THE CHICHESTER SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

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Member of Civic Voice, the charity for the civic movement in England

OWN GOAL ON PORTFIELD FOOTBALL PITCH

Richard Childs on a planning deadlock and possible solution

Volte-Face at CDC

It was with mixed feelings that I read about the recent debacle over Chichester District Council refusing to approve an extension to its own outline planning application for a housing development on the old Portfield football ground in Church Road, which was originally granted in 2009.

The entrance to once-proud Portfield football ground, weed-blown for 15 years in CDC inactive ownership

My first reaction was one of mild amusement that apparently the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing down at East Pallant House. Secondly, on reflection, I endorsed the sentiments expressed in the Chichester Observer's editorial, that this was a triumph for democracy, based on reasoned argument by those opposing the application.

Impasse on Building Houses

However my final thought was that this episode was just another symptom of the conundrum, both local and national, affecting the issue of house building.

Not enough houses are being built we hear being shouted from the corridors of Westminster and Whitehall. Time and again we have been told by CDC's Cabinet Members that we need to meet a target for building houses. If we don't voluntarily come up with the right number in the Local Plan, (the latest figure standing at 7,388 new homes by 2029, equating to 435 per annum), the government will impose figures on us. If we don't have a Local Plan the developers will run riot, building here, there and everywhere in and around our city.

Building Malaise

But what is the reality both national and locally? These days government, neither at national nor local level, builds houses. It is left largely to the private sector, with a relatively small contribution from housing associations. And there's the rub. Why build houses today when you can get a better price for them if you build them in a few years time when the economy is stronger?

Despite developers bleating on and on about the difficulties of the planning system, essentially they are sitting on vast swathes of land that already have planning permission, waiting to make hay when the sun eventually shines. And the consequences of the current situation? The building supply industry, e.g. brick manufacturers has shrunk; there aren't sufficient skilled builders around.

When it comes to building houses, particularly affordable housing and social housing, I would contest that

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the private sector isn't fit for purpose. In the 1980s it was the public sector that was deemed unfit to run council housing, and I'm sure that many councils were poor landlords, but if houses needed to be built, it was not profit that was the driving force.

Richard Poses a Solution

This brings me back to Portfield football ground. Portfield FC merged with Chichester City FC in 2000 and moved to Oaklands Park. The old football ground was left by CDC to rot until it is in the derelict state it is today. Meanwhile CDC sits on its own little land bank/nest egg until they can recoup the maximum return from its sale. After all, land with planning permission is worth its weight in gold.

However, there's a glitch in the shape of access to and from Westhampnett Road. No developer worth his salt would buy the relatively small plot of land knowing the costly issue of the road access. This is of course where the developers of the Barnfield retail park site, whose proposals abut onto Westhampnett Road, have a key part to play. They need CDC planning approval for improvements to the road which would also improve access from Church Road, which would then improve the market value of Portfield FC ground for CDC then to sell it.

If the current stumbling block is the proposed roundabout on Westhampnett Road, the equitable way forward would be to share costs between the retail park and the football field residential site on an independent valuation of the benefits to each developer. This would secure the development of both sites.

And you wonder why not enough houses are being built!!

PEDESTRIANS ARE FORGOTTEN IN STATION FORECOURT REVAMP

Bob Wiggins, who uses it frequently, notes the unfortunate consequence

The recent introduction of a traffic island at the entrance to the Chichester Railway Station is welcome as it separates incoming from exiting traffic and provides a safe haven for those crossing that area.

The finishing touch is less welcome, as a wide green strip allocated solely to cyclists was laid from the complete width of the station's pavement entrance area past Station Taxis to the junction with the walkway that leads to Waitrose.

This latter walkway is divided into two lanes – one for pedestrians and one for cyclists – thereby raising no doubt as to where each should aim for.

When a walker encounters the green strip, however, there is no defined route by which they can safely progress to the station.

What clearly is required is for two lanes – cyclists and pedestrians – to be delineated along this new strip. Your Society has asked the West Sussex County Council why the current layout was chosen.

ONLY TWO CHEERS FOR GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY?

The findings of the Select Committee are summarised by David Wilson

Readers will have realised by now that, in connection with Chichester's Local Plan, your committee is less than enthusiastic about the way in which the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has operated since its introduction in 2012. We think it has made it too easy for developers to grab greenfield sites, and that all too often it overrides local preferences in favour of a vaguely defined 'sustainable development'. So it was interesting when the MPs who make up the Select Committee on Community and Local Government (hereafter 'the Committee') produced a report last December which gave the NPPF only one, or maybe two, cheers - not helped by the fact they had been hindered in their efforts to assess how well it is operating by the absence of reliable, up-to-date data.

Shippams as demolition starts

Contrasting Views of Various Bodies

The national organisations who gave evidence to the committee thought that the NPPF had introduced a welcome simplification, and just needed time to 'bed in'. House builders in particular thought that the policy should not be altered. That evidence contrasted dramatically with the virtually unanimous views of numerous amenity groups and parish councils that development approved by the NPPF was unsustainable, generated speculative and undesirable housing applications, and offered no protection to town centres against out-of-town retail parks.

'Sustainability' ill-defined

While the Committee placed its trust in the early completion of Local Plans, they did feel that 'sustainability' was not properly defined in the NPPF, and this was a great weakness when the concept of sustainable development is a central plank of the policy. They also found that sites were being developed at a greater rate than could be supported by the parallel building of infrastructure, and wanted safeguards built in to future Plans.

Biodiversity and Woodlands Threatened

There was also concern over the way in which biodiversity was being threatened. Again, the Committee urged local planners to stress preservation of biodiversity.

However, a number of sites containing ancient woodland are at risk, and here the Committee considered that the phrasing of the NPPF should make disturbance of such woodland 'wholly exceptional'.

Local Plans Complex – but for a Reason

District Councils felt that the procedure for producing a Local Plan was too complex, but unavoidably so as developers would seize on any minor defect to have the whole plan thrown out. The Committee themselves appeared astounded by the number of documents, and suggested that plans which were simpler and more understandable to the man in the street could be produced if such plans could be incrementally built up.

Developers Criticised

Developers came in for their share of criticism for putting in speculative large-scale planning applications, essentially wrecking any Local Plan before it could even be published. The Committee thought that the Government could add a section to the NPPF setting out the responsibilities of developers .

Duty to Co-operate needs Enforcing

Your Executive has had doubts about whether Chichester District Council has indeed fulfilled its duty to co-operate. This does not appear to have been an isolated case. The Committee wanted a carrot-and-stick approach, on the one hand the carrot of extra cash for authorities who did cooperate, but the stick of making it a statutory requirement.

Conflicting Views on Neighbourhood Plans

Parish Councils and Civic Groups often regarded neighbourhood plans (NP) rather differently from

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developers. The former groups thought that the ability to develop a NP was merely warm words from the government. Developers thought that too much weight was given to NP. The Committee has a pious hope that house builders will work with communities to ensure that local needs are met – but it also noted that the NPPF did not provide for the case in which house builders and communities disagree. (*See Laurie Pocock's article on pages 15 and 16 about Birdham's experience with neighbourhood planning).*

Brownfield Sites Ignored

The requirement for councils to maintain a five year supply of housing land had been leading, in the view of many councils, to the success of planning applications for greenfield sites when brownfield sites were plentifully available. Rather optimistically, the Committee called for Government money to remediate brownfield sites.

What can be done with a brownfield site: Shippams site before and after building started

Housing Need Disputed

Developers and Councils were also at odds over the assessment of housing need. One dramatic example had an assessment from one source double that from the other – no prizes for guessing which was which! The Committee wanted to count all sites with planning permission towards the five year supply; at the moment, if one developer sits inactively on a site, another developer can claim that lots of houses should instead be built on the site he owns!

Retail versus Residential

Finally, the NPPF had been expected to direct retail developments to town centres, but evidence showed that 76% of recent development had been out of town. The Government disputed this but had no figures to back up its case.

In any case, with changing patterns in shopping, the Committee felt it unreasonable for Local Plans to see 15 years into the future and reiterated its case for rolling plans. The Committee also felt that uncontrolled change from retail to residential could also destroy town centres and wanted such changes to require permission again.

A NEW THATCHED ROOF APPEARS

Majestic in Appearance!

This thatched building located in what was called Combes Yard, was listed as a grade II building in 1976.

It is also identified as a Focal Building in the Chichester Conservation Area Character Appraisal. It became more prominent when Needlemakers was cut through from St Pancras.

DAYS OUT FOR CHISOC MEMBERS

VISIT TO WINCHESTER HOSTED BY THEIR CIVIC SOCIETY– Friday 24 April

Date: Friday 24 April 10:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.

Numbers: Up to 20 people

Itinerary: A day in Winchester as guests of the City of Winchester Trust – their civic society – to appreciate this historic town, seeing parts not normally accessible to the general public.

- Briefing about Winchester's town planning challenges
- A guided walking tour of old Winchester before lunch
- An escorted visit to Winchester College including the archives after lunch

Guests are expected to be fit for walking tours and must be confident with steep stairs

Refreshments: included – morning coffee and tea; sandwich lunch

Travel: Joining instructions will be posted with tickets on receipt of payment

Cost: £20 per person - includes refreshments, tours and access to Winchester College.

To apply: Send a stamped addressed envelope with your cheque **to be received by Friday 27 March** payable to The Chichester Society - to The Secretary, Chichester Society, 44 Westgate Chichester PO19 3EU. Applications will be managed in date order.

VISIT TO APULDRAM WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS – 20 May

Date: Wednesday 20 May 10:00a.m. to 12:00p.m

Numbers: Up to 20 people

Itinerary: Free tour during which operators and a scientist will be present to answer questions.

Travel: Independently by car. To reduce congestion, car sharing is advisable. Visitors should meet at office reception, just inside the gate.

To apply: Please contact John Wichers either by phone 01243 778976 or by email john@wichers.plus.com

NATIONAL TRUST OFFER FOR CHISOC MEMBERS

Date: During 2015

Details: *Sumer is icumen in* as the medieval folk song has it - so now is the time to plan a free visit to a National Trust property during 2015.

As a member of the Chichester Society, which is affiliated to Civic Voice, you can apply for a National Trust Day Pass to one of their properties - at the cost of just two stamps.

Not every NT property participates in this scheme: information is provided with the Pass posted to you.

To apply: To receive your Pass (it's a paper document and not electronic), post your request to Civic Voice and enclose a stamped addressed envelope (any size) confirming your name, address and your membership of the Chichester Society. Send it to: Gill Roxborough, Civic Voice, 60 Duke Street, Liverpool L1 5AA.

Passes for this year were not available at the time of going to press but are expected shortly. Just post your request and the Pass will be sent when available - there's no rush because this offer lasts to December.

THE DEFORESTATION OF CHICHESTER

David Wilson leaves no doubt as to the problem

Have you walked around the City Walls recently and counted the stumps where trees have been removed? Does it worry you that the shaded parts of the Walls Walk will be left to our grandchildren as a bare treeless bank?

The problem comes in two parts. First, do the trees need to be felled? In general the answer here is 'Yes'; the District Council isn't going mad with a chainsaw!

A hornbeam was felled in North Walls last year and the remaining stump shows evidence of why this decision was made. The original fruiting bodies of the 'spindleshanks' fungus have generally decayed. They can still be seen as dark patches, but the trunk itself is now growing a good crop of bracket fungus, a different species and currently more conspicuous!

The stump of the hornbeam in North Walls, by Chapel Street, felled because it was diseased.

But as trees get older and die off, more and more gaps will appear. This leads to the second half of the problem; why not re-plant them to maintain a rolling stock of trees?

The villain of the piece here is English Heritage (EH). The City Walls are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and EH policy is not to allow tree planting within 5 metres of any such monument. You can see their point of view - tree roots are capable of doing a great deal of damage.

Recent plantings in Priory Park are carefully sited on the flat ground at the foot of the Walls. Note that all the trees around the edge of Priory Park, on the Castle Mound and along East Walls, once felled, will be affected by this ruling, as well as those along North Walls.

The Monkey Puzzle tree near the playground in Priory Park, carefully planted at a distance from the Walls themselves, while the stump of a former tree languishes in the background.

The problem is that when the Walls themselves were last re-built in Georgian times, they were laid out as a cultural amenity, as a promenade for ladies and gentlemen with agreeable trees lining the route.

Obviously the original trees were re-planted through the centuries, before English Heritage came on the scene.

The early planting can be seen in old maps dating back 200 years and more. The example on the next page shows the tree-lined promenade and trees on Castle Mound.

There's a glimmer of hope, though....

Perhaps the District Council should read the regulations and put in for planning permission to replace the trees which have been felled, as there is a loophole which might be exploited.

From the English Heritage website:

In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework

"*planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats* [that's the Walls], *... **unless** the need for and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss"* [and it goes on to mention] *"a tree which, because of its great size or condition of exceptional value for wildlife, in the landscape, **or culturally"**.* [my emphasis].

Annex 2: Glossary, National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2012

William Gardner (1769)

THE RELUCTANT SLOE TREE

Fourth-time lucky?

David Wilson notes that readers may remember from the December 2012 issue of the Newsletter that the Society planted a sloe tree to replace the one at Northgate, which had died. This had been there to commemorate the preservation of rights to the Sloe Fair by Harry Stroud. Mr. Stroud turned up every year on October 20th throughout WWII and pitched his stall, so that showmen's rights were not extinguished.

Sloe trees are reportedly short-lived and we have proved this by experience! The nursery- grown one planted in October 2012 only lasted a year before also dying. Then a hurried replacement was found in March last year, from the waste ground at Barnfield near Homebase; too hurried as it never established in a fairly dry Spring.

Nil desperandum! Justin Jones, of CDC (to whom many thanks), dug up another one from the Barnfield site and grew it on in a pot through the summer. This was planted last November, the best tree planting season, with a well established root ball, and we feel confident that this will at last survive.

From left: Richard Attenborough and Toby Pointing (CDC) and David Wilson (Chichester Society)

Uses of Sloe trees: The wood from Sloe trees (also known as blackthorn) has been used to make walking or riding sticks, and was the traditional wood for Irish shillelaghs. Sloe fruit is used to make 'sloe gin'.

(The Society has also funded tree planting in the City, the first one being a Red Oak at Northgate between the pedestrian subway and the car park in February 1975 and still flourishing today.)

'PASS IT ON PROJECT' CELEBRATES THE HISTORY OF THE CFT

Sophie Shaw, Heritage Activities Manager, explains the work of the Theatre's project

The ambitious community project to capture and share the history of Chichester Festival Theatre is now entering its final year. With such a rich and varied past, there continues to be a great deal of fascinating material to explore. Taking lessons from the Theatre's founding story, we are keen to remember that people, community and collaboration are at the heart of everything we do. And, working with over 200 volunteers and in partnership with nine local organisations, we are drawing on a range of local skills, experience and sheer manpower to find, organise and tell our stories.

Origins and Aims

Pass It On owes its existence to the RENEW project, the recently completed large-scale capital work to restore and improve the Grade II* listed building that has housed the Festival Theatre since its opening in 1962. Heritage Lottery funding was awarded to support the major redevelopment, and to establish a three -year community participation programme. Pass It On aims to preserve the human history of the Theatre alongside the work to protect its built heritage.

Extensive Collaboration

Our work is centred on the mammoth task of organising a Theatre archive in partnership with West Sussex Record Office, whose highly experienced archivists

have been training volunteers alongside CFT staff. In addition an oral history project is contributing a wealth of living memory to this resource. Expert oral historian and writer, Rib Davis, has been training and mentoring our volunteers to record interviews. Our focus has been on the unsung heroes who have been actively involved in various phases of the Theatre's past, either as audience members or through various backstage roles.

Benefits for the Classroom

Another area of our work that is taking us into exciting new territory is our Playboxes. We have been working in partnership with five Chichester schools since 2013. A group of teachers from these schools have been meeting with us regularly to delve into our archive and to experiment with how its contents might support their great work in the classroom.

We have discovered that, because of the wide range of roles and skills necessary to a working theatre, this archive can support learning across almost every area of the National Curriculum. As well as scope for designing costumes and writing play scripts, these boxes focus on the maths involved in seating an audience or marking up a stage and the science behind lighting gels or the materials used in the RENEW project.

We can throw a fair dose of local history and citizenship into the mix for good measure through exploring the people who built the Festival Theatre in the first place and the impact it has had on Chichester. These Playboxes are being tested in the classroom for the remainder of this school year and will be ready to roll out from September 2015 onwards.

Ongoing Events

That's not all, we have been working with our volunteers on curating an exhibition of some of the highlights from the archive so far, which will be touring to Horsham, Havant, Midhurst, Littlehampton and Bognor over the course of 2015. We continue to run events and workshops to explore and share the history that we collect and we are also working on developing a series of radio plays from our Oral History collection for broadcast in early 2016.

Going Public

So far, our fabulous and dedicated volunteers have contributed over 1500 days' worth of work to this project, and we are far from finished yet. We are on track to open the archive to the general public through the Record Office by early 2016.You can keep up to date with our progress through our blog and see a full list of our partners and activities at www.passiton.cft.org.uk.

LOWER GRAYLINGWELL

John Pavitt our planning advisor, reports on a promising development

When the former mental hospital site was developed as Graylingwell Park there was a sliver of land left outside the development. This was not required by the NHS and it has been acquired by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) that is responsible for the redevelopment of the larger pieces of surplus government land. The HCA has named this site 'Lower Graylingwell' and it has published a draft master plan for consultation before it submits a planning application to Chichester District Council.

HCA Propose Lower Density Development

The HCA and its consultants propose 165 new homes. The density is somewhat lower than Graylingwell Park because of the wish to retain existing features including the hospital cricket ground which will be a community sports field. This will have a new pavilion and the whole field will be managed by the Chichester Community Development Trust for public benefit. The lower density will also allow mature trees to be retained and a community garden to be provided.

Parking and Traffic Arrangements

Parking provision will be in accordance with WSCC Integrated Parking Strategy which takes account of expected levels of car ownership, high quality design and the efficient use of land. This is higher than was allowed at Graylingwell Park. It is likely that parking will be managed on site by a Parking Management Company as is the case at Graylingwell Park.

WSCC intends to retain the split of traffic to and from Graylingwell that was required for Graylingwell Park. This means that access to Lower Graylingwell should be from Barnfield Drive and not from the west. Bus gates are proposed to control this but the Chichester Society is concerned as to how local deliveries and services can be accommodated. As Graylingwell Drive is owned by Linden Downland as part of Graylingwell Park this needs to be discussed between the landowners and the County Council.

Representation of Lower Graylingwell with retained sports ground to right

The Historic Martin's Farm

The future of the severely dilapidated historic buildings at Martin's Farm needs to be decided. The consultation master plan suggests courtyard housing to retain the pentagonal shape that was dictated by the network of Iron Age dykes.

However, we understand the HCA is working with the Council to ascertain whether the farmhouse building can be restored and integrated into the proposed scheme. The latest draft design for this area includes a retained and restored farmhouse building with a number of mews-style properties reflecting the layout of the historic farm complex.

Outline Plans to be Submitted

HCA will submit an outline planning application (with reserved matters) to enable it to select a preferred developer, who will then develop a final plan and take over the development.

The site is important because it will, in a small way, help the council towards its local development plan objectives without extending the city onto green fields.

The proposals have therefore been welcomed in principle by the Chichester Society, which will keep a close eye on them during the next stages.

THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK – THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

As recounted by Andrew Lee, Director of Strategy and Partnerships at the SDNPA

The story of England's newest National Park, which became operational on 1 April 2010, has been about partnership, with the interdependence of the National Park and the areas around being central to our vision and strategy.

From the health benefits of walks and cycle rides, the opportunities for children to learn, the spiritual boost of discovering its wildlife and cultural heritage, the food and timber grown and the freshwater which flows, the National Park gives us all a better quality of life.

Cycling to West Dean

Cycle northward out of town and you'll be on the Centurion Way. Thanks to close collaboration between the SDNPA, WSCC and the West Dean Estate, and with government funding, you will soon be able to get to West Dean, off-road from Chichester station. Our vision is to continue on to Midhurst, where plans are in place for a route across to Petersfield. In future intrepid families can pedal a circuit right into the heart of the National Park and back down to the coast on the Shipwrights Way.

Cycling paradise

Nurturing a unique Downland habitat

The beautiful grasslands and heathlands are also nationally important for wild flowers, butterflies, birds and reptiles. We are working closely with the National Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and farmers to create a better future for these priceless assets. The Defra-funded South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Area has brought substantial extra resources to manage, restore and join up chalk grassland habitat along the route of the South Downs Way. Meanwhile, with our partners, we have also been able to secure Heritage Lottery Funding for heathland management.

A Harting Woolly Mass

Hi-tec archaeology uncovers secrets

Using another HLF grant, the Secrets of the High Woods project involving flying over parts of this area using LIDAR technology has revealed hidden archaeology lying beneath the woodland canopy. It's early days but already we can see how generations have lived and worked in this landscape for thousands of years.

Volunteers studying archaeological sites with the use of Lidar images

Managing development

The Planning system is one of the most powerful tools the SDNPA has at its disposal. Claims that the National Park would become a no-go area for development and place undue pressure elsewhere have proved very far from the truth. For example, of the 3,600 decisions made by our Planning Committee in 2013-2014, 85 per cent were approvals. Planning is delivered in partnership with most of the local authorities which overlap the Park (such as Chichester DC and East Hants DC) which determine many of the less significant applications on our behalf.

The National Park communities and rural economy need to remain viable for example, through better rural broadband and more affordable housing. At the site of the former King Edward VII Hospital north of Midhurst, the SDNPA secured the future of a Grade 1 Listed building whilst seeing the creation of over 400 dwellings. This and countless smaller cases are setting benchmarks for well-designed and appropriately located development.

There are huge planning challenges ahead, and the policies being developed for the Park-wide Local Plan will provide the framework for future decisions that balance the needs of the community and economy with the imperative to safeguard the landscapes for which the Park was designated.

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK 5th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION WALK
Saturday 4 April, 10.30 a.m. South Downs Centre, North Street Midhurst

A six mile, 3 hour ramble, organised by the Hampshire Ramblers, with support from the Sussex Ramblers and the South Downs Society.
Date: Saturday 4 April 10:30
Itinerary: Start at the South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst (opposite the bus station and car park) commencing with coffee, presentations and a chance to look around the exhibition area. After the ramble (please bring a packed lunch) a return to the South Downs Centre for further refreshments.
To apply: contact Dr Owen Plunkett email: owen.plunkett@talktalk.net or simply turn up on the day.

NEW A27 FOOTBRIDGE AT KINGSHAM

A new bridge for pedestrian and cyclists is to be constructed across the A27 linking up the existing footpath networks and to ensure the continuation of the public right of ways for the benefit of the communities of North Mundham, Hunston and Whyke .

The primary purpose of the bridge is to provide a safe crossing for walkers and cyclists, It also aims to meet the local council's ambitions of embracing the landscape, encouraging recreation and serving as a landmark. The work started in February and is estimated to take 5 months to complete.

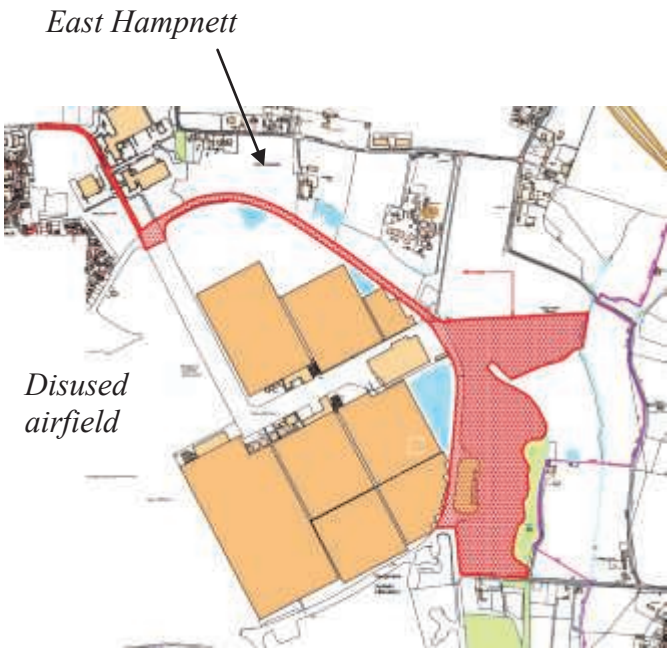
The arch bridge, to be coloured lime green, is designed to provide a more subtle, low level structure, to hug the contours of the surrounding pastoral countryside. It is 42.2m long with 2m-wide walkways suitable for wheelchair access, as well as stairs. At its highest point it will be 3m above the road level.

When the bridge is being lifted into place, there will be some closures of the A27 at this location, typically three or four overnight (8p.m. until 6a.m.). Further closures will be required at the start and end of the works to install and remove temporary safety barriers. Road users will follow a fully signed diversion route through Chichester City Centre.

WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL INVESTS IN A SOLAR FARM

Here we go again! Another Solar Farm is on the way in Sussex, this time our own County Council is at the forefront wishing to raise income from land which it owns.

Planning application was approved in January for a project which will cost £4.1 million to build on land adjacent to Tangmere Airfield and is claimed to pay for itself in less than ten of its 25-year life span. The site of 9 hectares (excluding access roads) and a proposed power output of 5MW puts it on a par with the 12.4 hectare solar farm at Hunters Race, reported on in the December 2014 issue of our Newsletter. We will report on progress in later issues.



Site area is marked in dark red

CHICHESTER STONEWORKS RISES FROM THE DUST

The rebirth is reported by John Wichers

In this age of globalization, I always think it sad to hear that a local business has ceased trading because it can no longer compete with 'big bucks' multi-nationals - an oft-repeated story during the last six years of recession. One such Chichester-based enterprise was the Cathedral Works Organization – more widely known to many of our readership as 'CWO', which went into administration early last year with the loss of over 100 skilled jobs.

New Company Formed

Whatever CWO's weaknesses were financially (and that is another story), the company's strong suit had long been a nation-wide reputation for top quality workmanship in all aspects of stonemasonry. Happily, a new company has now been formed and Adam Stone, their erstwhile Technical Director and himself a master mason, has now became Managing Director and a major shareholder in the re-born organization – Chichester Stoneworks Ltd.

CHICHESTER STONEWORKS

Adam Stone, MD of Chichester Stoneworks

Slimmer and Fitter

Adam is the driving force behind the new company, and together with four of his management colleagues are convinced their stonemasonry talents are still very much in demand. What they have achieved with their new firm is a very much slimmer and financially fitter operation, with the maxim 'Keep cash-positive' as a constant watchword. No longer the 100+ workforce on the payroll; they retain just ten of the most skilled 'banker' masons. All their other employees have now become self-employed. When the work is there, they are called in, and when it isn't, they are free to work on any other site or for themselves. A survival pattern replicated in many small building construction firms today.

External Investment

The creation of Chichester Stoneworks introduced a new participant – Szerelmey Ltd**.** This investor established a reputation in London early in the 20th century through restoration of some of the Capital's most prestigious buildings, most famously, the Houses of Parliament. Szerelmey is now the major shareholder in Chichester Stoneworks Ltd and brings with it additional financial muscle and also new clientele.

Now for the Grand Tour

Having brought me up-to-date with the history, Adam, a stocky friendly Yorkshireman, with a ready smile, is keen to show me the workshops on site, where his team of 'banker' masons create the finished article.

First, I am taken through the drawing office, where the templates are produced, to be used by the masons in creating the intricate shapes for their commissions.

Preparing the Raw Material

Then out to the yard where we enter a miniature 'Stone Henge' of limestone and sandstone blocks from various origins. "This is our raw material and this one here is mined in Bath" says Adam, patting a 2-tonne, 1-cubic-metre block – "See how regular it is, whilst this misshapen one here is from Portland, they even call it a 'Horse's Head'- 'cos that's what it looks like!" Next comes the primary saw shops where two giant saws – one rotary and one reciprocating – cut the blocks into regular, more manageable slabs.

'Stonehenge' yard (top); Primary reciprocating saw (centre); Profiling secondary saw (bottom)

Much water is needed to control the fine, powdery dust. The Company has just spent £30k on new plant to ensure waste water is cleaned to exceed Southern Water's standards.

Transformation to Finished Product

Finally, we enter the 'Banker Shop', manned by a team of ten masons. Here, the crude blocks are slowly and gently turned into the completed article, be it a rectangular cornerstone or a perfect sphere. With the most ancient of tools – mallet and chisels – and now, occasionally, aided by the angle-grinder, the mason slowly, skilfully and – oh so patiently, transforms the stone into its ordained form.

Colin Macrae, Banker Mason

Interestingly, just as silversmiths have symbols, so in stonemasonry. Each mason has a distinctive 'Mason's Mark' carved into each stone; often, but not always hidden once the stone is in place. The finished work is then delivered to the 'Fixer Masons' on -site, whose work it is to incorporate these stones into the building – an entirely separate, but nonetheless equally skilled job.

The Varieties of Stone Explained

"I suppose our cathedral was built with stone from Portland or Bath?" I wonder out loud; "Good Lord, no!" he replies with a chuckle, "that all came from Caen in Normandy. Don't forget, stuff that weighed this much could only easily be moved by water, so most of our older buildings in the south anyway, used a lot of French stone." "Besides," Adam continues, "Portland, as you can see, is not so user-friendly and has a lot of wastage because of the irregularities in its structure." "But I thought most of London's top architecture used Portland?" I query. "Yes, interesting that, but you see, it depends on the build date. With the coming of the railways in the 1840's, there was a sudden shift away from those quarries which had sea access. From the mid-1800's many prestige builds began to use the home-produced Bath stone – thanks to rail transport!"

"You know" Adam continues, "one of the best

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Gordon Utting, Senior Carver Mason, putting finishing touches to part of a carved installation for a large private estate

seams of Bath stone was only discovered thanks to the railway pioneers digging a tunnel for the new line through this hill – 'Box Ground'. It's still being mined there to this day!"

"What about the North and Scotland – all from local quarries, I suppose?" I ask Adam, "Oh Yes!, very much so – buildings prior to the coming of the railways were of local stone. We are very fortunate in the UK that there is such a variety of sedimentary rock deposits that originated from material produced by organisms such as coral or shellfish. About 350 million years ago, for instance, most of what is now the Peak District was under a shallow tropical sea and, being organic, each quarry has its own specific character – its colour, texture and sometimes even its smell will tell the experienced mason its origin!"

Costing the Work

"Tell me about cost" I ask, keen to get back to the present day, "does this vary much between sources?" "Absolutely!" he replies, "For instance, Portland stone is a lot pricier than Bath: more expensive to mine and the yield of workable Portland is very much less due to the stone's natural faults, yet the trade values its qualities so highly that a finished block of Portland can work out twice as expensive!" Adam smiles ruefully, "We had one load from a Manx quarry where the wastage was 600% - that makes pricing a job very- er, interesting!"

"Do you visit these quarries or mines when costing up a job?" I enquire. "Yes, at least one of the team will normally go – especially when the customer specifies a particular stone."

"How do you choose a stone for a certain job?" I query, "Is it all about price and yield?"
Adam responds thoughtfully, "Not entirely – if we are being asked to re-furbish or repair part of an existing edifice, then if that quarry is still working, we go there – if not, we choose stone with the most similar character. On the other hand, much of our work is for private houses and then it is very much a matter of consultation between us and the clients; their personal taste, depth of pocket and our guidance gained from years of experience."

Emphasis on Training and Apprenticeship

Talking of experience, it is clear from walking around the 'bankers' and meeting the masons, that everyone has been in his job for many years. Adam and his team are fierce advocates of an apprenticeship system, mindful that continuity of this expertise is essential. One young man has just completed a 3-year stint, a blend of academic knowledge and practical 'on-the-job' learning at the Stoneworks, attaining NVQ 1, 2 and 3 in stonemasonry. Now, a new apprentice has joined the workforce. Adam feels that not nearly enough emphasis is given to those companies who take indentureship seriously. "For example" he says, "When we tender for a contract, say with a local authority, we fill in what's called a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire – a PQQ. Loads of questions about Health & Safety – quite rightly so – but our training record is given very little, if any, recognition!"

Well Set for Future Success

Whilst Chichester Stoneworks, a home-grown firm, has recently been involved in some local work such as St. Peter's Church, in Petersfield, the refurbishment of our War Memorial and repairs to the walls of the Bishop's Palace garden, I am surprised to learn that the majority of their larger contracts are away from Chichester. Adam is sanguine about this; "We are a widely known company and CWO was a 'national treasure'. This industry has always survived by the patronage of the wealthy and it still does. They keep the ancient craft of stonemasonry alive, so that we can retain our heritage, to the benefit of all!"

"Any chance you might be asked to refurbish the Market Cross?" I enquire, a little mischievously, "It surely needs expert attention!" "Well, we would certainly like to tender for it – it needs a lot of 'TLC' to stop it getting worse and it's not something that can be done on the cheap. Cleaning of stone that age is a special technique and in the wrong hands can be very damaging. We have those special skills!"

CREATING BIRDHAM'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Laurie Pocock, Chairman of the Parish Council asks if 'localism' has any meaning in today's world

Let's set the scene back three years ago: Chichester District Council (CDC) had a failed local plan and was urgently inventing a new one; central government wanted to dramatically increase the supply of new housing and a newly elected Government used housing development to get the economy moving again. A new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced with a presumption to permit development in the absence of a Local Plan; meanwhile planners were using housing estimates from a Regional Plan the new Government was about to abolish! It must have appeared to developers (this is three years ago) that all their Christmases had come at once!

Enter 'Neighbourhood Plans'

In the midst of this came a commitment from David Cameron to let local residents have a say in how local matters should be run; they were to be allowed to write their own 'Neighbourhood Plans'. Realising that Birdham was about to be swamped by excessive and unsympathetic development, locals set about developing a Plan with some urgency. The starting point for those deliberations was that Birdham is a village of 650 homes with, at that time, 32 more under construction.

Parish Church of St. James, Birdham

First, Birdham Village Residents Association asked the Parish Council to write to the District Council - as planning authority – formally to request a moratorium on all development until the village had created its own Neighbourhood Plan. This was not an unreasonable request because the new Plan will run until 2029: so why the rush? Nevertheless CDC declined our request, stating it could not be supported legally.

Planning begins!

Next, the steering committee held its first consultation meeting, in November 2012, at the village hall and residents were asked to contribute ideas. Strong feelings were expressed, particularly on flooding, sewage and protecting Chichester Harbour's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and also the Manhood Peninsula's open environment in general and traffic problems on the A286, which runs through the parish.

Using feedback from that day allowed our hard-working volunteers to put together a questionnaire that was sent to every household in early summer 2013: over half were completed and returned.

The Steering Committee used these results to form a Birdham vision statement with objectives and draft policies shared at a second village open day. Feedback from this occasion informed policies designed to complement the District Council's emerging Local Plan. The revised draft circulated around the village in late spring 2014 produced copious responses and led to a final draft that included 50 new homes, an estimate overwhelmingly supported by residents. Birdham Parish Council approved our Plan in October 2014 - two years after we first started! It's now been submitted to CDC for examination and we await their decision: you can view it on the Council's web site.

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Development pressures

Whist all this has been progressing, planning applications for 126 more dwellings were lodged with CDC, of which 81 have been approved. Developers have challenged CDC's decision to lower the target for new housing, hopeful that they can push numbers back up to the levels in the former Regional Plan.

On top of this a Birdham land owner, who declined invitations to participate with the Neighbourhood Plan, has made an application to build another 81 new homes on land currently occupied by three nurseries in Bell Lane. So the pressure continues, and the question must be asked 'Will localism survive?' Or will we see the destruction of our green and pleasant land?

What's Happening in Other Parishes?

A spin-off from the Government's 'localism' agenda is the so-called 'Neighbourhood Plan' allowing smaller communities to be in greater control of future development. This is the context for Birdham's Plan.

How have other villages responded? There are about two dozen parishes around Chichester of whom just over half have begun to draw up a Plan - with three completed and submitted to the District Council for formal review; decisions are now awaited.

But there's no sign of a Neighbourhood Plan by Chichester City Council: why? The City has parish status and can do this, but so far has chosen not to. Is the City Council missing an opportunity? What do readers think?

CHICHESTER IN ALL ITS GLORY

This dramatic aerial photograph of the city from the south shows the importance of protecting the green setting of the city. The Roman walls and adjacent green spaces still define the historic centre; Centurion Way remains (so far) the firm boundary between suburb and countryside; the parklands between the city centre and Summersdale form the sylvan setting for the Hospital, University and Graylingwell Park, and the foothills of the South Downs National Park beckon beyond.

Aerial photo by CJB Photography

WHAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES BELIEVE IS RIGHT FOR CHICHESTER

The results of a questionnaire initiated by the Editor, Bob Wiggins

On 19 January all five local political parties – Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green Party and UKIP – were invited by email and letter to respond to 3 questions relating to housing and retail development, congestion on the A27 and the makeup of the City's retail centre. All requests were followed up to ensure they had been received and would be responded to. All agreed to send a response. All replies for each question were restricted to 100 words (any excess would be omitted) and all text would be published unedited (aside from formatting for the Newsletter).

The following tables, one for each question, contain their replies upon which the Society makes no comment. As a charity, The Chichester Society is of course non-political.

The respondents, all parliamentary candidates at the next election, are Conservative Party – Andrew Tyrie; Green Party – Jasper Richmond; Labour Party – Mark Farwell; Liberal Democrat Party – Andrew Smith and United Kingdom Independence Party – Andrew Moncrieff.

Question 1	**Has your Party any views on how much Chichester should expand in terms of both housing and retail development? And on what time scale?**
Conservative	The Local Plan submitted by Chichester District Council outlines the number of new homes that they believe are needed in Chichester. If we are to have more homes, we must at least have adequate investment in infrastructure to cope with the increase in demand on services and amenities.
Green Party	The present policy of District and County councils is to delegate the building of new homes to developers using large sites. The Green Party believes in smaller scale developments of social housing built in a sympathetic and beneficial form for local infrastructure. These would be sustainable, allow lower paid working families to live in the City they work in and reduce traffic by negating the need to commute. Local independent traders should be offered financial incentives and security of tenure to set up businesses within the city. These need to be instigated immediately, and be part of a long-term plan.
Labour	My views are same as the Labour Party in that I subscribe to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). A locally based development tax introduced to help finance the infrastructure needed to increase the supply of housing, particularly in areas of high demand like the South East. CIL was introduced by the Labour Government by regulations made under the Planning Act 2008. The Coalition Government has retained the CIL, but amended to give greater control of it to local councils and to allow some of the benefits of it to go to local neighbourhoods
Liberal Democrat	Chichester, along with Bath, York and Chester, was subject of a Study in Conservation published by HMSO in the late 60s. Each of these historic towns was recognised for its very special qualities. The emerging Local Plan clumsily refers to Chichester as a "sub-regional centre" but is about right on volumes and timescales overall. The Local Plan may well be settled by the time of the election. What will then matter is its execution. Attention to the quality of all aspects of design will be critical to retaining the special qualities recognised fifty years ago.
UKIP	Healthy communities must grow to remain healthy, and this fine and beautiful cathedral city is no exception - but its future development is dependent on its infrastructure. For example, the city's sewage treatment system is already operating beyond capacity. Further development must be conditional on investment to resolve these issues. It is also important that the 'strategic gaps' are maintained and protected, particularly to the West and North of the city. Finally, the residents of Chichester, both City and District, must have their say. The Government promised that local decisions would be made locally but has reneged upon it.

Question 2	What does your Party consider to be the best solution to the problem of congestion on the A27?
Conservative	It's vital that Chichester's roundabouts and traffic lights be improved, and a lot. The current congestion, especially when driving north from the Manhood Peninsula is intolerable. A lot of traffic is being displaced into the centre of Chichester itself. There is no sense in that. Constituents simply can't get to work in any reasonable time nor place any reliance on how long it will take. Extra money has already been agreed in principle but I will continue to push the Government for more support.
Green Party	The Green Party considers the best solution to reduce congestion is to facilitate alternatives that will lead to a reduction in car journeys; Integrated and affordable public transport; Affordable housing to lessen commuting; Safer spaces for cycling and walking; Utilisation of railways and waterways for the movement of goods; Support for local shops that can be used by pedestrians; Encourage deliveries outside peak travel hours; Smaller delivery vehicles. Our Georgian City was not built for the car or leviathans of commerce. By reducing the need to drive we will return it to a city for the people.
Labour	As set out in the 2010 Labour Party manifesto. In summary, the guidelines and regulation for the construction, enlargement, management and maintenance of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England [Wales and Scotland are managed by the Welsh Government and Transport Scotland]. The SRN comprises approximately 4,300 miles of motorways and major 'trunk' A-roads in England, and it is managed by the Highways Agency (HA). The Coalition Government plans that from 2015 responsibility for the SRN will pass to a new Strategic Highways Company, to be called Highways England, a company wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Transport.
Liberal Democrat	The volume of traffic using the A27 is far in excess of its design capacity. The junctions need to be improved but the Highways Agency's current proposals – abolishing the traffic lights at the Oving Road junction on the basis that they are inherently unsafe whilst simultaneously introducing them at other roundabouts – fail to convince. The Highways Agency underestimates the need to cater for north/south traffic. Improved cycling and public transport options are required, as well as encouraging greater self-sufficiency on the Manhood peninsula, but these initiatives won't obviate the need for grade separated junctions at the Bognor and Fishbourne roundabouts.
UKIP	UKIP have supported the concept of a Northern bypass but it will take many years, possibly decades to achieve, and traffic surveys suggest that the congestion is caused primarily by local movements rather than through traffic. The only practical solution is to improve the existing Southern bypass with a re-alignment at the Eastern end and modification of the five major junctions between the A259 Bognor road and the A259 Fishbourne road so that the roundabouts lie underneath the main carriageway. The through traffic and the tidal flows into and out of the city can then be separated.
Question 3	**Does your Party consider that measures should be taken to prevent or reverse the trend of Chichester becoming a clone town? And, if so, what measures?**
Conservative	A number of steps have been taken to support small businesses and help town centres retain their independent shops. In 2011, the Government commissioned Mary Portas to carry out a review and a number of recommendations were made and acted upon. Other measures have also been introduced to support small businesses, including incentives for businesses to move back into empty shops, the promotion of Small Business Saturday to encourage shoppers to buy locally and business growth vouchers.
Green Party	The City is indeed in danger of becoming a clone town. Our Georgian streets homogenised to look as any other town. We need to attract and support independent shops and traders to bring back the bustle and variety the City needs. We would support: Attractive business rates for independent traders; Fair rents and rates fixed for the first three years; Firmer and more rigorous planning regulations to prevent chain stores and outlets dominating the city. We feel that out of town supermarkets and retail outlets send out the wrong image of our city, and damage local traders.

Question 3 (continued)	**Does your Party consider that measures should be taken to prevent or reverse the trend of Chichester becoming a clone town? And, if so, what measures?**
Labour	Slightly at variance with the Labour Party [closer to the Greens] because like many of the mainstream parties we have not really got to grips with climate change [my view]; and this has aggravated by policies that pollute and privatise. These policies have undermined public services [cuts, contracting out and the loss of local political control] and is in danger of turning cities like Chichester into a 'clone town'. In other words, everything is for sale to the highest bidder.
Liberal Democrat	I don't accept the premise of your question. One of the reasons for Chichester's popularity is the variety of stores other than national chains compared with other centres. I speak as someone who has lived for over fifty years in the city since 1963.
UKIP	Chichester has a good mix of individual independent retailers to complement the 'cloned' outlets without which the city could not flourish as a commercial centre and 'market town'. We think the mix is currently about right and should not be tilted further in favour of the 'clones'. The independents would be helped by a cut in business rates, an official UKIP policy. The planning department of CDC also has a part to play. There is some evidence that the tide has turned against the out of town megastore and started to flow back in favour of smaller, targeted outlets.

ALL AT SEA (not referring of course to the political parties!)

Model boats on the Canal – 25 January

The odd one out?

The model above is that of the real HMS Howe (left) – the last of the five British King George V–class battleships of the Royal Navy. She was built by Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company and launched 9 April 1940

Clubs represented included the Portsmouth model Boat Display Team, Chichester Model Boat Club and the Portsmouth Model Yacht Club

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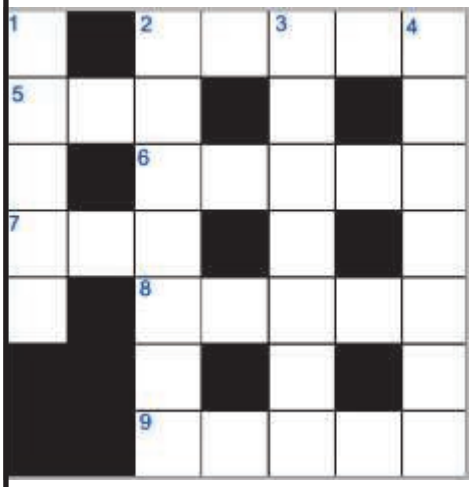
Editor's Spot

For relaxation – a small crossword; no prizes this time. Solution in next issue.



Clues:

2A Pales into not a musical tuba
5A Intellect in part for a passage
6A Intrigue might not help
7A Disk out of fashion for gov
8A Calculator for this plant
9A Part mineral for this state

1D Reptilian earthenware
2D Shape down for a small bag
3D Bookish political party underdone?
4D Royal enclosure perhaps?

***Correction*:** *The permission to publish the cartoon on page 4 of the December issue should have cited Rob Cowan,* www.plandemonium.org.uk

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Neither the Editorial Committee nor the Society necessarily subscribe to our contributors' views, but we believe that all shades of opinion should be expressed in this newsletter. The Editorial Committee reserves the right to edit if necessary any submitted articles or letters.

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