

Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

Annual Report 2018-19

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 still keen to have contributions to our '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). Nick 'tweets' regularly on a variety of topics, engaging with groups and individuals who share our interests and concerns. Our following continues to grow (slowly) and @nottmhistory recently became our 1,000th follower.

Significant planning applications are still announced via Twitter and we will e-mail members when we are seeking feedback/comment on particularly important developments.

We are still looking to appoint a permanent webmaster familiar with Wordpress who can oversee the creation of more comprehensive web content and Nick would also be willing to entrust the Twitter account to the right person!

If you can help (or know anyone else who might), please let us know.

3. Events for Members

'Memories of Stoneygate and Clarendon Park' at the SCAS AGM

Our guest speaker Colin Hyde, researcher and outreach officer for the East Midlands Oral History Archive at the University of Leicester, didn't actually do much speaking himself. Instead we heard the tape recorded recollections of people who had lived and worked in Stoneygate and Clarendon Park in the early 1900s. There were men who, as tradesmen, had made deliveries to and installed equipment at the grand houses; a lady whose family had moved in professional and commercial circles and had owned one and another who, as a girl, had come from a small village to work in domestic service. As we all listened to them speak, you could have heard a pin drop. They were completely absorbing and transported us back in time in a way that no documentary film could.

Coach Trip to Taylor's Bell Foundry and Melbourne Hall

Over forty people enjoyed our August coach trip and the hot, sunny weather was a pleasant bonus. First we went to Loughborough where John Taylor & Co have been casting bells since 1839. They have cast bells for some of our best-known religious buildings and were restoring a ring of twelve for the north-west tower of St Paul's Cathedral 140 years after first hanging them. We were shown around the factory floor, workshops and museum by knowledgeable volunteers whose enthusiasm was inspiring and were even allowed to do some testing in the tuning shop!

Melbourne Hall was a short coach ride away and on arrival we were served tea, coffee and a selection of delicious sandwiches and cake in the tearooms. The tour of the house - limited to the ground floor - was interesting but the undoubted stars of the show were the ornamental gardens and lake. A gentle stroll down to Robert Bakewell's 'birdcage', from where you could look back towards the house was very hard to resist.

The coach was as comfortable and the driver as professional as usual and, once again, we are grateful to Arthur Stafford for his choice of destination and meticulous 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 discuss applications that warrant closer examination.

2018-19 saw 149 applications, 80 relating to trees and 21 seeking to discharge/vary conditions attached to planning permissions or make 'non-material amendments'. We commented on 16.

Welcome developments

Building work at **Brookfield** on **London Road** has now been underway for nearly eighteen months and there has been considerable progress. Scaffolding recently removed from the side and rear has revealed impressive stonework repairs to window sills and if all restoration work is of similarly high quality, the University's new business school will have a home that everyone can be proud of.

We are pleased that **Knighthouse** (the City Council day centre named Martin House) will be brought back into use by its new owners, the Sant Nirankari Mission but we are disappointed that both planning officers and planning committee accepted the loss of the rear conservatory and bay and the unsympathetic design for the new rear extension. We remain convinced that the desire for more space could be met by creating a detached rear annexe, perhaps connected to the main house by a glazed walkway which would preserve the existing rear view of the house from Ratcliffe Road and allow the freedom to achieve a much better design.

Changes don't have to be on a grand scale to be impressive. A wall removed from the boundary of **99 Clarendon Park Road** has been quickly replaced by one of admirably high quality and design. Smart replacement close-boarded timber fencing has appeared at the **junction of Avenue Road and Avenue Road extension** and in **Toller Road**. Above all, we have been delighted to see a set of beautiful reclaimed cast iron Victorian railings fitted to an existing low brick wall in **Stoneygate Road**, together with a matching cast iron railed gate. The owners consulted widely before gaining planning consent and the results are spectacular.

Finally, when planners recognised that a front boundary hedge in **Knighthouse Road** was a unifying landscape feature and refused consent for its replacement by a wall and railed gates, they made a landmark decision. We salute them.

Objections and amendments

We objected to applications at;

- 58 Stoneygate Road** - Change of use from school to 35-bedroom HMO
- 341 London Road, Martin House** - 1-storey rear extension to community and education centre
- 28 Southernhay Road** - demolish house; build 2-storey 5-bedroom house
- 4 St Johns Road** - Change family home to 4 flats; replacement 1-storey extension; alterations
- 3 Southernhay Road** - Fell cedar tree covered by TPO 483
- 26 Southernhay Road** - 2.1m high gates and gateposts at side of house
- 26 Southernhay Road** - Discharge of Condition 3 (landscaping) to application 20161472
- 6 Knighthouse Road** - remove hedge; 1.5m boundary wall; front gates; extension of access
- 11 Elmfield Avenue** - Vary approved plans to fell 1 tree, works to trees, alterations to boundary, revised drainage scheme
- 16 Victoria Park Road** - Hard-surface frontage with tarmac (retrospective)

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

- Mary Gee Houses, Ratcliffe Road** - Demolish halls of residence; build 100-apartment care complex
- 7a Stanley Road** - Change of use from care home to 8x studio & 3x 1-bed flats
- 7a Stanley Road** - Internal alterations to Grade 2 listed building to facilitate above
- 19 St John's Road** - Change of use from surgery to 3-bed house; demolish side extension & garage; build 3-storey detached house; alterations
- 31 Knighthouse Drive** - Replacement uPVC windows to front, side and rear
- 4 Knighthouse Park Road** - Convert and extend garage to create new 2-bedroom dwelling

Outstanding concerns

We are deeply worried by a decision to allow the demolition of one of a group of inter-war homes in **Southernhay Road** and its replacement with a modern house whose design promises to offer little by way of compensation. This is unprecedented in recent years and evokes memories of the 1960s and 1970s. The case officer's misunderstanding of the nature of a conservation area and the planning committee's reduction of conservation area policies to the platitude 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' were both particularly alarming.

Despite its likely dysfunctionality as a living environment, planners claimed there were no grounds to refuse the conversion of **'The Home for Penitent Females' in Stoneygate Road** (purpose-built in 1881 for around 30 residents) into a 35-bedroom HMO which could have housed a random mix of nearly twice as many. This time it was the planning committee that saved the day – refusing the application on grounds of poor residential amenity.

The tendency for planning officers to ignore the recommendations of their own Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP) and to narrow the boundaries of their remit are major concerns; as is the frustrating inconsistency of the planning committee.

Enforcement & planning breaches

We are pleased that 2018-19 has again seen very few breaches, although we are disappointed by planners' acceptance of a new front porch and garage door at **8 Ratcliffe Road** without the need for retrospective planning consent and the hard-surfacing of front garden space at **16 Victoria Park Road**.

The glass globe-topped gate pillars at **14a Woodland Avenue** refused consent by a planning inspector in 2016 were finally removed last summer. Other outstanding cases are proving resistant. The unauthorised conversion into flats of part of Grade 2 listed **'Eastfield' in Stanley Road** has still not been resolved due to disagreement with the owner over internal partitioning. A wall at **11 Stoneygate Avenue** has still not been reduced in height to comply with retrospective consent obtained in August 2017. The future of gateposts built without consent at **26 Southernhay Road** and proposals to ignore a previously agreed landscaping plan and turn most of the frontage into car-standing are also undecided.

Trees

We were delighted when, in November 2018, the City Council published its first ever Tree Strategy; <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/city-mayor-peter-soulsby/my-vision/tree-strategy/>

While it deals mainly with the management of Council-owned trees in parks and other public spaces, it also recognises the importance of *'more than 500 Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) that cover many thousands of trees in private ownership' which 'provide protection for important trees, as well as for large areas of woodland'*.

The Council demonstrated its commitment to TPOs in Stoneygate when it refused consent to fell a TPO-protected cedar at **3 Southernhay Road**. As we write this in May 2019, it faces a sterner test in dealing with unauthorised works to TPO-protected trees at **16 Knighton Road** which led to one being removed on safety grounds and seems to have resulted in another falling across Knighton Road. Fortunately no-one was killed or seriously injured but government guidance makes it clear that non-compliance with TPOs is a serious matter and may be an offence under Section 210(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 with a maximum fine of up to £20,000. We have consistently maintained that, to be effective, the Council's use of TPOs needs to be underpinned by a willingness to take legal action and/or impose financial sanctions.

Whether covered by a TPO or not, we celebrate the contribution that Stoneygate's trees (in both streets and private gardens) make to its special character and continue to discourage owners from felling them simply out of *'tidiness'* or to reduce maintenance.

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.

Amenity

Unretrieved, overloaded and thoughtlessly parked bins are a perennial issue at tenanted properties but we are pleased that things continue to improve at addresses in **Clarendon Park** and **London Road** where there have been recurrent problems. Litter left by cars from outside the area and *'tagging'* remain irritating issues.

To Let Boards

Following the introduction of new regulations in July, landlords and estate agents now need to meet certain standards when fixing *'to let'* signs to properties in parts of Clarendon Park or to apply for planning consent to vary them. Despite the Council's efforts to establish a voluntary code of practice, some landlords and agents have been using permanently displayed boards as a form of company advertising and they have become a blight – particularly in streets with a large number of rental

properties. We hope, in time, that these improved standards will extend throughout our and neighbouring areas.

Road safety

We are pleased that police and community volunteers are beginning to systematically monitor London and Knighton Roads in an attempt to address speeding.

At the **London Road Co-op** and **Flexistay Hotel** the decision to change car park entry and exit points and vary the approved delivery management plan has clearly had a beneficial effect and we are pleased that anticipated problems with delivery vehicles and congestion have largely been avoided. Driver behaviour has been better than we expected – although drivers turning right on leaving still cause difficulties and the odd inattentive or lazy driver still ignores the ‘no entry’ signs at off-peak periods.

The increase in the number of very large vehicles on London, Knighton and Stoughton Roads is worrying, as is the rat-running through South Stoneygate and Clarendon Park. A fence on the Elms Road/Ratcliffe Road corner was demolished shortly after New Year’s Day and, at the Clarendon Park Road/London Road junction, St John the Baptist School’s new boundary fence is already dented.

Chronic traffic congestion, poor driver behaviour and inconsiderate parking at drop-off and pick-up times continues to be an issue at both the **Islamic Academy on London Road** and **St John the Baptist Primary School on Clarendon Park Road**.

5. Partnership and community involvement

Our 40th Anniversary ‘Tour, Talk and Tea Party’ at the Botanic Garden in June built on our good relations with **the Friends of the University of Leicester Botanic Garden**.

We continue to maintain active working relationships with the **Friends of Clarendon Park**, the **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. To launch **Knighton Neighbourhood Forum’s** Housing & Conservation Working Group in November, we gave a slideshow and presentation about SCAS’s work and the challenges we face. We remain actively involved with the City Mayor’s **Leicester Heritage Partnership** and the **University of Leicester’s** Community Liaison Group, formed last year to improve communication with local community groups, police and city wardens.

Most recently, we have signed up for a community heritage project led by the Head of Special Collections to mark the University’s 2021 centenary by researching the people, organisations and buildings associated with its formation and early history.

Stuart Bailey

In June we were saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Leicester Civic Society Chairman, Stuart Bailey. Stuart was a steadfast and endlessly inspiring friend who loved Leicester and its built heritage and worked tirelessly for both. A memorial plaque will be unveiled in New Street on Sunday May 26th at 12.00pm. Everyone is invited to attend.

6. Committee News

As planned, in July we gathered at the Attenborough Arboretum behind College Court to remember our ex-treasurer, Henry Evans, and to admire the information board bearing his name. If you knew Henry and are in the area, why not drop by?

The SCAS committee has remained unchanged for another year but we are always looking for new talent and 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.

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 remained stable and we ended the year with 237 member households. Once more, thank you all.