

Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

Annual Report 2013-14

1. Newsletters issued in August, December and April

The Newsletter is now produced three times a year on a regular schedule. This year it was again edited by Nick Knight with artwork, layout and production by Nita Foale. We are always happy to discuss ideas from members, either for articles, photographs or any other items. Please contact Nick (nicholas_knight@btinternet.com) if you have one in mind. The printed newsletters are distributed to local addresses by Gordon Hamylton and his team of volunteers while the small number of members living further afield receive theirs by post. Back issues of all Newsletters are available on the SCAS website to browse/download.

2. Website and social media

Our website (www.stoneygateconservation.org) has been redesigned by Tim Savage to freshen its appearance and make it easier to update and maintain. There are several new features and if you haven't visited recently, we hope you'll take a tour and let us know if there's anything you particularly like or anything we've forgotten to include. As before, the site provides details of society events, a quick link to SCAS's Twitter page (<https://twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc>) and links to a variety of historical and planning resources such as the Stoneygate Conservation Area Appraisal which characterises the area and should guide planning decision-making in it. The new additions include a weekly update of the latest planning applications (with links to the City Council's planning database), a 'News & Comment' section and a section on 'Conservation' (including energy-efficiency and local flora and fauna). We hope to develop the latter over time, together with a new section on the history of Stoneygate and would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to contribute articles and/or photographs and help with research.

3. Events

Sarah Kirby at the SCAS AGM

The talk by local artist and printmaker Sarah Kirby at last year's AGM was so popular that we had to move from the Octagon Room into the nave of St John's to accommodate everyone. Sarah's passion both for her work and her subject was obvious and seeing Leicester's familiar streetscapes and buildings depicted in such a vivid and striking way was a bracing experience.

Guided walk with Richard Gill

'Art House', an open house event where local artists show and sell their work from their own homes and those of friends and neighbours, has now become a regular item on the Clarendon Park and Stoneygate social calendar. Last June David Oldershaw's house in Pendene Road was one of those participating and local historian and writer Richard Gill kindly agreed to give a guided walk which led members there (pied piper-like) from St Johns Road via nearby landmarks such as St John the Baptist Church. The weather was perfect, Richard's commentary as entertaining and informative as always and David signed up over twenty new members.

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. 2013-14 saw 150 applications, 78 relating to trees. We commented on 13, none of which went to appeal.

We supported new owners' proposals for **147 Ratcliffe Road**, the former halls of residence 'Birnam House' and 'Woodlawn' (also on Ratcliffe Road) and 'Brookfield', the ex Charles Frears School of Nursing & Midwifery and home of the Fielding Johnson family. We are full of admiration for the very high quality restoration work carried out by sensitive local developers at **16 Stoneygate Road** and **7 Albert Road**.

We strongly objected to the following applications;

7 Burlington Road – where consent was being sought to build a detached house in the garden of a ‘continental’ style 1950s bungalow

4 Avenue Road – which sought to replace distinctive Crittall-style front windows and timber frames in a 1930s house with uPVC units and provide a significantly enlarged area of car standing on the front garden

26 Southernhay Road – which sought to significantly alter the appearance of a highly distinctive art deco house, remodelling the roof and adding a front-facing dormer and uPVC window

Land adjacent to 14 Woodland Avenue – where the owner is seeking to fit unsympathetic uPVC front windows to a new house (having earlier agreed to use timber) and, after already removing 17 trees, to replace the 3 remaining

15 Pendene Road – where a large rear extension to a residential care home in a quiet cul-de-sac threatened to overlook neighbouring properties

52a Ratcliffe Road – where, despite an earlier refusal, an identical application was made to enlarge, extend and alter the appearance of a former coach house

We also objected or sought amendments to;

368 London Road, Gables Hotel

Single-storey side extensions and alterations to sides of hotel

10 Stoneygate Road

Change of use of part of ground-floor from residential to business use, car parking and signage

93 Clarendon Park Road

Change of use from house to house in multiple occupation (7 beds)

Trees

2013-14 has, by comparison with previous years, been an uneventful year for trees. There have been no controversial incidents and very few contentious applications. We continue to champion the many benefits that trees bring to the conservation area, encourage planners, owners and developers to respect TPOs and oppose the loss of mature trees unless absolutely necessary.

Enforcement & planning breaches

We have reported various apparently recent and unauthorised work to the City Council’s Compliance & Enforcement Team, including replacement uPVC front windows at **1 Portland Road**, a particularly large and obtrusive satellite dish in **Central Avenue** and an internally illuminated sign on the Stoneygate Road-facing wall of **1 Francis Street**. There have been several cases (eg in **Elms and Pendene Roads**) where consent for extensions to commercial buildings (mainly care homes) has been exceeded or varied and conditions ignored. We strongly oppose this approach to development in the conservation area and continue to urge planners to deter it.

Satellite dish survey

Fitting a satellite dish to the front of tenanted and commercial properties (such as residential care homes) in the conservation area has always required consent but it is rarely obtained and the results have been steadily blotting the landscape. A comprehensive survey of dishes in the area was submitted to the planning department for action in July. We are still awaiting a response.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Since October 2010, planning consent has not been required to convert a family home into a house in multiple occupation (HMO) for up to 6 people. Last year the Council introduced an ‘Article 4 Direction’ for Clarendon Park (including those parts inside the Stoneygate Conservation Area) which brings the creation of 3-6 person HMOs (usually but not always student houses) back under their control. It comes into force on 20th August 2014.

Tesco

Tesco’s intention to open an ‘Express’ supermarket in the former Barclays bank on the corner of Queens Road and Clarendon Park Road has generated a lot of local interest. This has intensified recently with related planning applications being variously approved and refused. The site is just outside the conservation area but its proximity means that it still falls within SCAS’s remit. The committee decided not to comment on the applications but we agreed to pass on information and guidance supplied by those members who asked us to. SCAS encourages members and non-members to participate in the planning process. It allows residents to shape the environment in which they and their children (or grandchildren) live.

5. Rubbish!

Wheelie bins, skips, builders' bags and other waste left permanently on the frontage of conservation area properties do nothing to enhance Stoneygate and reflect badly on owners and occupants. In the coming year, we are hoping to dedicate more time to this perennial issue. Our first steps have been encouraging. Thanks to Knighton City Warden Caroline Walsh (city.warden@leicester.gov.uk or 0116-4541001), bins repeatedly left outside a tenanted property in London Road and a skip and bins left for weeks on a frontage in Stoneygate Avenue were removed almost immediately.

6. Partnership and community involvement

We continue to maintain good working relationships with other like-minded groups in the city, particularly the Leicester Civic Society and the Leicester Group of the Victorian Society.

The Friends of Queens Road Allotments

SCAS supported the Friends' Heritage Lottery funded project 'Not Lost the Plot' and committee members Nick Knight and Nita Foale attended an event in October to celebrate its successful completion. More recently, we have helped the Friends apply to have the allotments added to the Leicester Local Heritage Asset Register.

Leicester Transport Heritage Trust

In September committee members Jenny Westmoreland, Nick Knight and member Janet Bliss manned a SCAS stall during LTHT's 'open day' at the Stoneygate Tramshed. Busloads of visitors ferried from the 'Seaside Special' event at Abbey Park kept us all busy and between departures and arrivals, we enjoyed the sunshine, conversation and the LTHT's delicious home-made cake.

The University of Leicester

Following the purchase of 'Brookfield', the University has been keen to develop a friendly and informed relationship with its new neighbours and in June a group of local residents and SCAS committee members were invited for a walk around the site by Trevor Humphreys, the University's Director of Estates. About a dozen turned up on a bright, breezy afternoon to hear the university's tentative plans. Earlier this year Trevor and his colleagues updated us all at a follow-up meeting and there will be further meetings as the University's plans evolve.

Leicester Heritage Partnership

Nick Knight has continued to represent SCAS at the LHP. History and heritage are playing an increasingly important role in Leicester's strategic planning and new developments in the Market Place, 'Old Town' and adjacent areas are a sign of the city's ambition to 'put itself on the map', as well as raising the awareness of residents and rebuilding a sense of civic pride. The LHP's focus is not confined to the city centre. Work continues to add cherished landmarks throughout the city to the 'Local Interest List' (now called the 'Local Heritage Asset Register') and, with the Civic Society, we continue to remind everyone that conservation areas should be next in line for attention.

EMACHS

We have, with regret, allowed our membership of EMACHS (the East Midlands Association of Civic and Heritage Societies) to lapse. We were finding it difficult to benefit from the relationship which, for a society with our remit, was perhaps not a good match. With so much now available through the internet, the committee has decided that we should focus our resources here in Leicester.

7. Committee News

Nita Foale has told us that 2013-14 will be her last year on the SCAS committee. Nita has been a committee member for 8 years and has made a very significant contribution in all sorts of ways. She has designed and produced our publicity material and helped develop the SCAS Newsletter from a simple double-sided format into the illustrated magazine-style offering that it is now. Nita tells us that she intends to remain a member and she has very kindly given us a laptop computer for Society use. We hope you will join us in thanking her and wishing her well in future. Her generosity and personality will be missed.

We ended the year with 185 member households and we are delighted that membership has continued to rise. Thank you all.