
Wetherby Civic Society

Spring Newsletter

April 2003

We have to start this Newsletter with a few words about our Chairman, Mike Welby. All of us who were at Sir Thomas Inglby's witty but at the same time thoughtful talk on March 24th will have been pleased to see Mike there as one of the audience. He has come through two major operations and demanding follow-up treatment but this has not prevented him taking his usual keen interest in events in the town. We all wish him well for his continuing recovery. In the meantime our thanks to James Lodge and Ruth Wheeler who have taken on the roles of Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively.

PLANNING MATTERS

Since our last Newsletter in Autumn 2002 our Planning Working Party has had a busy time. It has made representations to Leeds Planning in respect of four applications in or near the town centre. One was for the conversion of the listed building known as the Cavalry Barracks on the Micklethwaite site to two dwelling houses. This the Society wholeheartedly supports since it will retain for the town one of its oldest surviving buildings. This follows a structural survey of the building which we had feared might have put it beyond restoration.

The other three applications were all for blocks of flats. Two of these were to replace individual dwelling houses and the third was the old joinery works on Deighton Road. None of the properties to be demolished was of architectural or historical significance. The Society realises that replacement of perfectly good dwelling houses by flats seems a wasteful use of resources to many people. But if you believe that town centres ought to have a substantial residential element and, if you agree that already developed sites should be recycled rather than green fields disappear, then you have to accept that modest apartment blocks in towns such as Wetherby may well bring many benefits not

the least of which may be a reduction in motor car journeys.

So far no decisions have been made. One application has been withdrawn and one other has been put on hold subject to the archaeological survey of the castle site.

Of course, the proposals for so many blocks of flats also reflect what is happening in today's communities with more and more households of only one or two people. If it turns out that the builders and developers have got their marketing strategies wrong then we may well have a number of relatively low priced homes for young couples starting up on the housing ladder.

The Planning Working Party monitors weekly all planning applications. These are now listed on the Leeds website - www.leeds.gov.uk. However, for full details a trip to the library is still needed if the plans are to be examined.

Two other areas connected with planning also received attention. The Leeds Unitary Development Plan has now reached its first review date. The Society was pleased to note that land off Spofforth Hill, which had received limited protection from immediate development, is proposed to be Green Belt again.

So where do we put the additional houses which are still needed for our growing numbers and how do we avoid using up all our green fields? Well the answer in our area is the old ordnance factory site at Thorp Arch. Here the planners have identified room for some of the 1900 new houses which will be needed each year for the next 13 years in the Leeds City area. A substantial proportion of these will have to meet affordable criteria. And, we all want that don't we for our young people? We are waiting to see more detailed proposals for this site before making representations to the City Council.

The other area which is causing concern is the possibility of piecemeal development of the riverside. Wetherby in Bloom and the Weir Preservation Trust have worked wonders on the left bank of the river in the vicinity of the bridge. It would be marvellous if this could be extended. The Society has, therefore, made representations to Leeds City that where any development is proposed which brings about a significant change to the riverside then there should be a presumption that safe access for the public to the riverside to the public is a condition of any approval. A start was been made at the Old Mill site. Let us hope

that this may be a model for any

future developments.

BUILDING & ENVIRONMENT

The development of the public area at Wharfedale Lawn is well in hand. The Town Council tells us that it should be open to the public later this year. The hard and soft landscaping will have been completed leaving only the planting scheme to start at a later date. One worry is the state of one of the boundary walls. This requires rebuilding and the cost involved may well mean that a fence and dense shrubbery will have to be used instead. This is a less than desirable alternative. The Society has asked for details since it is prepared to make a financial contribution if that will mean the wall is retained.

We still do not know what is the intended use for the restored Georgian bathhouse. However, all being well we are looking to include access to the bathhouse during the weekend of Heritage Open Days in September.

It now seems to have got through to authorities that the public perception of a town's environmental health is largely a matter of small things. Uncleared litter, pavements pock marked with discarded chewing gum, vandalised public amenities and spaces and graffiti do more to undermine the character of a town than the occasional building which may not meet our idea of what is suitable. The Society has been pressing hard for action for many years and we are pleased to support the Town Mayor's campaign to make Wetherby a cleaner place.

Unfortunately, only some of the litter is imported. It is produced and distributed by local people for the most part and what seems to happen is that if public places are not cleaned thoroughly and regularly then private owners start to give up as well. And once an area becomes a

recognised dumping ground then it just attracts more rubbish. No doubt a change in public attitudes would solve the problem but this will only work in the long term. Immediate problems require immediate solutions. In the end this means spending money, which has to come from the public purse.

Perhaps with more activity centres for young people we may see some improvement. The Society has, therefore, made a donation to the group trying to set up a skate park on the Ings.

Our winter tree planting programme has been successfully completed. We are still looking for further sites where tree will add to the amenity of the area. We have some ideas in hand which we let you know about in due course when they come to fruition

SUMMER EVENTS

Our summer events are detailed below. All those who have returned the original booking form will be asked to confirm their attendance at each event in good time beforehand. If you have not already advised the Secretary that you wish to attend a particular event please contact him as soon as possible as there may be vacant places still available.

Wednesday 14th May
Guided Tour York Minster

Tuesday 15th July
Lotherton Hall Guided Tour

Wednesday 25th June
The World of James Herriot, Thirsk

Saturday 20th September
Broughton Hall, Skipton Guided Tour

Enjoy the summer!

WETHERBY CIVIC SOCIETY

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