberland, like some other councils in the North East does not have a new Local Plan ready. It would appear that summer 2014 is the earliest date for completion. The concern for Berwick, as for other areas in a similar position, is that without an operational local plan, it is difficult to see how a Local Authority can control controversial planning applications.

The NPPF does now have a clearer definition of sustainability. It draws on the work of the United Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Report) to offer this: 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

The five guiding principles of sustainable development are: living within the planet's environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using sound science responsibly. The pursuit of sustainable development is classified as job creation,

increasing bio-diversity, replacing poor design with better design, improving the conditions for life, work, travel and leisure, and widening the choice of high quality homes. The Civic Society would welcome these principles and would hope that they might be applied to developments with existing planning consents such as that at Spittal Point.

On a more domestic note, we have completed the application forms to buy two 'snake-head' seats. One to be on the pier and the second on the Village Green in Tweedmouth. So far we have not heard from the Council when we might expect this transaction to be completed or the seats to be in place.

The Society's AGM is on the 3rd April, within this Newsletter are the nomination forms for officers of the Society. Judy Nicholson who has been our Secretary for many years is retiring. To say that Judy is a mainstay of the executive is a massive understatement. I will be quite literally bereft without her wise counsel. So, we need a new secretary and some new executive officers without whom the Society will be in considerable disarray. Please consider very seriously if you can devote some time and energy to these posts. and contact Judy Nicholson (330430) or Do Shaw (330092) by March 20.

We also need to consider a recruitment drive. We are not unaware that we do very little to actively gain new members. The reason is that it takes time and commitment to pursue this goal and with the limited number of active members undertaking the work the Society is involved in, we are simply not able to do this necessary task. Again, if you feel you could organise a recruitment drive, please volunteer.

We also need you to nominate and then vote for the Civic Society Award for the best new building or building conversion within the town. So far we have had one nomination for the Watchtower conversion in Tweedmouth. Please e-mail me at [hatherleigh.shaw@virgin.net](mailto:hatherleigh.shaw@virgin.net) or post to me or Judy Nicholson.

The new exhibition at the Watchtower has exciting paintings directly related to Berwick by Grahame Tebbutt; Cara Lockhart Smith's paintings and illustrations have strong local feel; and Arthur Wood's gently scathing (an oxymoron) calligraphy and drawings make knowing comments about Berwick.

Very best wishes, and please don't forget the AGM!

Do Shaw

## EVENTS AND PROMOTIONS

**SERMONS IN STONE:** In November the Society met to hear a talk by Canon Christopher Smith. It was an enlightening account of the meanings that lie behind the design of church buildings. Canon Smith's thesis was that much could be learnt from the shape and style of a building and how its occupants planned to reflect and conduct themselves.

Among the examples he gave were that of the Quaker Meeting House, its lack of any outward religious show marking an expression of purity and unity; the medieval church with a nave far larger than its neighbouring population could fill in order to accommodate a variety of secular activity; then there was the Methodist Hall which might have seats a good deal more comfortable than pews to hear the word. A look inside the parish church revealed what probably few of us had known - that it was originally built on a north-south alignment. Canon Smith's expertise was dispensed with warmth and enthusiasm.



**CHRISTMAS PARTY** In December, we held our annual Christmas Party in the Parish Centre. Forty two guests had a very enjoyable evening starting with a sparkling wine reception. Canapés were provided by Ann Faragher and the delicious meal was cooked by Amaryllis.



The after dinner entertainment was excellent with the popular Mamatone singers (Lizzie Bell, Anna Emmins and Tamsin Davidson, accompanied by Iain Petrie on guitar). Our guests were delighted with a medley of songs, some of them seasonal.



**ARCH REDEVELOPMENT:** John Lord, consultant with Arch, Northumberland County Council's arms-length development company, spoke to January's meeting about regeneration plans for Berwick.

John said: 'There are severe challenges facing towns of this size and type all over the country. Berwick's not the worst, but it's one of the more acute places I have come across.'

Historically, the town had been declining for two centuries. 'The population here has declined over the last 200 years, while the population of England has increased six-fold.' This decline had intensified over the last two-to-three decades, as Berwick had lost its purpose. 'There used to be manufacturing, but what's it for now?' he asked.

The decline of Marygate is typical of most high streets across the country, and Mr Lord believes the key to rejuvenating it lies in identifying a new use.

'I've been following the parking debate with interest,' he said. 'Anybody who thinks parking is killing retail in Berwick is barking mad! It's places like Asda and Tesco that are doing that. What happens on the high street needs to be different from what used to happen.'

He said that although there were some positives in the town, like the significant Simpson's Malt, The Granary and the Workspace, as well as a rich cultural and artistic scene, Berwick was stuck in a circle of a lack of economic opportunity leading to a deterrent to invest in the town.

'Berwick is a mixed bag. It's weak in terms of production, but strong in that it is a very special place. We need to enrich and protect the quality of the place. It's the most valuable asset here. It's essential, particularly in these times of public cuts, to grow a high value economy in order to look after the heritage, and avoid a 'race to the bottom'.

He said the Arch plan struck the 'right balance' between caring for the place and making it a more prosperous community, but added that any tangible output would take two to three years to mature.

## **FUTURE EVENTS**

On Wednesday 13 February at 7.30pm in the Parish Centre you can test your knowledge of the town in a quiz, Quirky Bits of Berwick, compiled by Sandra and Ian Dods. (This was postponed from September last year.) This will be followed by a short talk by Alison Cowe on how the design of the town is being developed in relation to shop fronts, signage, guides and seats. This is, of course, one facet of the Berwick Plan.

On Wednesday 13 March Ray Stockdale, Technical Manager of English Heritage, will give a talk on the maintenance and repair of EH properties in the north east.

Wednesday 3 April is the date of the AGM. Please note the starting time of 7.00pm. In the second part of the meeting, Michael Cullen will give a talk on aspects of Berwick between the Wars.

As we approach the end of the Society's calendar year, I think great thanks should be expressed to all on the Events and Promotions sub committee and to others who have helped at the meetings, stewarded on Heritage Open Days and prepared food for the Main Guard preview party and other events. Also thanks are due to Peter Maule (our sommelier) for his excellent work in charge of wine and drinks.

Zoreen Hill

## **PAY UP PROMPTLY, PLEASE**

Subscriptions to the Society are due in January, so Marion Mead our Treasurer reminds members who have not yet paid to get in touch with her with their cheques. Marion would be even better pleased to see you brandishing a standing order, which means you pay automatically each year until you cancel the order.

Membership is £8 for an individual member and £12 for a couple. We hope you will agree that the benefits, meetings, newsletters, exhibitions, local action and membership of the campaigning organisation Civic Voice, are well worth your continued subscription.

You can contact Marion Mead on 01289 308333 or write to her at 18 Bridge Street, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 1AQ.

## STUDY GROUP CELLAR SURVEY

You may recall the item on this topic in the September 2012 Newsletter regarding the request from Northumberland County Council Archaeological Department for help with their project to identify buried historic deposits in the town.



The response from members and from the Doors Open Day was disappointing. However, members of the Recording Group have carried out street surveys in a significant part of Berwick (the study covers the area within the Edwardian walls) and a number of cellars have been identified.

The Group has looked for cellars and basements (ie: all rooms which are wholly or partly below ground). Generally, basements are habitable rooms and cellars are for storage only. These definitions are of necessity a bit loose in a town with steep hills and areas such as Quay Walls where front and back are at different levels.

The group has identified over 40 cellars / basements including 7 under pubs, 14 under commercial premises and 21 under (or in the grounds of) private houses. The commercial premises are primarily in Bridge Street but also Marygate has a few. The private properties are primarily in the lower part of town (eg: Palace Street, Palace Green, Ravensdowne) but also in Scott's Place.

Members of the Group were able to gain access to 10 of the cellars to carry out surveys of size and condition and take some photographs. Many of the cellars are still in use but a few have been filled in.

The Group was not able to inspect all the streets within the study area and no doubt there are more cellars and basements which have not been identified.

All the information available in the Group by mid-December was collated and sent to the Assistant County Archaeologist who is incorporating the information into her report. The Group will receive feedback as this work progresses.

David Robinson

## THE MAIN GUARD 2012

This analysis of last summer's Main Guard figures is so late that we have almost forgotten what happened. Looking back we did have a successful season although, as at most tourist attractions, our numbers of visitors were down. We had seven hundred fewer visitors but they gave us £40.00 more in donations making the total the second best since 2005.

Sales of the 'Walk Round the Walls' leaflet continue to be very encouraging and Brita Granstrom's book has sold well.

Alison Cowe is co-ordinating this year's exhibition on: 'Flodden: Last battle of the Middle Ages'. If you have any suggestions or wish to help in any way please contact Alison.

The Main Guard is kept open because of our dedicated team of helpers, the eight co-ordinators, our willing band of stewards and of course all those who help with the exhibition. Special thanks must go to Chris Shaw who designed last year's exhibition and to our Chairman, Do Shaw who obtained many of the artefacts. Thank you to everyone who contributed cups, mugs, coins, photos, books and other memorabilia. Finally thank you to Marion Mead for her sterling work in keeping an eye on the stock and collecting the daily takings. I don't think she ever imagined that the job of Society Treasurer would have so many facets.

Judith Nicholson





## CALLING ALL ENTREPRENEURS



Here's something to think about. As we all know, Joe's corner on Hide Hill has been empty for about ten years. The present owner of the site is very anxious to sell and (we are told) has brought the asking price down dramatically.

One of our members has looked at the property recently and thought that there could be a group of people and organisations who might be prepared to form a consortium, buy the property and develop it.

Some ideas include small scale shops within shops selling antiques and crafts, artists' workshops and the potential for three flats above the main building.

If you feel entrepreneurial and would like to talk more about this, please let me know and I will pass your name on to your mysterious and intriguingly anonymous fellow entrepreneur.

Do Shaw, 01289 330092

## **‘HELP TO PLAN THE FUTURE OIF NORTHUMBERLAND’**

What an invitation! But it is true: you are invited to tell the County Council your views on what the we need over the next two or three decades in such areas as housing policy, encouraging business, protecting the environment and developing renewable energy. (This is the next stage of the consultation that Alison Cowe explained in the last Newsletter.)



Councillor Tom Brechany, Executive Member for Planning, Housing and Regeneration, explained the objectives:

- 1: To place sustainable development and positive future growth at the heart of planning decisions in Northumberland;
- 2: To meet Northumberland’s objectively assessed development needs including new homes, employment space, services and infrastructure;
- 3: To maintain and create sustainable communities throughout our urban and rural areas to support health, social and cultural well-

being for all;

4: To rebalance and encourage a strong, competitive and diverse Northumberland economy;

5: To make climate change work to Northumberland’s advantage adapting to, and mitigating change whilst also capitalising on economic opportunities;

6: To protect and enhance Northumberland’s natural, historic and built environment;

7: To manage the prudent use of Northumberland’s natural resources including minerals, energy, land and water while reducing waste and minimising adverse impacts on communities and the environment.

8: To ensure all development maximises the use of Northumberland’s infrastructure securing necessary up-grades and also reducing the need to travel where appropriate.

The issues and opportunities are set out in long detailed document from NCC, which is available online (<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/corestrategy>) or in conventional paper format at libraries and planning offices.

There are informal drop-in consultations around the county, with a session arranged for Berwick on Thursday 28 February at the William Elder Building any time between 10.30 am and 8.00 pm.

You can also make comments online, which is just what Jenny Crawford and Peter Watts have done on behalf of the Berwick Community Trust. The response is very full, so perhaps a quotation from the author's reply to a question about 'Vision' will give a flavour of their work.

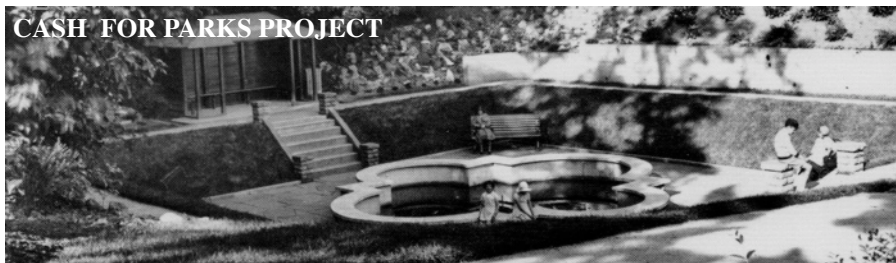
*We are concerned about what is meant by 'rebalancing' the economy. We would like to see a stronger emphasis on improving the 'connectedness' of the County, using high-speed broadband, improved public transport and other strategic linkages, including cross-border working.*

*The significance of this to the County's participation in the 'knowledge economy' cannot be overemphasised. There is an urgent need to further promote further and higher education for the County (particularly in the Berwick area). We welcome the recognition in the spatial vision of the importance of the County's cultural and historical heritage to our economic future....*

You can read this long and thoughtful reply for yourselves. All the way through the writers correctly insist of the particularities of Berwick (its cross Border links, for example, or its acute housing need, or indeed its very low average income) being recognised alongside the strategies that will benefit the whole county.



## CASH FOR PARKS PROJECT



Berwick's million-pound parks project will begin this spring, as the tree surgeons move in to Castle Vale and Coronation parks to start the rejuvenation process. These parks, both established in the 1930s, were designed to exploit varied and dramatic views of the station, the castle ruins, the railway bridge and the river. Castle Vale park in particular has become very overgrown, so one of the first phases of work will be to restore the vistas and get the remaining trees and shrubs into good shape.

The project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Big Lottery Fund and the County Council, and in a bold but very sensible move, funding was applied for not just for the parks themselves, but also for the walkways which run along the top of the river bank to link Castle Vale with the New Road at the boathouse.

Where this walk (the Shammell Braes) meets the Elizabethan walls at the corner of Meg's Mount, another path branches off to meet Castlegate just outside the Scotsgate. This spur is part of the project too, and all of these areas will be treated consistently, with similar handrails, signage and other details.

At the corner of Meg's Mount, there is small field bounded by hedges which currently boasts a fine collection of molehills. It has been earmarked for a disabled-friendly sensory garden, to be created with the involvement of various groups including local schools.

Over the coming years we'll be treated to the sight of seeing these two parks come back to life, building on the hard work of local residents and the Castlegate Area Residents Association. There'll be more information in the next newsletter about the history of the parks and the improvements we'll see over the next few years. But in the meantime, if you hear chainsaws on the riverbank, don't be alarmed. The groundwork being done now is laying the foundations for some truly impressive results.

Alison Cowe