

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE CHICHESTER SOCIETY AGM 2015

Mr Mayor, ladies and gentlemen:

Another year has flown by and again I stand before you to report on our activities over the past twelve months and to look forward to 2016 and what may be in store for us.

When I spoke to you last October, the Examination in Public of the Chichester District Local Plan had just begun. I firmly believed that the Plan was a flawed document and that the Planning Inspector would find fault with significant aspects. In particular I was convinced that the various fundamental infrastructure problems relating to the West of Chichester Strategic Development Location (Whitehouse Farm) were of sufficient magnitude to render the development of the site unsustainable.

I also felt that the Westhampnett/ East of Chichester Strategic Development Location (aka Oldplace Farm) was wholly unsuitable, particularly in its proximity to Goodwood motor circuit and airfield.

The inspector's report was published in May and concluded that as modified (with more than 100 modifications) the Local Plan met the 'soundness' test of the National Planning Policy Framework. Naturally I and many others found the conclusions disappointing. On a number of points we felt that the evidence demonstrated failure of the Local Plan. The inspector concluded otherwise.

On West of Chichester development site, despite numerous objections concerning inadequate transport infrastructure and wastewater treatment, which would make the site unsuitable, the inspector decided that these major difficulties were not a matter for the Local Plan but for resolution during the detailed planning process.

On Oldplace Farm the Inspector concluded, "I am satisfied that the Plan's flexible and pragmatic approach to addressing the buffer between Goodwood and new housing development is appropriate and effective"

Notwithstanding approval of the Plan, due to the major infrastructure issues relating to the A27 and to wastewater treatment, a review of the Plan has to be completed within 5 years.

With the Strategic Development Locations approved the battleground moves to the individual planning applications for each site and I foresee our activities in the forthcoming year focusing on these issues.

Our participation in the Local Plan Enquiry informed us of other groups and individuals in this town who are also dismayed at the scale and insensitivity of the development proposals as set out in the Plan. The Society's Committee members have had constructive discussions with these interests.

Furthermore, nationally the Society, as a member of Civic Voice (with over 300 member societies), is well aware of similar development pressures across the country. Civic Voice is setting up a Cathedral Cities Alliance, which will seek to lobby for more sensitive and appropriate development in and around our historic cathedral cities.

Yes we know that more homes are needed, that young people must be educated, that we need full employment and uncongested roads; but these objectives should be attained *without* killing that which we love.

Moving away from planning matters, I'd like to turn to the more enjoyable activities.

I was very pleased that this year we provided more events for members than we have done for some time.

Following the visit of members of the Winchester Trust to Chichester in 2014, we organised a reciprocal visit to Winchester in April.

In May we organised a trip to the Apuldram wastewater treatment works. Much to my surprise this was a well-attended event, though suggestions that we visit some more sewage plants seemed a little over enthusiastic for my liking!

For a third year the Society made its contribution to the Festival of Chichester. Over 50 people attended the Pallant Suite to hear Tim Rooth's lecture and the launch of his book, *Saving Our City*.

The talk by Richard Pailthorpe, the Director of the Weald and Downland Museum, on the museum's history and its future was regrettably not so well attended and we shall review the reasons for this.

David Wilson conducted another guided walk, (the best attended yet), on the Downs near Hooksway, North of Chichester and I would like to thank him for doing this.

In July we arranged a very pleasant guided tour of the vineyard and a wine tasting at the Tinwood Vineyard, Halnaker.

The following month we had a guided historical tour round the Graylingwell Hospital site. I'd like to place on record my thanks to our guides, Greg and Katherine Slay for providing us with a most enjoyable afternoon.

Finally last month we had a guided walk round Chichester Harbour.

I have just mentioned the launch of Tim Rooth's book, *Saving Our City*, so it is appropriate to say a bit more about it. It was about three years ago when Tim approached me with the idea of writing a history of the Society's early years, as a way of marking its 40th anniversary. As its first Secretary, Tim was ideally placed to write the book.

I am delighted with what Tim has produced. The book is very readable and has some fascinating illustrations. Thanks are therefore due not only to Tim but also to John Templeton, who provided lots of information and photographs, and to Bob Wiggins who found us a very good local publisher. I should also like to thank those who helped to finance the publication of the book.

My final word on the book is that tonight there is a golden opportunity for you to buy a copy or even two copies at the bargain knock-down price of £5 – remember Christmas is only 9 weeks away!

In January your Executive Committee agreed that we should apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund to finance a project to produce a series of Chichester Heritage Trails, namely guided walks around the city. Though such guides have been produced in the past, there really isn't much currently available. We commissioned someone who is well-versed in these matters to write our bid to the HLF. At the same time we applied to Chichester City Council's community grants scheme for some matching funding, your committee having already agreed to contribute £1,000 of the Society's funds to the project.

I am delighted to tell you that not only has the City Council granted us £1,000 but the HLF has agreed to fund the rest of the project to the tune of £53,000. We shall shortly be recruiting a project officer and then recruiting volunteers for this two-year project. We believe that producing these trails will be an educative and creative process involving people of all ages. The trails will not just be leaflets but will be available in various electronic formats. This is truly exciting work!

Whilst talking of projects, in January Anthony Quail and I attended a workshop relating to the War Memorials Project, which is being run by the

War Memorials Trust and is encouraging civic societies like ours to organise the project locally. The project aims to locate, record and undertake conservation assessments of every war memorial in a particular locality. In Chichester there are over 20 war memorials.

I made an appeal to our members in our June newsletter, alas I had no response. However, if anyone here tonight would be interested in getting involved, do let me know. Nationally the project will run until 2018.

Now I should like to say a few words about the work of my colleagues.

This time last year I congratulated Bob Wiggins on his first edition as Editor of our Newsletter. Since then, Bob has produced a further four editions and has brought about a number of changes and new ideas, so I repeat my congratulations and offer him my thanks.

I should also take this opportunity to say that we always welcome articles and suggestions for future editions, so please do contact Bob if you have anything to offer.

You will shortly be hearing our Treasurer's annual report, so it is appropriate for me to thank David Wilson for his excellent work on running a financially tight ship. As a reward, we have now given David the additional task of managing a separate account for our Heritage Trails Project!

David has given me advance notice that he wishes to step down as Treasurer after this coming year having been our Treasurer for 5 years. This means that we start the search for a new Treasurer and if anyone here tonight is interested please have a word with David.

I should like to congratulate John Wichers for his sterling work as our membership secretary, in particular for his gee-up emails reminding members of forthcoming events. Also I would like to thank Bill Sharp for his continued work managing the Society's website.

Again I have been more than ably supported by Anthony Quail, our Secretary, who has kept me well briefed and organised. Our retiring Vice Chairman, John Templeton has provided his usual high level of sage advice and wisdom.

I have been helped in many ways by the other members of the Executive Committee. Thanks also to our various volunteers who have helped us out at events or have stuffed newsletters into envelopes.

Last but not least ,I should like to offer special thanks to John Pavitt who, though he retired from the Executive Committee three years ago, has continued to monitor planning applications and write the appropriate letters to the District Council. John has informed us that after many years as our planning adviser he wishes to stand down. May I wish John all the best for the future, freed from the shackles of planning applications and wish him and his wife, Daphne happiness in their new home.

The consequence of John's departure is that we are also now looking for someone who would be interested in monitoring the District Council's planning application lists and making responses to the Council.

More broadly I would urge members to come forward and offer their help to the Society. The Society is only as strong as its membership will allow it to be by collective effort. Be in no doubt we are in need of some fresh blood to take on key tasks.

So, looking forward, what can we expect in the forthcoming 12 months?

I suspect that quite a bit of our time will be spent reacting to issue relating to the Whitehouse and Oldplace Farm developments. In the next few months we are promised a consultation exercise by Highways England on options for the future of the A27. We have already responded to the Ministry of Justice's consultation document on the future of Chichester's Courts and we await the outcome from that. Another outcome we await is the future of Chichester's markets. There will also be the District Council's document on a 20 year vision for the future of Chichester.

However in terms of self-generated work for the Society we shall of course be starting the Chichester Heritage Trails Project.

I hope that we shall be able to arrange a number of visits and events for members during 2016 and of course we shall keep you informed through the pages of our newsletter and on our website and even a Twitter feed!

I trust that I and my colleagues have served you satisfactorily during the past twelve months and that we have justified your continuing support for the year ahead.

Richard Childs

October 2015