

Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

Annual Report 2012-13

1. Newsletters issued in August, December and April

The newsletter continues to be edited by Nick Knight with layout and artwork by Nita Foale. We distribute it to members (mostly by hand), send copies to local councillors to keep them aware of our activities and use it to promote the Society. A digital version in full-colour is uploaded to the website after a short delay. If you have an idea for an article, please have a chat with Nita or Nick before you leave or send it to Nick at nicholas_knight@btinternet.com.

2. Website and social media

As well as advertising events, our website (www.stoneygateconservation.org) has links to many other points of interest in the area, such as the work done on Stockdale House in Stoneygate Road (<http://stockdalehouse.blogspot.co.uk>), the City Council's planning database and the [Stoneygate Conservation Area Appraisal](#) which is a useful document to refer to when making an objection to a planning application. The website provides access to back issues of the newsletter, there are resources for conservation and historical research and there is also a link to our Twitter page.

3. Events

Richard Gill Guided Walks

In May local writer and broadcaster Richard Gill led a guided walk for members around Knighton Drive, Elms Road and Ratcliffe Road. As ever there was plenty to say about quite a small area and we were lucky with the weather. A second walk with Richard in October addressed a neighbouring area of South Stoneygate. This time a group of nearly thirty members and two dogs looked at Toller Road and Stoneygate and Woodland Avenues. Residents were very welcoming. We had a long chat about the history of their property with the owners of a converted flat in Toller Road while the owners of the Red House in Stoneygate Avenue not only came out for a conversation but also invited us in to look at their oak-panelled living room, hall and butler's pantry.

4. Planning

We check the City Council's weekly list of planning applications and examine all those within the conservation area or close to it. 2012/13 saw 116 applications, 78 relating to trees. We commented on 14, two of which went to appeal. In one case, the appeal was dismissed. In the other - which related to trees - it was partially allowed.

We supported sympathetic plans to restore the neglected Victorian property at **58 Knighton Drive** and convert it from flats back into a family home.

We objected or sought amendments to the following applications;

22 Knighton Park Road - where an application to build a student accommodation complex on a cleared site opposite St Mary's Triangle was refused by the Planning Committee despite planning officers recommending approval (the refusal was upheld at appeal by a Planning Inspector)

52 Knighton Road - where the owner sought to build a bungalow on the garden of a large detached house which he had recently subdivided, endangering an attractive and important conservation area feature (the application was withdrawn)

Land adjacent to 14 Woodland Avenue - where a request to renew lapsed planning permission to build a modern 5-bed house on the side garden of an early twentieth century house built in the American colonial style was approved

7 & 14 Burlington Road - where plans to build a three-bed 'chalet bungalow' in a rear garden threatened to compromise the existing property. Despite the proposals failing to respect City Council planning policy and being opposed by the Council's own Conservation Advisory Panel, they were approved.

In the last two cases, we made extensive spoken and written representations to the City Council Planning Committee.

We also made detailed comments on;

8 Ratcliffe Road – where consent was being sought to significantly enlarge the existing Art Deco-influenced detached family home with front, side and rear extensions, to alter the roof and add 1st and 2nd floor rear balconies (the application was refused)

9 Stoneygate Road– where timber windows were replaced with uPVC ‘replicas’

7 Knighton Park Road – where the owner is seeking to install railings and large railed gates which would alter the existing streetscene (most front boundaries are dwarf walls topped with hedging or shrubbery) and also retrospective consent for hard landscaping

24 Stoneygate Avenue – where a property and lettings company sought to replace Crittall-style metal-framed windows and doors in a 1950s retirement bungalow with uPVC and a large new rear extension would, we thought, be unsympathetic to the original design

We are delighted that **Brookfield on London Road** which was vacated and put up for sale by De Montfort University in 2011 has been acquired by the University of Leicester. This looks like an ideal match. Brookfield was the home of the Fielding Johnson family who were founding benefactors of the University and committed advocates of higher education.

Trees

The new Woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO) created by the Council to safeguard the **spinney on the corner of London and Ratcliffe Roads** was challenged by the owner and tested soon after being introduced. We are pleased that the Council Tree Officer’s good judgement was confirmed by a Planning Inspector who upheld his decisions in all but one minor detail.

The Council’s new Tree Enforcement Procedures were also tested but the outcome was somewhat different. We were extremely disappointed that unauthorised work which grotesquely disfigured a protected tree **on the corner of Southernhay and London Roads** resulted in no action being taken against the owner. If owners are not held responsible for work carried out on their property, how can protected trees in the conservation area be effectively safeguarded?

Enforcement and planning breaches

We reported the unauthorised erection of concrete fenceposts and wooden panelling on the front boundary of a care home in **Toller Road** and were pleased that the Planning Enforcement Team managed to persuade the owners to replant mature hedging that had been destroyed.

5. Energy-efficiency

As energy bills continue to rise, the Society is keen to explore and publicize ways in which energy-efficient design can be applied to conservation area properties. In November several members of the committee visited a new house in Howard Road (just outside the conservation area) which was specifically designed to be 'low carbon' and highly energy efficient. Built for Pat and Julian Pollock, it has large south facing windows and very highly insulating walls so that, together with photovoltaic cells its net power consumption is very small. The architect, Nils Feldmann, has bought a Victorian house in Knighton Drive and is using the same principles in its restoration. On a snowy day in March, he showed several committee members around. We hope to feature this exciting and informative project in a future issue of the newsletter.

6. Partnership and community involvement

We maintain good working relationships with other like-minded groups in the city and beyond and 2012/13 has seen us continue to play an active role in the community.

Illustrated Talks

In September committee member Anthony Matthew was again invited to speak to residents of 'The Lawns' residential care home in Knighton Rise - which served as a trial run for a talk to the Leicester branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A) at the Christchurch in Clarendon Park a month later. Committee member Neil Crutchley reprised his talk on the ‘Lost Mansions of Stoneygate’, this time to the Leicester Early Music Association.

Leicester Heritage Partnership

Nick Knight and Tim Savage continue to represent the Society at the LHP which was set up by the City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, to provide a forum for closer co-operation between the City Council and local groups with an active interest in the city's heritage and history. Recent discussion has centred on 'Connecting Leicester', projects in the 'Old Town' and Cathedral areas and – of course – the responsibilities and opportunities arising from the discovery of the remains of Richard III.

Radio Leicester

In March we were asked by Radio Leicester to provide a target for their Sunday morning programme 'Clueless' where a team travels round the county being guided from one point to another by cryptic clues. We nominated the plaque in Francis Street commemorating Queen Victoria's 1897 diamond jubilee which featured in the December newsletter. Caroline Cook duly handed over the clue and was interviewed on-air by presenter Julie Mayer.

Francis Street Post Office

This Spring we worked with Francis Street newsagent and retailer Mr Harish Amiani and other local retailers to publicize their campaign to reopen Post Office facilities closed by Royal Mail in 2007. The campaign was featured in the April newsletter and as a result of Mr Amiani's sponsorship, an additional 200 copies were distributed. If you haven't already done so, please visit the on-line petition 'Francis Street Post Office' at www.thepetitionsite.com

7. 'The A to Z of Stoneygate'

In association with Leicester University's Centre for Urban History, Nick Knight put in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to help finance a project to encourage the community's appreciation of Stoneygate's history and heritage, primarily through a website created by local volunteers. The bid required a substantial amount of work and unfortunately was not successful though it is possible we shall try again.

8. Leaflet for Estate Agents

Stoneygate's special character makes the area attractive to old and new residents alike and preserving it helps maintain residential and public amenity and property values. Anyone buying a house in the conservation area should be made aware by their solicitor or estate agent that an Article 4 direction applies and that certain types of normally permitted development require planning consent. The recent unauthorised removal of front gates and walls at several properties suggests either that this is not happening or that advice is being ignored. We have designed a leaflet to help potential buyers appreciate the area's qualities and the value of safeguarding them and are working with local property professionals and the City Council's conservation team to get the message across.

We ended the year with 177 paid-up members (individuals, couples and families) and more people joined the Society than ever before. Many thanks to you all.