

# Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

## Annual Report 2017-18

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

This year's newsletters were edited and produced by Nita Foale and Nick Knight. Regular features were written by Nick and front-page articles by Nick and Neil Crutchley. Local distribution was organised by Gordon Hamylton with help from Aubrey Stevenson, Andy Bent, Kitty and Freddie Measures, Bill and Jan Walker, Janet Bliss, Paul Griffiths, Alan Christopher, Glen Bush and other committee members.

We welcome contributions from readers! 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 - and we are especially keen to have contributions to our new 'A Point of View' column (max 500 words with illustrations/ photos).

We also welcome help with deliveries from anyone who can make a regular commitment in the third week of August, first week of December and the second week of April.

### 2. Website and social media

Nick Knight continues to upload event announcements and newsletters to our website and manage our Twitter account ([www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc](http://www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc)). Nick 'tweets' regularly on a variety of topics, engaging with groups and individuals who share our interests and concerns. Our following continues to grow and has reached 920!

Significant planning applications are now announced via Twitter, with help from our colleagues at the 'Friends of Clarendon Park' group.

We are still looking to appoint a permanent webmaster familiar with Wordpress who can oversee the creation of more comprehensive web content. If you can help (or know anyone else who might), please let us know.

### 3. Events for Members

#### Austin J Ruddy at the SCAS AGM

Our guest speaker at the AGM was Austin J Ruddy, editor of the Leicester Mercury's (sadly now discontinued) 'Mr Leicester' pages and author of 'To the Last Round: The Leicestershire and Rutland Home Guard 1939-1945' and 'Tested by Bomb and Flame: Leicester versus Luftwaffe Air Raids 1939-1945'. Austin's illustrated talk on 'Stoneygate in World War 2' was meticulously researched and gave us a graphic insight into the havoc wrought in Stoneygate by Luftwaffe bombs and mines and the admirable and often courageous human responses to them. Austin received a resounding round of applause, many questions from the floor and copies of his books were all sold. Thanks to Neil for arranging everything.

#### Coach Trip to Kelmscott Manor and Hill Barn Farm, Broadway

Our July coach trip could hardly have gone better. The coach was almost full and the early start and steady drizzle didn't deter the buzz of conversation as we made our way along the M69. Once we reached deepest Gloucestershire the sun came out and the weather remained perfect for the rest of the day.

Our short stop at Cotswold Lavender (and the cakes and infusions at the excellent tearooms) provided a welcome break but the main attraction was Kelmscott. The introductory talk, knowledgeable Society of Antiquaries' guides and the seventeenth century farmhouse itself, with its interior decoration and hand-crafted furniture, opened a fascinating window onto the world of the Morrises, their friends and the arts and crafts movement. The peace and seclusion of village and house still give the place a timeless, other-worldly quality.

Once again, Woods provided us with a luxurious coach and a helpful and knowledgeable driver who took us through the lovely villages of Moreton-in-Marsh, Stow-on-the-Wold and Burford and made a small detour so that we could catch a glimpse of the Thames. Overall it was a delightful, carefree day out and we are, as ever, grateful to our Treasurer, Arthur Stafford, for his painstaking organisation.

## 4. Planning

Matt Matthew checks the City Council's weekly list of planning applications and identifies those within the conservation area or (close to it). Our planning team - Matt, David, Jill, Nick and David - then discusses applications that warrant closer examination.

2017-18 saw 163 applications, 80 relating to trees and 28 seeking to discharge/vary conditions attached to planning permissions or make 'non-material amendments'. We commented on 16.

### *Welcome developments*

Two of the year's most significant projects at **Brookfield** on **London Road** and **Ashfield** in **Elmfield Avenue** were preceded by extensive consultation with residents. This is the surest way to successful development and we are delighted to have been involved at an early stage - and to see work going forward according to plan at both. The Diocese of Leicester and several smaller developers have also approached us for pre-application advice/opinions and we appreciate their openness and care.

Detail is very important in a conservation area and we have been impressed by planning officers' increasing attention to it, even in 'minor' applications. It was a real surprise to find that the design for a bin store at the front of a care home in **Toller Road** had been amended to take into account concerns we had expressed several years ago when the mature front boundary hedge had been thoughtlessly replaced (without consent) by unsympathetic fencing.

Finally, it is always nice when good work in the conservation area creates a 'ripple effect'. Last year's most conspicuous example was in **Stoneygate Road** where, following the refurbishment of numbers 12-16, several nearby homes carried out their own improvements.

### *Objections and amendments*

We objected to applications at;

**58 Stoneygate Road** - Change of use of part of ground floor and all of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> floors to 23-bed HMO  
**19 St John's Road** - Demolish house and outbuildings; build 2x 4-bed semi-detached houses  
**28 Southernhay Road** - 2-storey side/rear extensions; 1-storey front, side & rear extensions; alterations  
**7a Stanley Road** - Change of use of care home to 9x studio and 3x 1-bed flats ((retrospective)  
**7a Stanley Road** - Internal alterations to Grade 2 listed building to facilitate above; CCTV cameras  
**7 Stanley Road** - Change of use of care home to 4-bed dwelling (retrospective)  
**7 Stanley Road** - Internal alterations to Grade 2 listed building to facilitate above; CCTV cameras  
**11 North Avenue** - Change of use from dwelling to 3 flats  
**23 Knighton Road** - 1-storey front extension; alterations

We sought amendments to (or clarification of) applications at;

**8 Ratcliffe Road** - Front dormer and rooflights  
**11 Stoneygate Avenue** - Front boundary wall, railings and railed gates (retrospective)  
**11 Elmfield Avenue** - Build 3-storey 72-bed care home; access, parking, landscaping  
**44 Knighton Drive** - Hard surfacing of frontage, 0.9m high walls at front and side  
**257 London Road** - 1<sup>st</sup> floor alterations, rear extension and rooflights to coach house  
**289 London Road** - Alterations to vehicle access; new wall, piers and front entrance gates  
**6 Toller Road** - Replacement front uPVC windows

Challenges remain. Owners continue to seek to hard-landscape front gardens and replace relatively open (usually 'green') front boundaries with enclosing walls, railings, fencing and gates. Non-resident landlords continue to seek to replace rear gardens with income-generating extensions. Perhaps the most worrying challenge has been the growing number of projects which are inadequately planned and managed; where approved designs are treated as 'guidelines' and completion dates as elastic. We are very disappointed that a **Burlington Road** property under construction since 2014 has still not been completed. This project has been fraught with problems since it was allowed by planners and has, we are sorry to say, been a case study in how not to do infill development in a residential conservation area.

### *Enforcement & planning breaches*

With the notable exception of Grade 2 listed 'Eastfield' in **Stanley Road** (where part of the house was converted into apartments without consent) 2017-18 has seen a welcome decline in serious breaches. Similarly, although a 'make it up as you go along' approach persists at **26 Southernhay Road**, planners have dealt effectively with most minor breaches through retrospective planning applications.

We await remedial action at **11 Stoneygate Avenue** where a wall has still not been reduced in height to comply with consent obtained retrospectively, **26 and 28 Ratcliffe Road** where uPVC instead of timber windows were fitted to new semi-detached houses and **14a Woodland Avenue** where gate pillars were refused retrospective planning consent and an appeal dismissed in 2016.

### ***Trees***

Stoneygate's mature trees (especially its street trees) make a very significant contribution to its special character and it is encouraging that large projects at **Brookfield on London Road** and **Ashfield in Elmfield Avenue** have both taken great care to minimize the loss of mature trees and to preserve wildlife habitats. We continue to highlight the beneficial role that trees can play in smaller gardens and to discourage residents and (especially) landlords from felling them out of 'tidiness' or simply to reduce garden maintenance.

There have been no controversial incidents involving trees this year, although the decision to allow the felling of a TPO-protected tree at **3 Elm Tree Gardens** highlights weaknesses in past planning decision-making. The mature cedar was already there when the house was built as part of Wimpey's 2009 'Ascot Priory' development and was incorporated into the garden – which was clearly too small for it. Where trees make a valuable contribution to the conservation area (and perhaps act as an important historical signpost), we believe they should be retained as a separate landscape element; not given what is, in effect, a short stay of execution. Planners should not be approving new buildings where residents' amenity is bound to be compromised unless such trees are pollarded or removed. The handling of a case at '**Stoneygate Grange**' in **Elms Road** (formerly '**Woodlawn**') suggests that lessons have been learned – but we remain concerned.

That said, we are pleased that planners continue to extend conservation area tree protection. New Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) have been created at 323 London Road, 289 London Road, 24 Stoneygate Avenue, 12 and 16 Southernhay Road, in Dukes Drive and at the Springfield Road Health Centre. A comprehensive map of Stoneygate TPOs is available here; [www.leicester.gov.uk/planning-and-building/conservation/nature-and-biodiversity/protecting-trees/](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/planning-and-building/conservation/nature-and-biodiversity/protecting-trees/)

### ***Garden development***

Green spaces between buildings are one of Stoneygate's main characteristics and in some of the larger suburban gardens new detached annexes have begun to appear. Where there is sufficient space to accommodate them, we have no objection in principle but we are increasingly concerned by disproportionately large structures which relate poorly to the main house and appear to be ultimately intended for habitation. Structures built without consultation as 'permitted development' which then exceed allowed limits are also problematic – and when they are also built on property boundaries (as has happened in **Southernhay Road**), their adverse impact can be far-reaching.

In the more urban townscapes of Clarendon Park and East Stoneygate where green amenity space is very limited, large habitable rear extensions are also a growing concern.

### ***Complexes of privately-owned apartments***

In the 1960s, 70s and 80s some of Stoneygate's unusually large Victorian family homes were converted into separately-owned self-contained apartments and we have met with residents of one who are concerned by the number of units being acquired by neglectful non-resident landlords. Apartment conversion can be a lifeline for historical properties and apartment living is an increasingly popular choice but for such investments to work in the medium- to long-term, they need to be intelligently managed. We are exploring ways of getting this important message across.

### ***Amenity***

Unretrieved, overloaded and thoughtlessly parked bins are a perennial issue at tenanted properties but we are pleased that things seem to have improved at addresses in **Clarendon Park** and **London Road** where there have been recurrent problems. Litter left by cars from outside the area and the 'tagging' of telecoms cabinets remains an irritating problem in many of the streets off **London Road**.

### ***Intrusive commercial signage***

After three years of non-compliance, the City Council finally obtained a court order to remove the large advertising signs that property and lettings company **Parmars/Unipad** had fixed (without consent) to the walls and front fences of its properties in **Victoria Park and London Roads**. Fines, costs and victim surcharges totalling £10,680 were imposed. We are at a loss to understand why a company that has been a conservation area landlord for many years would behave so irresponsibly and risk such damage to its reputation. We are pleased that an advertising sign on the Stoneygate Road-facing wall of **1 Francis Street** has also finally disappeared.

### ***Road safety***

The **Flexistay Hotel** and **London Road Co-op** store at the old **Gables Hotel** site opened their doors slightly later than planned in October. Following a meeting at the office of Jon Ashworth, we were delighted that the Co-op changed its car park entry and exit points, varied the delivery management plan agreed by planners and is now using 8m long vehicles which do not require parking spaces to be coned off prior to arrival. We believe these changes have significantly reduced the risks to road-users,

pedestrians and Co-op customers and are very grateful to the Co-op for listening. Driver behaviour when entering and exiting the car park has been better than we had expected – although drivers turning right on leaving still cause difficulties and we still receive reports of inattentive or lazy drivers ignoring the ‘no entry’ signs.

Irresponsible driver behaviour and inconsiderate parking at drop-off and pick-up times has continued to be an issue at both the **Islamic Academy on London Road** and **St John the Baptist Primary School on Clarendon Park Road**. At the former, pencil bollards have at least displaced the problem. At the latter, road humps and a 20mph zone seem to have made little difference. Operations by police and enforcement officers have had some deterrent effect – but we suspect they will be required for the foreseeable future until a sustainable solution can be found.

## 5. Partnership and community involvement

We continue to maintain active working relationships with the **Friends of Clarendon Park**, the newly-formed **Evington Footpath Conservation Area Society**, the **Leicester Civic Society** and the **Leicester Group of the Victorian Society**; co-operating on day-to-day planning and heritage matters and promoting each others’ talks, walks and other events.

Our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ‘Tour, Talk and Tea Party’ at the Botanic Garden on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June has built on last year’s reciprocal mailing with **the Friends of the University of Leicester Botanic Garden**.

Kindly hosted by Sue and Peter Ryan, our stand at **Art House 2017** was managed by Nita Foale with the help of volunteers Jan Moore, Kate Andrews, Henry Doyle, Bob Hall, Olivia Gould, Pat Kirkham, Jenny Westmoreland, Bill and Jan Walker, Julia Williamson, Dee Yorke and Aileen Orme. As usual, we renewed a number of overdue membership subscriptions and also attracted 14 new members.

We remain actively involved with the City Mayor’s **Leicester Heritage Partnership**.

## 6. Committee News

We were delighted to welcome Jill Reville onto the SCAS committee in December. Jill has been a member since 2006 and has been helping the SCAS planning team assess new planning applications for the last couple of years.

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.

An information board bearing a dedication in memory of our ex-treasurer, Henry Evans, was installed at the Attenborough Arboretum in February. We will be arranging a small event to celebrate the event which will be reported in the August newsletter.

## 7. 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 237 member households. Once more, thank you all.