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# Wetherby Civic Society

## Spring Newsletter

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www.wetherbycivicsociety.org.uk

April 2009

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### JUBILEE GARDEN

The Jubilee Garden maintained by volunteers from our Society and Wetherby in Bloom goes from strength to strength. Those who attended the recent coffee morning at the Bath House will have seen it at its best. If you haven't been this year please go soon to appreciate the work done by all our volunteers before the tree canopy develops and the Spring blooms fade.

*If you would like to help the Tuesday morning group at the Jubilee Garden please contact either Ruth Wheeler on 01937 583186 or Margaret Dabell on 01937 581234.*



### PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

The dramatic decrease in planning applications continues. Just over a year ago we were looking at anything up to eight pages of applications for the Wetherby Ward on the Leeds Planning web site at any one view. Now the number of applications is so few that they struggle to fill two pages. And this is just not for new build.

Conversions, extensions and improvements requiring permission are also at a low. It has been reported elsewhere

that one of the knock on affects of the fall in applications is a reduction in local authority income so much so that employment in town halls will be reduced and planning departments will have to restrict themselves to their core activities. One result may be that enforcement and control may have to be cut back.

Judging by estate agents' boards it looks as if developers got their sums right when concentrating on flats marketed

to single and couple households. In Wetherby, at least, it is not the new apartment blocks with a proliferation of For Sale and To Let signs. It is the older terraced cottages, probably a bit larger and certainly not so easy to manage as the new flats, where the signs abound. Again looking at estate agents' boards, new speculatively built four and five bed-roomed homes are proving the most difficult to shift

### BLUE PLAQUES

If you were in town on a recent Sunday morning you may have been lucky to see our Chairman and Secretary busily engaged in cleaning the blue plaques in the town centre. There are 17 plaques and

pictures of all of them are on our website together with a map of where they are. Apart from two new plaques – one on the Bath House and one at Castle Keep – all the others have been up for more than ten

years. In fact the majority pre-date the formation of the Civic Society in 1994.

A few plaques contain some information of how they came about but in most cases we

know very little about these older plaques. We don't know who decided which buildings should be distinguished by a plaque or who paid for them. We suspect that most of the plaques are there through the initiative of the late James Lodge our long time Vice-Chairman and a founding

member of the Society. If anybody can enlighten us please let us know so that the information may be recorded.

The plaque cleaning exercise is the first step in looking at their condition. Several plaques are beginning to show the stresses of age and may require more radical refurbishment.

Whether or not this means sending them back to the manufacturer will have to be assessed as will the availability of funds to meet the cost. Again if anybody has information which may be helpful we should be pleased to hear it.

#### *THE CIVIC TRUST*

The present recession has claimed another victim. Just as we were about to begin this Newsletter we were informed that the Civic Trust had put itself into administration. The London based Civic Trust has been in existence for 50 years and in that time has become the leading organisation concerned with the built environment.

The Civic Trust represents centrally over 700 Civic and Amenity Societies. Ever since our formation, Wetherby Civic Society has been affiliated to the Civic Trust. We have taken advantage of the competitive insurance scheme offered to member societies and have made extensive use of the information and advice disseminated by the Trust. We have supported campaigns initiated by the Trust, most recently joining with it in opposition to the new planning

legislation now going through Parliament.

Like many other charities, the Civic Trust worked under contract for local authorities and semi-public bodies. With money tightening many local authorities are withdrawing from schemes at the optional margins of their activities and that has reduced the income of the Trust. The Trust also lost a substantial slice of income when it failed to win the renewal of the contract to manage the Green Flag Award scheme for public open spaces.

The Trust has been attempting to replace its lost income by promoting individual membership of the Trust. At a forthcoming meeting of our Executive Committee we would have been thinking about participating in this promotion. Unlike the

National Trust, individual Civic Trust membership would have brought no tangible benefits to members – no free entry to stately homes nor free parking in Lake District car parks and at other beauty spots. All that was being offered was the opportunity to be informed of matters affecting town and city environments at a national level and the ability to feel good about being a member of a campaigning organisation at the heart of the establishment – Patron Prince Charles. So perhaps not surprisingly, the boost in income failed to materialise.

Not all will be lost. 700 societies will need an organisation to represent their interests nationally. Whether it will be something new or an existing organisation is still uncertain. We shall keep you posted about developments.

#### *SUMMER EVENTS*

Two fully booked outings to Ribston Park have marked the beginning of our events programme for this year. Remaining visits are as follows:

**Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May**  
**Newburgh Priory, Coxwold, North Yorkshire**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July**  
**The Mouseman Visitor Centre, Kilburn**

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June**  
**Sutton Park, Sutton on the Forest, York.**

**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September**  
**Bramham House & Garden**

*For further details and booking arrangements please contact:*

*Mrs Ruth Wheeler*  
*6 Chestnut Avenue, Wetherby. 01937 583186*