

# Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

## Annual Report 2014-15

### 1. Newsletters issued in August, December and April

This year's newsletters were edited by Nick Knight. Nita Foale has kindly continued to take responsibility for layout and production and add sparkle to the artwork, even though she is no longer on the committee. Gordon Hamylton and his team of volunteers continue to deliver newsletters to local addresses while a small number of more distant members receive theirs by post. Back issues of all Newsletters are available on the SCAS website to browse/download.

We warmly welcome comments and are happy to discuss ideas from members for articles. We'd also love to see your old photographs. Please e-mail Nick ([nicholas\\_knight@btinternet.com](mailto:nicholas_knight@btinternet.com)) or leave a message via the website.

### 2. Website and social media

Tim Savage continues to manage the SCAS website ([www.stoneygateconservation.org](http://www.stoneygateconservation.org)) and provide a weekly update of the latest conservation area planning applications with links to the City Council's planning database. The site provides a quick link to Twitter ([www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc](http://www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc)) and Facebook pages ([www.facebook.com/StoneygateConservationAreaSociety](http://www.facebook.com/StoneygateConservationAreaSociety)). It also carries details of upcoming society events.

Planned new sections on the history of Stoneygate, local flora and fauna and home renovations have been slow to develop – mainly due to a lack of content. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to contribute articles and/or photographs and help with research.

### 3. The Year's Events

#### Douglas Smith at the SCAS AGM

Our guest speaker at the AGM was Douglas Smith, an architect originally from the West Country who studied at the Leicester School of Architecture and began his professional career working for Pick Everard. Now based in Leicester, Douglas has designed many buildings (residential and non-residential) in the city and several in the Stoneygate Conservation Area, including the St John the Baptist Primary School on East Avenue and Oliver Court on London Road. His illustrated talk was based on his experiences as an architect and artist ([www.douglassmithart.co.uk](http://www.douglassmithart.co.uk)) and gave us some fascinating insights into his very personal approach. The appreciation of Ernest Gimson's 'White House' in North Avenue (Douglas's family home in the 1970s) was especially interesting.

#### Members' Summer Coach Trip

Our July coach trip to the Barber Institute of Fine Arts and Winterbourne House & Gardens was a new venture but it couldn't have turned out better. The coach was full, the weather was perfect and, thanks to committee member Arthur Stafford, everything on the day ran like clockwork. We stopped first at the Barber Institute, a small but distinguished gallery on the Birmingham University Campus where we had a guided tour of the collection. Then we walked the short distance to Winterbourne House, enjoying first a buffet lunch and afterwards a tour of the beautifully maintained gardens. The house was built in 1903 in the Arts and Crafts style for John Nettlefold (the N of the manufacturing firm GKN), was later a women's hall of residence and has now been restored to something near to its original state. All in all, it was a delightful day.

#### Guided walk with Richard Gill

October's guided walk was billed as 'The Avenues' and this time Richard took us for a short stroll along East Avenue, Central Avenue and West Avenue and through the narrow passage connecting Cecilia Road to Orlando Road which some in the party had never discovered before. As always, there was much to see of architectural interest and Richard's usual fund of stories and anecdotes. There was also some social history in which we learned about distinguished former residents such as the late Professor Richard Hoggart and Geoffrey Martin who went on to become the first Keeper of National Archives at Kew.

## 4. Planning

### *New Leicester Local Plan*

January was the deadline for comments on the new City of Leicester Local Plan and Nick Knight commented on behalf of SCAS. Nick emphasised the value of the Stoneygate Conservation Area to the city and the importance of managing changes to it sensitively. He also highlighted the threats (particularly to green space, neighbourhood amenity and community cohesion) posed by certain types of commercial development – of which more below.

### *Meetings with Planners*

In February David Oldershaw and Nick Knight met with senior planners at City Hall to discuss some of our current concerns. Our hosts were impressively well-prepared and we were very encouraged. We sense the beginnings of a refreshingly different approach to conservation area management; something also reflected in recent planning decisions. If this is true, we hope that it will not be handicapped by departmental constraints (financial and otherwise). The Compliance and Enforcement Team, in particular, needs to be fit for purpose and properly funded.

### *Welcome developments completed during the year*

The completion of work to bring the former halls of residence ‘**Birnam House**’ and ‘**Woodlawn**’ on Ratcliffe Road back into use has been a high spot of the year. These are very positive developments which we would be happy to see duplicated – along with the outstanding refurbishment of **58 Knighton Drive**. In June several SCAS committee members visited this detached Victorian house which architect Nils Feldmann and his wife Lisa had imaginatively renovated and adapted for their own family use. We had first seen it in March 2013 and the transformation was striking; a welcome contrast to the (sadly) more familiar outcome in which such houses are divided into what one member describes unflatteringly as ‘a warren of pokey bedsits’.

### *Applications*

We check the City Council’s weekly list of planning applications and examine all those within the conservation area or close to it. 2014-15 saw 138 applications, 71 relating to trees and 12 seeking to discharge conditions attached to planning permissions. We commented on 17, two of which went to appeal after being refused. One refusal was upheld and one was overturned by a planning inspector.

We have enthusiastically supported the new owner’s plans to build an attractive, strikingly innovative and future-proofed home on land adjacent to **14 Burlington Road**. We are delighted that the developers responsible for the very high quality restoration of **16 Stoneygate Road** are now repeating the work; turning **12 Stoneygate Road** back from flats into sustainable family housing.

We strongly objected to applications at

**Land adjacent to 7 Burlington Road** – which sought to vary earlier planning consent that had already seen a 3-bed ‘chalet bungalow’ enlarged into a 4-bed house. Plans included a further single-storey rear extension, new front dormers and additional front and rear Velux windows. Successive applications at this former garden site graphically illustrate the dangers of relaxing planning policy with no clear objective in mind and leaving the outcome to developers.

**15 Elms Road** – where a retrospective application to ‘normalise’ unauthorised changes to a new rear extension would have had an adverse visual impact on the setting of the neighbouring Grade 2 star listed house designed by renowned Leicester architect/designer Ernest Gimson.

**73 Clarendon Park Road** - where proposals to extend the existing property (already converted into 9x 1-bed flats) into the garden and add 4 more 1-bed flats were refused (a later application to add 2x 1-bed flats was also refused).

**15 Pendene Road** – where a retrospective application to ‘normalise’ an unauthorised side window, door and steps at a care home would have compromised the privacy of neighbours.

**52a Ratcliffe Road** – where a 2m high close-boarded fence would have removed the historic visual link between a striking late-Victorian house and its coach house and the design/materials for new windows and doors were not specified.

**52 Ratcliffe Road** – where a previously refused application to use a windowless basement as a flat was being resubmitted.

**39 Springfield Road** – which sought to change the use of a single family home to a 7-bed HMO (house of multiple occupation) in an area with a high concentration of such accommodation.

**10 Beechcroft Road** – which sought to add a single-storey front extension and alter the symmetrical appearance of a carefully designed new infill house.

We objected or sought amendments to applications at

#### **52 Knighton Drive**

Change of use from student halls of residence to 2 houses (2x 3-bed); single-storey extension to front and side; increase in height of part of existing roof; dormer extensions to front; alterations.

#### **14 Knighton Park Rd (land to the rear)**

2x 4-bed dwellings.

#### **26 Southernhay Road**

2-storey side extension; 1-storey rear extension; extensions to detached garage; alterations to roof.

#### **273 London Road**

replace existing timber fence and gates with 1m high railed gates and new railings at front of house.

#### **16 Victoria Park Road**

2-storey 2-bed dwelling at rear of house.

#### **Trees**

We are pleased that there have been no controversial incidents involving trees this year, although there has been an increase in applications seeking to remove them. We continue to publicize the benefits that trees bring to the conservation area in terms of biodiversity, wildlife habitat and aesthetics. We encourage planners, owners and developers to respect TPOs and oppose the loss of mature trees unless absolutely necessary.

#### **Enforcement & planning breaches**

As with last year, there have been several cases (eg in **Knighton Drive** and at **the Gables Hotel on London Road**) where consent for work to commercial buildings (including tenanted properties) has been exceeded or varied and conditions ignored. We are implacably opposed to this 'make it up as you go along' approach to development in the conservation area. It is unnecessary, unprofessional and the exact opposite of a planned approach. It makes effective public scrutiny almost impossible and we continue to urge planners to deter it.

Unsympathetic and intrusive signage is an unfortunate side-effect of commercial activity in the conservation area and last year has seen an increase. One property & lettings company has fixed advertising boards to the front walls, bays and fences of its properties and the internally illuminated sign on the Stoneygate Road-facing wall of **1 Francis Street** remains (although the power has now been switched off so it is less intrusive in the evenings). Councillors are considering introducing legal methods to control advertising and 'to let' boards and if a voluntary code proves ineffective, we will support them.

Front garden landscaping is often a condition of planning consent. Some owners seem to believe that their responsibility ends once the plants are in the ground while others simply ignore it and hope that no-one will notice. We have been taking stock and the results are disappointing. Young plants set 3 years ago to replace a destroyed mature hedge at a care home in **Toller Road** are not thriving and are, apparently, not being encouraged, while 'planted pockets' in the block-paved frontage at **18-20 Stoneygate Avenue** (included as part of a condition to deter car parking) have simply been allowed to die. The same fate has befallen a lone tree on the front boundary of **330a London Road** where planting and soft landscaping was never carried out in the first place.

#### **Tesco and the Co-op**

Following Tesco's application to open an 'Express' supermarket in the former Barclays bank on the corner of Queens Road and Clarendon Park Road, it seems that we will shortly have an application from the Co-op to change the use of **the Gables Hotel on London Road** into a 'convenience store'. As readers of the Newsletter will know, we have been closely following events at 'The Gables' for the last two years. They will also know what we think of the way in which developers have - apparently - disguised their true intentions and been encouraged by planners to do so. Considerable risks are being taken here. We hope that they will have a positive, rather than a negative outcome.

## **5. 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.

#### Stoneygate Baptist Church

Three years ago SCAS took part in the very first 'Stoneygate Festival', held at the Stoneygate Baptist Church on London Road. It was a colourful mix of art, craft and home-made food stalls and music

and we gained several new members who are still with us. After a year's absence the organisers decided to repeat the experiment and April 2014's festival was just as successful. Our stall attracted a steady stream of visitors and Nick Knight was able to premiere his illustrated talk on the 'History of Stoneygate' before the large and appreciative audience who had come to hear Professor Richard Buckley's excellent talk about the discovery of the remains of Richard III. Minister (and SCAS member) Peter Shepherd was pleased that the festival had achieved its main objective; to help build bridges between the church and the community. We were happy to have contributed to what was another thoroughly enjoyable day.

#### June 'Art House' weekend

'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. SCAS Chair David Oldershaw is one of the participants and at last year's event in June we set up our stall outside David's house in Pendene Road. Thanks to David's enthusiasm and energy and the collective efforts of volunteers Janet, Diane, Bill, Nick, Jenny and Jennifer, we signed up a record-breaking 45 new members.

#### The University of Leicester

We continue to liaise with the University of Leicester over the use of the **Brookfield** campus. A group of residents and SCAS members met the University of Leicester's Deputy Director of Estates, Tim Yates, in September and while the long-term future of the site - particularly the main house - is yet to be decided, medium-term plans are becoming clearer. The existing 1960/70s buildings have been refitted as offices and seminar rooms and since October the campus has been in use as a post graduate teaching centre.

Residents were most concerned about on-street parking and access. The Travel Plan required by the City Council restricts the use of the large car park and most staff and all students are expected to travel on foot or on public transport. An informal survey suggested that only a small percentage of people who park in Holmfield Road are university personnel (most were observed heading up onto London Road). A formal parking survey is to be undertaken to provide an accurate picture. One early complaint has been addressed. The entrance barrier has been cushioned so that it no longer makes a noise when closing and the Security staff have been asked to open the gate more quietly in the early hours of the morning.

#### Leicester Heritage Partnership

2014-15 has been a momentous year for history and heritage in Leicester and all the indications are that they will play an increasingly important role in the city's strategic development in future. Nick Knight continues to represent SCAS at the LHP and we are proud to be playing a part - albeit a modest one - in realising a collective vision that is engaging so many people and transforming our city.

## **6. Committee News**

The pressures of work and other commitments mean that Tim Savage has stepped down from several of his committee responsibilities. We have benefited from Tim's fresh approach and technical know-how since he joined the committee in 2012 and we are pleased that he has agreed to continue to tweet on our behalf and act as SCAS webmaster.

The committee is always looking for new talent and we would warmly welcome anyone who thinks they might be able to contribute (particularly anyone interested in helping the planning team). Please talk to a committee member after the meeting or contact us by phone or via the website.

Membership has continued to rise and we ended the year with 211 member households. Thank you all.