

Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

Annual Report 2011-12

1. Newsletters issued in July, November and April

The newsletter, delivered by volunteers under the direction of committee member Gordon Hamylton, is edited by Nick Knight with layout and artwork by Nita Foale. The July 2011 issue included a double-page centrepiece in full colour. We are always interested to hear your comments and are keen for members to contribute. If you have an idea for an article, please have a chat with Nita or Nick before you leave or send it to Nick at nicholas_knight@btinternet.com.

2. Website and social media

Committee member and webmaster Tim Savage has made several improvements to our website (www.stoneygateconservation.org). Newsletters can now be downloaded in seconds and there is a 'Useful Links' section with quick access to City Council Planning and Conservation resources. These include the Stoneygate Character Appraisal (a key decision-making guide for planners), an overview of Article 4 and two excellent illustrated tour maps. There are energy-efficiency tips from English Heritage and, for those interested in historical research, online versions of Victorian and Edwardian trade directories which list residential addresses in Stoneygate and their occupants.

We exist on Twitter as <http://twitter.com/#!/StoneygateCASoc> and we now also have a Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Stoneygate-Conservation-Area-Society/113497682032444>.

3. Events for members

Heritage Treasures Hunt

Instead of taking part in 2011's annual Heritage Open Days (now run by English Heritage), we organised our own event on the following Saturday 8th October. Participants were given a set of photos of details of buildings and a 'Treasures Map' of part of the conservation area and asked to locate the photos. While the weather was less than ideal, members were more than up to it and the prizes (lunch for two at Time & Place Café Bistro, Francis Street and dinner for two at Timo, Allandale Road) were won respectively by Angela Walker & Team and Janet Stevenson. We think it was a good idea but next time we'll do it in summer!

Richard Gill Guided Walks

In June local writer and broadcaster Richard Gill led a guided walk around St Johns and Holmfield Roads, a small area but still enough for him to find plenty of interest to tell us. We ended at the Brookfield Bowls Club, founded as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the Great War, and when some of the bowlers noticed us peeking at a discreet distance they invited us to join them on the terrace for a cool drink.

A second walk with Richard in October, again on the east side of London Road, was also blessed with fine weather. This time we looked at the substantial houses on Sandown and Alexandra Roads which nicely illustrate the changes in fashion over the period in which they were built.

4. Planning

We receive a weekly list of planning applications and look at all those within the conservation area or close to it. 2011/12 saw 119 applications, 56 relating to trees. We commented on 18, none of which went to appeal.

We supported sympathetic plans to change **College Hall, Knighton Road** into a Conference Centre for Leicester University, extend the **Progressive Synagogue at 24 Avenue Road** and create a new car showroom on the cleared site of the old Sandiccliffe garage at **230 London Road**.

We objected or sought amendments to the following applications;

Land adjacent to 10 Woodland Avenue - where a request to renew lapsed planning permission to build a modern 5-bed house on an ex-side garden was withdrawn after planning officers had recommended refusal.

5 Knighton Road - where consent was being sought to replace timber front windows and doors with uPVC replicas and unauthorised work to the frontage had seen a boundary wall demolished, gates removed and all 'soft' landscaping cleared (the application was amended)

22 Knighton Park Road - where an application to build a student accommodation complex on a cleared site opposite St Mary's Triangle is still pending

2 Southernhay Road - where plans to build a two-storey annexe and single-storey garage in a rear garden (both visible from the street) were withdrawn and approval was limited to a single-storey rear and side extension and a 'Juliet' balcony. We drew attention to the fact that space designated for business use in an otherwise residential property had been exceeded and this was noted.

We objected on principle to retrospective applications made at **330a London Road** and **16 Elm Tree Gardens** (changes to frontages) and **18 Victoria Park Road** (conversion of rear outbuilding) and we reported that planning conditions relating to front landscaping at **330 London Road** had still not been fully complied with.

We also made detailed comments on;

4 Knighton Park Road and **11 North Avenue** - where timber side windows were replaced with uPVC replicas

3 Alexandra Road - where the owner sought to convert a family home into five 1-bed flats

15 Elms Road - where a care home extension threatened to overlook a neighbouring Grade Two listed property and family home

We are carefully monitoring events at **Brookfield, London Road** which was vacated by De Montfort University in the summer and is still awaiting a buyer. Finally, last year we also made detailed written and spoken contributions to a City Council public consultation on the Future of Student Housing in Leicester. We are particularly anxious that the concentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that we have seen in other parts of the city should be avoided in Stoneygate and the adjoining areas of Clarendon Park and Knighton.

Trees

Our extensive correspondence with planners, councillors and MP over **the spinney opposite 349-353 London Road** has resulted in the site being resurveyed and the creation of a new Woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO) which should safeguard the spinney in future. It has also prompted the Council to create a new set of Tree Enforcement Policies. These should deter unauthorised work to protected trees throughout the city and prevent owners profiting from their removal.

Enforcement and planning breaches

Friendly meetings between councillors, local residents, SCAS and the owner of a tenanted property in **Springfield Road** did not, unfortunately, lead to the promised reinstatement of timber-framed leaded front windows which had been replaced, without consent, by uPVC units. Fortunately, gentle but firm pressure from the subsequently formed Springfield Road Residents Group (set up by several SCAS members) ensured that City Council enforcement action finally delivered a result.

5. Partnership and community involvement

We have continued to work with other like-minded groups in the city and beyond. 2011/12 has also seen us playing an increasingly active part in the community.

Stoneygate Festival

We were delighted to be invited to set up our stall at the first 'Stoneygate Festival' organised by the Stoneygate Baptist Church on 24th March 2012. David Oldershaw gave a short talk in the morning and Richard Gill another in the afternoon. Both gave us the chance to wax eloquent on the special qualities of the area and explain what the society was doing to protect them. We gained a number of new members as a result.

Illustrated Talks at 'The Lawns' and 'South Lodge' Residential Care Homes

Committee members Neil Crutchley and David Oldershaw treated residents to Neil's illustrated talk on 'The Lost Houses of Stoneygate' which has been generating interest at venues around the county since we first heard it at the 2010 SCAS AGM. Neil's photos of the Victorian mansions that disappeared between the wars and during the 1960s and 70s usually elicit a stream of memories from the audience and those at 'The Lawns' and 'South Lodge' were no exception.

EMACHS - East Midlands Association of Civic and Heritage Societies

By joining EMACHS, we have been able to gain a regional perspective. EMACHS draws its members from cities (such as Nottingham and Lincoln) and towns (such as Bourne, Belper and Boston) across the East Midlands and aims to share experience and promote best practice. Through EMACHS we have gained membership of the Historic Towns Forum and Civic Voice, the lobbying group for the civic movement in England whose President is comedian, writer and broadcaster Griff Rhys Jones. Last year's EMACHS Annual Conference was held at Jewry Wall Museum in October and hosted by the Leicester Civic Society.

Leicester Heritage Partnership

The LHP was set up by the City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, in July to provide a forum for closer co-operation between the City Council and local groups and organisations involved, in one way or another, with the city's heritage and historical buildings. Members include representatives from the Civic and Victorian Societies, the Leicester Diocese, both universities, the Leicestershire & Rutland Society of Architects, OPUN, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

University of Leicester Centre for Urban History - 'Connected Communities' Project

Our role in helping Dr Rebecca Madgin secure grant funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) means that SCAS is now in a position to develop Stoneygate history or heritage projects which will benefit from the professional guidance and help of Rebecca and her colleagues.

There are a wide range of possibilities; the publication of leaflets, books and guides; the organisation of school or adult learning activities; the creation of history trails; even the production of new digital media applications. We are currently considering what sort of project we might develop. If any of you have any suggestions, please e-mail Committee member Nick Knight or have a chat with Nick after the AGM.

6. Leaflet for Estate Agents

Stoneygate's special character is one of the things that make the area attractive to old and new residents alike and preserving it helps maintain residential and public amenity and property values. Anyone buying a house in the conservation area should be made aware by their solicitor or estate agent that an Article 4 direction applies and that certain types of normally permitted development require planning consent. The recent unauthorised removal of front gates and walls at several properties suggests either that this is not happening or that advice is being ignored. We have designed a leaflet to help potential buyers appreciate the area's qualities and the value of safeguarding them and are hoping to work with property professionals to get the message across.

7. Promotion

We have made a big effort to raise awareness of the Society among conservation area residents. In 2010/11 we designed a new leaflet explaining who we are and what we do and delivered it to all non-member households in the conservation area. This year we have followed that up by distributing nearly 400 extra copies of the Spring Newsletter to selected non-member addresses.

We are pleased that this extra effort is already bearing fruit. We ended the year with 153 paid-up members (individuals, couples and families) - another all-time record. Thank you all.