

Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

Annual Review of 2010-11

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 2010-11;

1. Newsletters issued in August, December and February

The newsletter is edited by Nick Knight with layout and artwork by Nita Foale. It is distributed by the committee and local volunteers under the able direction of new committee member Gordon Hamylton. We are always interested to hear your comments, what you most (and least) enjoy and suggestions as to how we could improve. We are also keen for members to contribute. If you 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 Nick at nicholas_knight@btinternet.com.

2. Website

The SCAS website (www.stoneygateconservation.org) allows people to find out who we are and what we do and to access back copies of the Newsletter in digital form. The internet is now a primary source of information for many people – not just those under twenty-five – and we have for some time been considering ways in which our site could be developed. Our lack of in-house expertise has made this difficult. We are reluctant to use professional help (mainly on grounds of cost) and would welcome suggestions and offers of practical help from members.

3. E-mail communication with members

Our successful campaign against the siting of a burger van outside student residences in Elms Road was the first time that SCAS had used e-mail to alert members and encourage them to object to an application. We repeated the strategy this year to draw members' attention to the Aylestone Meadows Appreciation Society's campaign against a planned development of a nature reserve – which was also successful. Our view is that e-mail communication should be used sparingly but we would like to hear what you think. Should we be using it more, perhaps?

4. 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. 2010/11 saw 91 applications, 40 relating to trees. We commented on 11 and were involved in 2 cases that went to appeal, one of which was granted and one refused.

(i) Developments

Our greatest efforts have been directed at two developments;

48 Knighton Drive

We supported residents who opposed plans to change the 1950s bungalow on this corner site into a day nursery and welcomed a second proposal to enlarge it into a family home. When it was demolished instead, we were among the first to ask planners to clarify the situation. Retrospective applications for demolition and a new two-storey house were finally forthcoming and out of the confusion emerged a plan that clearly acknowledged design suggestions made by neighbours, ourselves and the Civic Society. The house is still a work in progress but the willingness of Council officers and owner to accommodate public comment has been very encouraging.

Land adjacent to 349-353 London Road

After two applications to build an unusual "eco-house" on the site – which is a small spinney on the corner of Ratcliffe Road and London Road – SCAS became increasingly concerned about the non-observance of Tree Preservation Orders and non-compliance with a Planning Inspector's requirement to replace trees which had been removed. After further research and prolonged and detailed correspondence with planners, we concluded that the survival of the spinney was incompatible with proposals to build a substantial home within it. There has recently been a general invitation from the City Council for sites to be nominated for specific purposes and SCAS has proposed that this site should remain as urban woodland. Whether it does or not may not be known for some time.

We have also taken a keen interest in ongoing proposals to develop *the Sandcliffe garage site at 230 London Road* and *'Brookfield' on London Road*. At the former plans to build a student residence up to five storeys high were withdrawn and a new application submitted for a single-storey car showroom. The owner of the latter, De Montfort University, is looking to sell the site and surrounding land in the summer after its Charles Frears School of Nursing has moved into its new home in the Newarke.

Jewish Progressive Synagogue

We were delighted to be invited by the committee of the Jewish Progressive Synagogue to discuss plans to enlarge their premises in Avenue Road. An earlier application to build a small bungalow on a vacant part of this site has been withdrawn and the plan now is to provide a more flexible space - possibly for wider community use. Consultation is, in our view, the surest way to successful development and we look forward to seeing the detailed plans when they emerge.

(ii) 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 - relating to the spinney opposite 349-353 London Road.

5. Planning breaches

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

At ***68 Stoneygate Road*** a front wall and gate were removed without permission and the garden converted into a parking space. Two years after SCAS first reported the matter a planning inspector finally refused the owner's appeal against a City Council Enforcement Notice and both wall and gate were reinstated. At ***13 Toller Road*** front timber windows that had been removed without authorisation were replaced following a complaint by SCAS but non-matching aluminium windows in a new extension were allowed on appeal. This unfortunate (and unexpected) outcome revealed the weakness in Council officers' reliance on drawings, rather than detailed written descriptions or explicit planning conditions.

Unauthorised and unsympathetically sited satellite dishes have been removed after SCAS intervention and we await action following the unauthorised replacement of leaded front windows and timber frames with uPVC units at ***33 Springfield Road***.

6. Heritage Open Days (HODs)

Once again SCAS took part in this national event held annually on a weekend in September and organised by English Heritage. 'Places of Worship, Welcome & Wonder' saw 10 places of worship either in or close to the conservation area opening their premises to visitors for at least part of Saturday 11th September. The Friends' Meeting House in Queens Road was the focal point where visitors could pick up a leaflet about the event and guidance on how to find the buildings. At most of them there was a representative of the congregation to explain what they did and how they used the premises. Particularly interesting was the Chinese Christian Church in Clarendon Park Road where the building which was originally the Liberal Hall, designed by Arthur Wakerley, has been renovated and has its fine timber roof on display. The Chinese Christians were also generous with their refreshments! The other participants were: The Jesus Fellowship, Christchurch, St John's, St Thomas More, Clarendon Park Congregational Church, St James the Greater, Geeta Bhavan and Stoneygate Baptist Church.

7. South Lodge Care Home - Talk to Residents

Following his success at last year's AGM, Neil Crutchley gave residents an illustrated talk on 'Lost Houses of Stoneygate' and David Oldershaw explained the work of the society.

8. Springfield Road Residents Group

A number of Springfield Road residents called a meeting in October following concerns about the maintenance of a tenanted property and the behaviour of some of its occupants. SCAS committee members attended together with local beat officer, PC Emma Jayne, Councillor Clayton and the owner of the properties. There has recently been a second meeting to discuss progress - which has, unfortunately, been disappointing.