



The Buckingham Society

Campaigning for a Better Buckingham

Newsletter June 2017

A Word from our Chair – Roger Edwards

I have recently been reading something of the history of the civic movement in Great Britain and it goes back further than I thought. The first civic society, known as the Sid Vale Trust was created as long ago as 1846 in Sidmouth in Devon. Later, in 1957, Lord Duncan Sandys gave the civic movement a stronger, national voice when he created the Civic Trust which brought all civic society's together under one roof. The Civic Trust has evolved into Civic Voice the modern umbrella group for the civic movement. Interestingly, Lord Sandys' daughter, Laura Sandys, is now a vice-president of Civic Voice.



By bringing the civic movement together under a single national body it enabled it to grow into one of the country's most important social movements; a movement that the Buckingham Society has been part of since the early 1970s.

One of the main reasons behind the creation of the Buckingham Society was the destruction in the 1960s of some of the fine buildings that stood in the town centre to be replaced by second-rate structures such as the (for a little while longer) Nat West bank, Boots, M & Co etc. Another of the outcomes of this was the creation, in 1971, of the Buckingham Conservation Area.

The concept of conservation areas was first introduced into England, Wales and Scotland by the Civic Amenities Act 1967 through a private member's bill led by the same Duncan Sandys. So, this year is the 50th anniversary of conservation areas.

Stamford in Lincolnshire was the first conservation area to be designated in 1967 and so, in Buckingham we have one of the earliest designated conservation areas. Today there are over 10,000 conservation areas in the UK (approximately 9,300 in England, 500 in Wales, 650 in Scotland and 60 in Northern Ireland) protecting some of our most valued historic places.

Conservation area designation controls the demolition of unlisted buildings over a certain size and works to protect trees, restricts permitted development rights on

houses and tightens regulations on advertising. It also places a statutory duty on local planning authorities to pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas while undertaking their planning duties. Without the creation of the conservation area, it is quite likely that much more of Buckingham's heritage would have vanished under the bulldozer.

Another fact that I stumbled across is that, since 2008, there has been a 33% reduction in the number of conservation officers employed in local government. AVDC has not been immune from cuts such as this and has reduced numbers in its planning department. That makes it all more important for the Buckingham Society, working with colleagues on the Town Council, to keep a sharp eye open to try to ensure the protection of our market town.

Of course, the Buckingham Society is only effective if you, the members are vigilant and let the Committee know of concerns that you might have or anything untoward that you might have spotted. And the Society is very fortunate indeed that members do just that. For example, we have recently been informed about the planned sale of the Oddfellows Hall in Well Street. There is concern that a developer might come up with a plan to convert the building into flats which could of course be hugely problematic due to the already difficult parking situation in Well Street. While there is nothing the Society could do to prevent the sale, we are certainly able to ensure that anything that could disadvantage the area would not go unchallenged. And the fact the Hall is within the conservation area, also helps in that regard.

So, please remain vigilant in helping to protect Buckingham. And if you know of anybody who might be interested in joining the Buckingham Society, please let a member of your Committee know. The more members we have, the stronger will be our influence.

Hustings for the County Council Elections

On 27th April, the Buckingham Society held hustings for the County Council elections in the Radcliffe Centre attended by about 40 people. The Reverend Will Pearson-Gee very ably chaired the event and eight of the 10 candidates took part in the debate. See picture on the right.



Buckingham Civic Day 2017

On Saturday June 17th, the Buckingham Society will once again be organising Buckingham Civic Day, giving the people of Buckingham the opportunity to celebrate their town.

As in previous years, proceedings will be opened at 10.00 a.m. by Buckingham's powerfully leather-lunged Town Crier, Russel Cross, John Bercow will present the awards to the Buckingham Rotary Club's Citizen and Young Citizen of the Year and

cheques will be handed out to various local groups who raised funds through the Rotary Swimathon earlier this year.

The Buckingham Society this year plans to ask people a very simple question; “What do you like about Buckingham”? We will also be asking them to name their favourite building and/or their favourite tree (see below). The plan is to collect all the answers together and put them into a “*Pamphlet for Posterity*” that could be added to at times in the future and provide an ongoing view of people’s thoughts about our market town.



Trees in Buckingham – Kathy Robins

We plan to produce a poster showing our members favourite trees. To do this, we need our members to be out and about with cameras to capture their own favourites. Please let me have your own suggestions and photographs of the trees that you would like to see featured. The tree should be within the parish of Buckingham and easily visible from the road or a public place. Please send suggestions or photographs to kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk. To start us off I have photographed my favourite – the lime tree in the old Church Yard.

Planning – Carolyn Cumming

Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan

We still await the final consultation on the revised VALP. It will no doubt emerge at the beginning of the summer holiday period. We have been informed by Cllr. Tim Mills that the methodology for calculating suitable sites for development has altered and it will now give more weight to those sites considered “sustainable”, regardless of their current size. Of course, the age-old question as to how “sustainability” is assessed remains vague but it would appear that those smaller settlements that find themselves close to strategic settlements may be subject to larger allocations.

Civic Design Awards 2017

This year the judges commented that six lessons are starting to come through from the Design Awards, that can be applied to almost any other project, no matter how big or small. With Civic Day (17th June) fast approaching, this seems an appropriate message for our own historic market town as we, a Civic Society working alongside our Town Council, try to influence the planning decisions that affect the character and well-being of the Buckingham community.

Partnership working between the public, private and voluntary sectors is key. It is clear from many past winners and this year's shortlist that working in partnership across sectors, can have a positive impact on the quality of the built environment in

our towns, villages and cities.

Early collaborative engagement – Real positive examples of community groups being involved at an early stage in the process and influencing the final scheme are starting to emerge but we want see more and for this to become the Civic Voice standard across the country!

Leadership and mindset - Individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors have been at the forefront of schemes, driving forward new ideas by asking, "How can we do this better?" or "What can we do as a community to tackle this problem?"

Historic Environment is not a barrier to growth - From the shortlisted schemes, we have ten schemes in a Conservation Area and one in a World Heritage Site, showing that the historic environment is an asset not a barrier to growth and high quality new development can be successfully integrated within historic settings.

Paying for an architect brings results - The judges felt that it was clear when an architect had been commissioned on housing developments and they were encouraged to see Crest Nicholson using Alison Brooks Architects to design a housing scheme in Bath, but questioned, why is this the exception and not the norm?

Finally, we are still not seeing large scale housing developments coming forward that communities are proud of and want to support. The judges wondered whether we ever will?

Civic Voice will delve into each of these issues over the next few weeks, leading up to the Civic Voice Design Award ceremony in the summer.

Planning Updates

16/00847/APP Care Home at West End Farm Brackley Road

A decision has been made to refuse this application for 72 "care" units on the basis that it does not accord with the Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan, nor provides an element of affordable housing as the emerging VALP would want to see.

16/03302/APP Cornwalls Meadow

We still await a decision on the application for the 61 bed care home on land behind the Grand Junction, although it should be noted that despite being allocated for parking and recreation in the BNDP, the application is recommended to be delegated to Officers for approval subject to various S106 agreements. The Society has opposed the development as submitted on the grounds of lack of public amenity space and increased traffic and congestion.

Waglands Gardens

AVDC have approved this application for 9 flats and 1 house – again despite vehement opposition from the Society, nearby residents and the Town Council.

We also still await the decision on the planning appeal for Moreton Road (Phase III). A decision is expected early in July

Lace Hill

We should soon see major construction works on the allocated employment site as Lidl and Premier Inn have obtained the necessary permissions to begin work. The Society wrote to Whitbread Premier Inn concerned at the ubiquitous, corporate design for the Beefeater restaurant, pointing out that, given its prominent position at the entrance to the site, its “one design fits all” is inappropriate to a small market town. This comment fell on deaf ears.

Destination Buckingham Group – Roger Edwards

The Destination Buckingham Group (DBG) attempts to promote the town, encourage townfolk to use its facilities rather than travel elsewhere, and attract increasing visitor numbers. It is funded by AVDC and enthusiastically chaired by Councillor Mike Smith. The Buckingham Society has a seat on the Committee along with people from businesses and organisations around the town.

At the most recent meeting of the DBG it was confirmed that Buckingham Garden Centre has agreed to take over the maintenance of the planters outside the Sorting Office. Also, new planters and hanging baskets will soon be installed throughout the town to brighten all of our lives this summer.

Plans are in hand to position “wayfinding totems” in the town, again using DBG/AVDC funding. These would comprise a map of the town and directions to the main shopping areas and places of interest.

Speaking of information for visitors, did you know that members of the DBG regularly visit the town’s hotels to ensure that stocks of information leaflets are maintained? Well, you do now.

Buckingham of course is proud to be a Fair-Trade town and the DBG is helping fund the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of that status being achieved. The celebration will take place over the weekend of September 16th and 17th. Councillor Margaret Gateley, a member of the DBG, chairs the celebrations Steering Group organising the events.

These will include a talk from Adam Gardner, Fairtrade Foundation Communities Campaigns Manager, and a raffle will be held outside The Old Gaol on 16 September. On September 17th, a celebration service will take place at Well Street Church and other attractions will include a “Wheel of Fair Trade” and an Anniversary Cake Design competition (the winning design is to be professionally made). It would be good if as many Buckingham Society members as possible could support this important celebration.

Looking further ahead, funding will be provided for “Christmas Big Event” that will coincide with the switch on of the Christmas lights on November 26th. There will be more information on this nearer the time but definitely part of the celebration will be the presentation of the Buckingham Society’s Trader of the Year Awards. More on all of this later.

Preserving and Enhancing Buckingham's treescape, hedgerows and open spaces – Ian Orton

Action to preserve and enhance Buckingham's trees, hedgerows and open spaces

The Action Commission established by Buckingham Town Council (BTC) back in November 2016 to consider ways in which the town's trees, hedgerows and open spaces can be protected against the depredations of developers and other vandals duly completed its work and submitted a report containing its recommendations to BTC's Environment Committee.

I understand that the recommendations were passed and will be worked-up into more detailed plans and policies that can be implemented in the months and years ahead.

Getting the general public involved in helping to take care of their environment underpins many of the recommendations contained within the report, the bulk of which I drafted.

To ensure that BTC receives as much assistance as possible in moving the report's recommendations forward I thought it would be helpful if Buckingham Society members were made aware of them.

Here they are in my original draft:

Solutions.

The palliatives and solutions that we have come up with to help preserve and enhance Buckingham's trees, hedgerows and open spaces fall into two categories: medium and long-term and shorter term.

Because of their scope, which is more wide ranging, the former, i.e. medium and long-term palliatives will almost certainly involve other organisations and local government agencies in addition to BTC. They will also be much more costly to implement both in terms of manpower and other resources. As a consequence we have focused our attention on shorter term measures which can be introduced more quickly and cheaply by BTC in association with other organisations within the town.

1. Medium and Long Term.

(i) A long term arboreal, hedgerow and open space management plan for the town identifying:

- *all open spaces, trees, and the ownership thereof;
- *planned "new" open-space, tree and hedgerow developments, i.e new open spaces/linear parks, the ownership thereof etc;
- *maintenance priorities;
- *routine maintenance plans etc., etc.
- *the time frame and phasing of any policies contained within the plan;

*the resources available along with any shortfalls to implement the plan.

This will involve consultations with a wide range of stakeholding organisations within Buckingham as well as other elements of local government.

Two potential problems here is that the current system of local government may change in the near future with Buckingham forming part of a unitary authority.

(ii) The management plan will be based on parameters established as part of a *Vision and Design Statement* that is supposed to be produced under the auspices of the Buckingham Local Development Plan.

Ideally this should contain be based on a vision of Buckingham's future treescape, open spaces (including linear parks linking both housing developments and more substantial open spaces) including details of preferred trees and shrubs etc. etc. as well outlining what type of "open space" we really want.

A lot of "open space", especially that included within new developments is nothing more than empty grassland, e.g. Embleton Way, Linden Village etc.

2. Short term

(i) *More tree wardens to help enforce and implement the planning system, especially as far preventing tree felling or hedgerow grubbing by developers is concerned.*

BTC, or the BTC's Environment Committee should, as a matter of urgency, produce materials outlining the nature of a tree warden's responsibilities along with useful contact numbers to enable the relevant authorities to be alerted quickly in the event of unauthorised work on trees, hedgerows etc.

Although BTC has recruited more tree wardens (and probably many more people who would be willing to act as tree wardens) the current lack of relevant materials may result in interest evaporating.

(ii) *Inculcating a sense of community pride in Buckingham's treescape and outstanding examples of particular trees along with our open spaces.* The reality is that many residents are probably unaware of just how good some of our trees and open are.

(iii) *Encouraging neighbouring residents or local organisations to "take ownership" of the maintenance of trees/hedgerows or open spaces following the examples set by the Buckingham Railway Walk Conservation Group, Maids Moreton Avenue Conservation Group; Friends of The Old Churchyard etc.*

(iv) *Enlisting the help of schools and other organisations to create more interest in our trees, hedgerows and open spaces as valuable habitats that may be "adopted".*

(vi) *Organising something similar to the annual "River Rinse" to help clear and tidy open spaces, hedgerows etc, especially those bordering the by-pass.*

vii) Making property owners aware of their [legal] responsibilities under the planning system, especially if they have trees in the curtilage of their property along with the help available to assist with tree maintenance and planting from local authorities and other bodies.

(viii) Extending and completing the existing network of footpaths and embryonic linear parks in conjunction with both local authorities and community groups to help create a giant linear park embracing the whole of Buckingham.

(ix) Making use of Assets of Community Value designations to provide additional protection to open spaces where ownership may be unclear.

(x) Paying much greater attention to boundaries when examining planning applications, especially if the boundaries contain trees and hedgerows and making sure that these are protected as far as possible

The Transport Group – David Child

The transport group continues to work on a number of projects and in this newsletter we report on the HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicle) restrictions in Buckingham. HGVs are generally restricted to the major roads through the town but there are gaps in the siting of the signs and the wording of the restrictions.

So some get into the town, as shown here: this HGV had to reverse to ensure he did not take the Zebra crossing Belisha beacon with him. Cars had to reverse or drive across the paved area outside the old Town Hall to allow the HGV to negotiate the



junction.

You may have seen weight restriction signs around the town like the one on the High Street or the School Lane sign hiding in the trees.

The weight restriction signs come in various forms with text like “Except for loading” or “Except for access”. At this time we are not sure what the effect is of the text in terms the legal constraints but “Except for loading” presumably is the strongest as no doubt the driver would have to show that he is loading within the restricted zone and not passing



just through.

Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) is in the process of preparing a listing of the restrictions they have on record and we hope to be able to compare this to the HGV information that is available on the OS MasterMap Highways Network.

The aim is to try and ensure that the OS MasterMap Highways Network is in line with the needs and legal restrictions of Buckingham so that HGVs using satnavs with the OS information will not find themselves in restricted zones.

We say Farewell to Two Eminent Buckingham Society Members

Rodney Shirley was active in the Society from the 1990s when he carried out very effective work in researching and restoring the site of St Rumbold's Well. With characteristic foresight, he ensured that the site was registered to protect it from future building development that was likely to happen in that area. Rodney's funeral took place on 14th March at St John the Evangelist Church in Radclive.



John Townsend, pictured left, died on 7th May this year. He was an active member of the society from the early 1990's, and was Secretary in 1993. He was involved in the development of the Riverside Walk and the influential Vision and Design Statement published in 2001. His funeral took place on 19th May and he is buried in Buckingham Cemetery.

2017 Dates for your diary

17th June Civic Day starting at 10.00 am.

20th July Annual Lecture and Garden Party - Barry Smith will talk about Stowe and other National Trust gardens in Aylesbury Vale for which he has responsibility. His title is Head of Gardens and Estates

15th November Annual General Meeting – After the meeting, Ian Harvey of Civic Voice will be talking about the history of Conservation Areas - fifty years old this year (the conservation areas, not Ian). Ian is Executive Director of Civic Voice and one of its founders.

Executive Committee:

Roger Edwards	Chair
David Child	Transport and Planning
Carolyn Cumming	Planning
Paul Fello	Transport and Planning
Ed Grimsdale	Planning and society historian
Gill Jones	Membership Secretary
Tony Mayston	Treasurer
Belinda Morley-Fletcher	Secretary
Nigel Morrison	Destination Buckingham
Ian Orton	Green and Open Spaces
Kathy Robins	Newsletter Editor, Transport and Planning
Colin Stocker	University representative

We should like to hear from you

Please give us some feedback - tell us what activities you would like The Buckingham Society to prioritise, what more you think that the Society should do or what we should stop doing. Comments to: kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk Tel: 07834 484762. If you would like be become in involved in any of our activities or attend a meeting of the executive committee, then contact us or just come along. www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk