

Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

Report for 2009-10

The committee of the Society meets every two months and keeps in constant e-mail contact. The annual general meeting may be the only time in the year when members meet the committee but there is a good deal of activity throughout the year. These have been the highlights of 2009-10;

1. Newsletter issued in April, August and February

Our newsletters are largely the work of Nick Knight and Nita Foale and are distributed by a few volunteers. This is where a significant part of your subscription goes to and many members have said they think it well spent. If you do have an idea for an article, or better still an article already written, similar in size and subject to those you already see, then please have a chat with Nita or Nick before you leave or send it to Nita (nita.foale@btinternet.com).

2. Website

The SCAS website (www.stoneygateconservation.org) is a way in which people can find out about our existence. It also notifies the public of meetings such as this and any other events. Copies of the newsletter are added to the site some time after you receive the printed copy.

3. Christmas card

There was quite a long gap after the August newsletter, so to remind you of our existence we sent a Christmas card to all our members.

4. Buildings at Risk survey

Those of you who came to last year's AGM will remember that James White, the City Council's Heritage Regeneration Officer, talked about the survey that the council was making of all buildings in conservation areas to detect any that were deteriorating. James recruited a few volunteers from the society and over the summer we covered Stoneygate, looking out for leaking roofs, broken gutters, decaying windows and other warning signs. Out of 686 buildings, only 7 were deemed to be 'at risk'. A comprehensive register of the City's 'Buildings at Risk' (including all conservation areas) has now been published by the City Council and can be viewed on the Civic Society website (www.leicestercivicsociety.org.uk)

5. 'New Lease of Life' Photographic Exhibition

In September we held a photographic exhibition at the Friends' Meeting House (as we have done several times before) this time showing a number of buildings which have been given a new lease of life. This took place under the auspices of the Heritage Open Days, a national event now organised by English Heritage (previously by the Civic Trust).

6. South Lodge Care Home - Talk to residents

One such renovation has been South Lodge in London Road, now a large residential home for the elderly which opened in January and featured in the February newsletter. The owners kindly invited us to give a talk to the residents about the conservation area and committee member David Oldershaw did so last month.

7. Planning applications

We receive a weekly list of planning applications from the City Council and look at all those within the conservation area or close to it. The present economic climate has seen the number reduced. 2009/10 saw 103 applications, 64 relating to trees. We commented on 11 and were involved in 2 cases that went to appeal. Of these, 1 appeal was dismissed and the other is yet to be heard.

i. Trees

The felling or major pruning of a tree within the conservation area requires the Council to be notified. They may, after inspection, issue a tree preservation order (TPO). The large number of applications suggests that most owners comply with these regulations but we will support neighbours who report unauthorised work. We trust the Council Tree Specialists' good judgement and usually comment on tree-related applications only in special cases. Last year there was one; an application to fell 14 trees in Woodland Avenue which resulted in TPOs being issued for 12.

ii. Developments

22 Knighton Park Road. This is just outside the conservation area and was one of the few large developments proposed. After carefully examining the plans we did not object. A second application was approved after a first had been refused. So far there has been no work on the site.

230 London Road. This is also just outside the area and is the former Sandcliffe garage on the corner of Mayfield Road, overlooking Victoria Park. A five-storey student residence has been proposed and SCAS has objected. A decision has not yet been made.

4 Avenue Road. A major extension has been proposed for this house which we think harmonises well with the existing house, provided that the windows and other features match. We have commented to this effect. No decision has been made.

353 London Road. There was an application to build an imaginative "green" house on this undeveloped site in front of 353 London Road. Our only concern was that it would be very close to the road. The proposal has been withdrawn.

297 London Road. SCAS objected to an application to replace all existing timber front windows with uPVC units. This would have set a precedent and was, fortunately, refused.

iii. Article 4

Since May 2007, 'minor' changes such as work to front garden boundary walls and fences, the paving over of front gardens and the replacement of windows or doors, has required planning permission. Cumulatively, such changes can have an important effect on the area and during the year our comments have influenced several applicants to modify their plans.

8. Planning breaches

We have urged and supported Council action in 2 cases where development had taken place without permission or had exceeded the permission granted.

68 Stoneygate Road. Committee member Caroline Cook worked hard to get the council to take action in this case where a wall and gate were removed and a garden changed to parking space without permission. An appeal against a reinstatement order was dismissed

13 Toller Road. An extension to this house resulted in unapproved windows being fitted and others being removed without consent. The council has taken action and an appeal is due to be heard shortly.

9. Discussions with the City Council's Planning Department and contributions to the City of Leicester Local Development Framework

SCAS has worked hard to build relations with City Council planners and encourage them to devote effort and resources to conservation. We had two meetings with planners, councillors and conservation officers to this end in May and October. Since 2008 the Council has been drawing up a 'Local Development Framework' which sets out its planning policy for the next 15 years. SCAS has also contributed to this. Nick Knight contributed a written submission from SCAS during public consultations and in April he spoke at a final hearing where the LDF was examined by a Planning Inspector.

10. Elms Road Street Trading Licence Application

In December we worked energetically to encourage members, local residents and organisations such as Leicester University and the Civic Society to comment on an application for a licence to operate a mobile burger van outside student residences in Elms Road between 3.00pm and 200am. There were 62 letters of objection and none in support. The application was withdrawn.