

# Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

## Annual Report 2016-17

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

This year's newsletters were edited and produced by Nick Knight and Nita Foale with contributions from the committee and Janet Bliss. Local distribution was organised by Gordon Hamylton with help from Aubrey Stevenson, Lisa Williams, Andy Bent, Bill and Jan Walker, Janet Bliss and other committee members.

We welcome your comments, suggestions and offers of articles (500-1,000 words with illustrations/photos). Social history, your own house history your family links with the area; whatever your ideas, we'll always be happy to discuss them with you. We also welcome help with deliveries.

### 2. Website and social media

Nick Knight has grasped the rudiments of creating web content and is now uploading events announcements and newsletters. Regular planning application announcements will (hopefully) follow but in the meantime look for them on Twitter. Plans for more comprehensive web content –possibly even a blog – are not likely to materialize in the near future unless we can find a more adept webmaster. If you are familiar with (or fluent in) Wordpress and fancy the challenge, let us know!

Nick continues to 'tweet' regularly on our behalf ([www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc](http://www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc)). We now have 725 followers (a 45% increase on last year) and actively engage with many groups and individuals who share our interests and concerns, as well as identifying ourselves to many others.

### 3. The Year's Events

#### Mike Taylor at the SCAS AGM

Our guest speaker at the AGM was Mike Taylor, the author of the 'Quality of Leicester'. First published in 1993. revised in 1997 and now rewritten for the present day, 'The Quality' is a unique attempt to capture the essence of Leicester's architectural character in words and pictures. Mike gave us a fascinating insight into the challenges he and his collaborators faced in updating the book to reflect the stability and change of the last two decades (and the previous 2,000 years!).

#### Members' Coach Trip to Tissington Hall & Garsington Water

We had an excellent turnout and perfect weather for our July coach trip. The trip generated a small surplus and justified the decision to keep ticket prices around £30 while using as large and comfortable a coach as possible. The organisational skills of our events manager, Arthur Stafford, made it possible and we were sorry that illness prevented Arthur from sharing what was a lovely day.

#### Guided walk with Richard Gill and Neil Crutchley

Due to an oversight our June guided walk 'Manor Road and Environs' wasn't advertised in the April Newsletter. While the numbers reflected this, thanks to a new member who did come along we spent a very pleasant hour learning from Richard and Neil about the splendid houses in the University of Leicester's Botanical Garden, the architects who designed them and the Edwardian industrialists and their families who lived there.

#### September 'Summer Social' at the Knighton & Clarendon Park Conservative Club

The 'Summer Social' (again organised by our ever-resourceful events manager Arthur Stafford), combined several attractions; a four-piece jazz band, licensed bar, finger buffet and a prize quiz on 'Leicester and Leicestershire History & Places'. It was designed to give members an opportunity to meet each other informally in a bistro-type setting and was a bit of an experiment. We all had fun—which was the main thing – and the band were really terrific but we think the formula needs a little fine-tuning. Thinking caps on everyone. What sort of entertainment would you like us to stage?

## 4. Planning

### *Welcome developments completed during the year*

It was great to see the elegant Stockdale Harrison-designed townhouse at **14 Stoneygate Road** sympathetically converted from scruffy flats into a modern family home following similar work already completed at **12 and 16 Stoneygate Road**. We are also delighted that the innovative new development in **The Avenue** (nearing completion) promises to match up to our expectations.

### *Applications*

We check the City Council's weekly list of planning applications and examine all those within the conservation area or close to it. 2016-17 saw 131 applications, 65 relating to trees and 7 seeking to discharge conditions attached to planning permissions. We commented on 17.

We objected to applications at

**14a Woodland Avenue** - Retrospective application for gates at front of house  
**14 Knighton Road** - 2-storey side and rear extensions (to make 3 more flats); alterations to existing flat  
**3 Cross Road** - CoU from 3 to 4 flats (4x 1-bed); single-storey rear extension to provide 2x 1-bed flats  
**Land at rear of 5-8 Glenwood Close** - Demolition of existing outhouse/store; construction of single-storey detached house  
**Gables Hotel, London Road** - Discharge of Condition 7 attached to 20150787, travel & parking plan  
**Gables Hotel, London Road** - Discharge of Condition 5 attached to 20150787, servicing and delivery management plan  
**26 Southernhay Road** - Alterations to front, construction of single storey detached building at rear  
**26 Southernhay Road** - Replacement front windows and door; construction of front boundary wall  
**12 Glenwood Close, Land adj** - 1 dwelling  
**1 Albert Rd, Victoria Court** - Fell 4 trees TPO184.  
**8 Ratcliffe Road** - Construction of single-storey front and rear extension; two-storey side and rear extension; detached self-contained flat at rear  
**2 Knighton Park Road** - 2-storey rear extension (to form 1 flat) with front dormer; landscaping  
**2 Southernhay Road** - 1- and 2-storey extension at rear, balcony at rear, alterations.

We sought amendments to applications at

**26 Southernhay Road** - Alterations to roof; 2-storey and single-storey rear extension  
**24 Avenue Road** - Single-storey side extension  
**2 St Johns Road** - Demolition of dwellinghouse; 1x 4-bed dwellinghouse  
**14 Cross Road** - Replacement front windows

### *Enforcement & planning breaches*

We are delighted that unauthorised work on a two-storey rear extension to the care home at **15 Elms Road** has – after a prolonged struggle – finally been remedied. A second retrospective application was approved by the Planning Committee last Spring after the owner had agreed to replace the concrete roof tiles with clay Rosemary tiles and remove the remaining rooflight in addition to earlier promises to remove three other rooflights, replace uPVC with timber windows, resite a dry riser and clean mortar stains from the brickwork.

This was an excellent outcome and the changes will significantly mitigate the new building's adverse impact on the setting of the neighbouring Grade Two star listed building, 'Inglewood'. We are very grateful to everyone who helped achieve it; Knighton councillors Grant and Gugnani (who spoke strongly to committee); the owner of 'Inglewood', Adam Suddaby (who passionately explained the significance of the listed building); the committee Chair (who recognised the benefits of a site visit and attended it); and above all, the members of the planning committee themselves who steadfastly refused to accept planning officers' recommendation to approve the extension as built with only minor changes.

Following this advice would have sent completely the wrong signal to conservation area developers. It would have said, in effect, that proposals approved after careful discussions with planners, conservation officers and neighbours can, if the developer chooses, simply be replaced by different, cheaper ones; even if they adversely affect a neighbouring building whose heritage quality has been nationally recognised.

The position taken by planners in this case represents a low point which we hope they will never revisit. Accepting unauthorised work to important buildings with minimal changes and effectively subcontracting opposition to volunteers and councillors is not a substitute for an effective system of enforcement – or a sustainable basis for successful conservation area management.

### **Appeals**

There have been three appeals against refusal of planning consent. At **14a Woodland Avenue** (new gates and gateposts) the appeal was dismissed. At **79 Knighton Drive** (new house on garden land) it was withdrawn.

At the **Gables Hotel** (change of use to convenience store) the appeal was upheld by a planning inspector last May. Gordon Hamylton and David Badley both made representations on behalf of SCAS and we were very disappointed by the outcome. Servicing, delivery management, travel and parking plans have all now been signed off by officers and we have no further recourse. Building work has resumed (slowly). If (or when) the proposed convenience store and hotel do finally open, we can only hope that the inspector has assessed the risks accurately and that our fears for the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and other road users in the immediate area prove unfounded.

### **Trees**

There is encouraging evidence that planners are taking conservation area tree protection more seriously these days. Applications to remove hundred-year old cedars from gardens in **Burlington and Beechcroft Roads** both resulted in the creation of new Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). We were also impressed by officers' willingness to remedy an earlier failure to upload application forms for the felling of a TPO-protected cedar in **Southernhay Road** onto the online planning database.

### **Amenity**

Unretrieved, overloaded and unsightly bins continue to be a problem at several tenanted properties in **Clarendon Park** and at one address on **London Road**. Experience suggests that only a highly-focused and determined approach from the City Council will remedy this.

The hard landscaping of front gardens and the unsympathetic treatment of front boundaries continue to be a challenge and we continue to wait for City Council action on unsympathetic and intrusive commercial signage.

## **5. Gardencheck survey**

Inspired by the Royal Horticultural Society's 'Greening Grey Britain' campaign, in the April 2016 newsletter we highlighted the impact (aesthetic and otherwise) of the loss of Britain's urban front gardens. We thought it would be a good idea to accurately assess the scale of the problem in Stoneygate and in September seventeen volunteers pulled on their walking shoes and joined us to survey the more than 1,000 front gardens in the conservation area.

We were surprised by the media interest. We were interviewed by BBC Radio Leicester, featured on BBC East Midlands News and also contacted by BBC Radio 5 Live. We have now gathered all the 'raw data' but processing and tabulating the results is taking longer than we anticipated. Once this has been done, we will have a reliable evidence base that allows us to compare all streets in the conservation area against a useful benchmark and pinpoint particular issues.

## **6. Partnership and community involvement**

Through SCAS Chair, David Oldershaw, we maintain our support for the annual **Art House** and **Art Beat** events. David's enthusiasm and energy and the collective efforts of volunteers Diane Hall, Matt Matthew, Jenny Westmoreland, Bill and Jan Walker, Sue King, Janet Bliss and Aileen Orme meant that the SCAS stand at this year's 'Art House' took nearly 30 membership subscriptions and attracted 14 new members.

Following an initiative by Lawrence Whittaker, we profiled the **Friends of Victoria Park** and the **Victoria Park Users' Group** in our August newsletter and – starting this year – have agreed to help the City Council by distributing the annual timetable of outdoor events on Victoria Park and the De Montfort Hall amphitheatre with our April newsletter.

Following an initiative by Rodney Spokes, we undertook a reciprocal mailing with **the Friends of the University of Leicester Botanic Garden**; including each other's promotional leaflets within our respective newsletters. This is already paying dividends and is something we hope to repeat with other like-minded groups.

Working smarter through the use of social media is enabling us to co-operate with the **Friends of Clarendon Park** and the **Knighton Neighbourhood Forum** in publicizing planning- and heritage-related news items and new planning applications.

We continue to maintain good working relationships with the **Leicester Civic Society** and the **Leicester Group of the Victorian Society**; co-operating on day-to-day heritage issues and promoting each others' talks, walks and other events. With the Civic Society, we have been helping a group of residents in a nearby part of the city to form their own local conservation area society – and are awaiting news with anticipation.

We remain actively involved with the City Mayor's **Leicester Heritage Partnership** and while it remains (understandably) focussed mainly on city-centre heritage projects, we are delighted that the heritage interpretation panels telling 'The Story of Leicester' have at last found their way to Stoneygate. The first was installed outside Thomas Cook's retirement home, 'Thorncroft' on London Road, earlier this year and there is another outside the Stoneygate Tramshed. We have been invited to assist the City Council in selecting sites for further panels and, while we have been slow starting, are now in the process of suggesting people, events and properties that might help tell the story of Stoneygate.

## **7. Committee News**

Due to the pressure of other commitments, Jenny Westmoreland has stepped down from the committee. Jenny first joined us in 2008 and became membership secretary in 2011. We would like to thank her for her considerable contribution and we very much hope that she'll join us from time to time at SCAS events.

We have been very fortunate in persuading ex-committee member Nita Foale to rejoin as our new membership secretary and we warmly welcome Nita to the job. She has been shadowing Jenny for the last few months and has already begun to introduce new innovations including a 'joining' pack for new members. From now on please send all membership correspondence to [nita.foale@btinternet.com](mailto:nita.foale@btinternet.com).

You will have read about the passing of our fondly remembered ex-Treasurer Canon Henry Evans in the April newsletter. We have been exploring practical ways in which to commemorate Henry and have narrowed the choice down to three schemes. We hope to be able to make a final announcement this summer.

## **8. Make a contribution!**

Finally - whether you want to celebrate or help safeguard Stoneygate, we warmly welcome any contributions or offers of help to the Society, big or small. Just buttonhole 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 223 member households. Once more, thank you all.