



Maidenhead Civic Society **NEWS**

Issue 3/04

July 2004



Legless in Maidenhead! (See inside, page 6)

In this issue

Strategic Review of Amenity; “Eyesores of Maidenhead”

Regular features on talks, outings, the Heritage Centre,
Projects and Planning

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STRATEGIC REVIEW OF AMENITY

For the better part of a year now a group of us has been labouring to set out a vision of what people would like Maidenhead to be - at least as far as its amenities are concerned. This has now been achieved in a version fit for publication, not only to the members but also with the intention of giving it wide publicity through the various routes available to us. You will find a copy of it with this Newsletter.

What we have to be clear about is that none of this will come about effortlessly. Of course, many of the targets involve spending money and depend on actions initiated by the Council and other public bodies who have their own priorities and commitments. So what we aim to do is to work to embed our ideas with theirs. This cannot be a swift process and it will require persuasion and reasoned argument. In the end we believe that our Strategic Review sets out a long-term picture and targets for all. It is in the nature of the political system that parties tend to have a short-term horizon. Our vision aims to transcend this and to play its part in establishing long-term targets irrespective of which party is running things. Their methods may differ but they should be reading from the same hymn sheet.

As you can see from the Review, it is focussed on three specific centres, viz.: the town centre, the railway station and the area in front of the Town Hall. Anyone who visits these can see that, whatever their current merits, with a little imagination they could be so much better. Piecemeal, of the moment, developments driven by purely commercial demand never have and never will lead to an integrated and optimal combination of function, services and amenity. It requires an overall vision driven by real needs, not just those where developers can see a profit or what is expedient. We want to start a debate leading to a long-term drive to upgrading amenity in the town based on an overall ongoing strategic plan.

Nothing is set in stone and we intend to review the document and progress against it, say annually. Inevitably, needs and opportunities will change with time and so must the objectives, but at least people need to be aware of what is happening to amenity in the town. We hope that our efforts will go some way towards achieving a better Maidenhead.

John McIntosh
Acting Chairman

HELP NEEDED WITH THE NEWSLETTER

We are looking for a volunteer to act as a reserve for the two members – Daphne Line and Molly Dunning – who organise the delivery of small bundles of Newsletters to our network of area distributors. If one of them is away on holiday it is rather an onerous task for the other. You would be required to take the little bundles of Newsletters to about fifteen addresses in either West or east Maidenhead. Please contact Carol Innes on 01628 620280 if you feel you can help. Thank you!

TALKS

WEDNESDAY 15th September 2004 – 8 p.m.

“RED KITES IN THE CHILTERNs”

An illustrated talk by Brian Clewes

WEDNESDAY 20th October 2004 – 8 p.m.

“GHOSTS & TRADITIONS OF MIDDLE THAMES”

A talk by Michael Bayley

BOB SANDYS - AN APPRECIATION

It is with deep regret that I have to report the death of Bob Sandys - a long time member of the Society and of the Executive Committee. Bob died on April 28th last. His funeral, held at Holy Trinity Cookham on 12th May, was attended by our President Richard Poad.

Bob had been a stalwart of the Society for many years and perhaps his most notable contribution was as Organiser of the Society's Outings for a period of some 16 years ably assisted in this by his wife Ivy who survives him. Anyone who has tried organising these outings will know that there is a good deal of work involved coupled with a degree of uncertainty as to their outcome. Amongst many other contributions he made to the Society's work was materially helping to promote the Maidenhead 'Face-Lift' of some years ago. He also took part in the first Maidenhead Carnival, dressing up as a Bishop at the wedding of Margaret of Anjou no less! This was a role he repeated for the later exhibition at Ockwell's Manor. His other interests included the Probus Club and water-colour painting. So it is hoped that family and friends will accept these brief but heartfelt acknowledgments from the Society's Executive Committee to someone who served the community and the Society with commitment.

John McIntosh.



“Bishop” Bob

OUTINGS

On Sunday 13th June over 40 of us visited Knowle House in Sevenoaks and Chartwell in Westerham, Kent. We had a beautiful sunny day for the visits to these two very contrasting properties. When we arrived at Knowle some very tame fallow deer sitting and eating in front of the house greeted us. On entering the house we were guided through the many rooms and saw the extensive restoration to the contents that has been carried out by the National Trust. We saw less than half of the house as it is still occupied by the Sackville family. We left Knowle after lunch and took the 20-minute drive to Chartwell, the home of Sir Winston Churchill. Viewing was by timed ticket to stop overcrowding, so we had time to visit the magnificent gardens and admire the rose garden. The house was a funny mixture of styles and contained many paintings and memorabilia.

By the time you read this, we will have visited Eastnor Castle in Herefordshire in July.

Our next trip is to the Houses of Parliament and the Cabinet War Rooms on Saturday 2nd October, where we will be given a guided tour of the Palace of Westminster to include both houses and the division lobbies and St. Stephen's Hall and Westminster Hall. We will then have a short walk to the Cabinet War Rooms off Horse Guards Parade. Here you will see the Map Room and Cabinet Room as well as the recently opened Churchill's Kitchen and dining room also Mrs. Churchill's bedroom. There will also be time to visit some of the other historic sites in the area.



The Houses of Parliament, as seen from the "London Eye"

We look forward to your support for our outings and will always welcome non-Members.

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

YORK STREAM

Since May this year, as expected, York Stream in the town centre has been dry, except when it's functioning as a storm drain. The work the Environment Agency did in clearing trees from the White Brook in the winter has been ineffective in increasing flow into the town centre.

David van Beesten of the Environment Agency (EA) came to talk to the Maidenhead Town Forum on 24th May. He reiterated their plans to dredge the same section to remove silt later this year and complete the removal of trees from the water-course. He also said they will use herbicide to control the reeds, though as of July there is no sign that this has been done. It remains to be seen whether herbicides will be effective in dealing with the reeds that currently clog Maidenhead Ditch. In response to my specific question he said they had no plans to dredge out the Ditch, partly because of cost and partly because it would expose the gravel bed, allowing any water to seep into the ground. This may be true, but such streams usually reseal themselves as did North Town Moor pond when we dredged it out in the 1980's.

As far as improving flow from the Marsh Meadow ditch at Cookham, it would appear that the possible presence of water voles, a protected species, is still impeding plans to provide a larger ditch. The current small ditch is fed from the Thames and was dug in 1996 to try and increase the flow into the system and help maintain water in York Stream. The EA claim they are negotiating with English Nature to find a solution. I went out with Jane Gifford of the Windsor & Maidenhead Urban Wildlife Group (WMUWG) recently to look for evidence of water voles and we found none. The local farmer, Mr John Copas, told us that there were many mink in the area. Jane said she feels that a proper survey should be carried out.



Jane Gifford of the WMUWG next to the ditch dug in 1996 to increase flow into York Stream and now a protected environment supposedly inhabited by water voles.

On the positive side the EA are attempting to get funding for a study of the ground water to see (surprise, surprise) if water extraction is contributing to the problem. If the study goes ahead we would like to see an assessment of the effect on groundwater flow of the clay barrier put underneath the flood bund (which crosses from east to west to the north of Maidenhead).

The Chairman of Maidenhead Forum asked that the Environment Agency keep them informed of developments and Mr Van Beesten said he would do this via the Royal Borough's Green Way Working Group. I hope this means that in future the EA will regularly attend meetings of this group.

MILLENNIUM WALK

The Walk runs from Hurley across country to Maidenhead Riverside connecting at each end with the Thames path and so creating a very large circular walk. Within this circular route we hope to create two smaller walks by creating another link from Marlow to Malders Lane near Pinkneys Green, hence the need for a safe way of negotiating the A404 at Bisham. Completing the Millennium Walk is included in the draft Rights of Way Improvement plan being put together by the Royal Borough. We have tried most recently to provide the two missing links detailed below. As you will see in both cases we appear to be getting nowhere fast.

Path from Lower Cookham Road to Towpath

Unfortunately, Ready Mixed Concrete plc (RMC), after five years of negotiation and a promise in 2003 of a permitted path for 10 years, have decided they have reservations about allowing the path that we would like to run on the top of the flood bund along the southern border of White Place Farm. They have recently been reorganised and are either thinking of selling White Place Farm (letter dated 27 April to Theresa May MP from D N Wiseman, Development & Estates Manager) or redeveloping the farm buildings (letter dated 7 June to me from M G Foster, Executive Director of the RMC group). They say they want to defer their decision until the flood bund land is handed back to them by the Environment Agency.

However in the hope that the path will eventually go ahead, we have, with the Royal Borough's assistance, approached the Onyx Environmental Trust for funding to allow improvements to the whole of the Millennium Walk, including the creation of a nature reserve with public access next to the towpath on land offered at no cost by Quintain PLC and the provision of a new bridge across the White Brook. A presentation about the project was given to the Trust on 25th June, at the Ford Plant at Dagenham, which we hope will be successful. I would like to thank Kate Dagnall of the Royal Borough for her help in drafting our application and for accompanying me to Dagenham to give the presentation (and no, we don't know why it was held there!). Thanks are also due to Cllr Simon Werner who persuaded the Borough officers that the acquisition of Quintain's land was worth pursuing. **Stop Press:** We have just heard that Onyx liked our project but refused the grant because of unresolved land issues not the least of which was RMC's change of heart.

A404: Marlow to Malders Lane Link

Secretary of States orders Footpath 9 Bisham: The orders were designed to close off the part of Footpath 9 that crosses the A404 and create instead a new path under the road going through one of the flood arches and thence across the edge of a field into Bisham Wood. The Public Enquiry on this proposal was held on 5 and 6 November 2003, and the orders were overwhelming supported by local people. The report is still with the Government Office of the South East. Our MP, Theresa May, asked a parliamentary question about this in May (for which we are grateful) and was told that the results of the enquiry would be released in June. As of the 15th July there is still no news.

BOY AND THE BOAT STATUE

So far our attempts to raise money for the repair have not been very successful. Our initial appeal in the Maidenhead Advertiser produced only one phone call and a second appeal on 21 July was

also unproductive. The Civic Society executive has decided to allocate £500 towards the cost of repair (put at about £4,000) but unless the rest of the funding can be raised it seems unlikely that the statue will be repaired. We have recently been contacted by the Community Partnership section of the Royal Borough and hope this means the Council is interested in restoring the statue.

EYESORES OF MAIDENHEAD

Maybe we should organise an “Eyesores of Maidenhead” walk. It could start at the statue; go down the High Street; past the mouldering Cresset Towers, and thence to Chapel Arches to see the old cinema site (slowly disappearing under a blanket of weeds). Walkers could then pop round and see the willows growing in the stream bed next to Hynes Meadow car park (currently undermining the Green Way path) and then back to Chapel Arches to view the muddy, smelly littered mess with its abundant nettles and ground elder that is York Stream in the town centre. The really energetic could then stroll on further to the river to view Skindles, passing the delights of Moorbridge Road on the way. Here’s a flavour of the tour:

Disappearing statue at the top of the High Street



Admire the magnificent Cresset Towers

Take in a film at the Bridge Avenue Cinema!





See the ducks swimming on the waters of York Stream

Delightful period cottages in Moorbridge Road



Open-air art gallery at the corner of Waldeck Road

And finally, enjoy a drink at the welcoming riverside Skindles Hotel



HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

SUMMER ON THE RIVER - until August 21st

This exhibition is a colourful must, with flags, bunting, model boats, punting medals, memorabilia and wonderful photographs illustrating summer on our beautiful stretch of the Thames from Bray to Hurley: the exhibition includes historic and contemporary material and aims to send visitors away inspired to enjoy today's river. You will find sections on swan upping, rowing, punting, sailing, electric boats, navigation. In the Heritage Centre shop there is a new selection of fine art prints of local river scenes by Tissot, Lavery, Gregory, Caffieri and Stanley Spencer; also attractive watercolour prints by local artist Lesley Olver.

STAGE COACH MAIDENHEAD - August 26th to October 23rd

The glory days of the coaching era are evoked in this new exhibition curated by Brian Boulter.

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS - September 11th and 12th

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is coordinating a pilot scheme under which five local buildings, all listed, will be open to the public free of charge over the national Heritage Open Days weekend. The buildings are Oldfield Lodge (c.1780, now the Bridge Clinic), All Saints Church, Boyn Hill, St Mark's Church, United Reformed Church (1785, the town's oldest church, with a perfect preaching house interior) and Norden Farm Centre for the Arts. Taplow Court will also be open. Full details in the local press or from Maidenhead Heritage Centre, or in the national guide published by the Civic Trust.

LEST WE FORGET - October 27th to November 20th

A moving exhibition marking the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War, when VCs were won by four Maidenheadians - and many more local men died than are recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

STANLEY SPENCER AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR - October 28th

An illustrated lecture by painter and writer Timothy Hyman who curated the Spencer retrospective at Tate Britain. He will describe Spencer's war experiences as a medical orderly near Bristol and in Macedonia, and then as an infantryman in the Royal Berkshires. He will show how these experiences were reflected in influences his subsequent work, in particular the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere near Newbury. Tickets on sale in September - advance booking recommended.

Venue: King George VI Club, York Road, Maidenhead, 8pm.

'MAIDENHEAD VOICES' - *pre-publication offer*

Civic Society members can order this new book from Maidenhead Heritage Centre at a special pre-publication price of £11 (normal price £12.99). 'Maidenhead Voices' is based on interviews and other contributions from over 60 local people. It includes many previously unpublished photographs and will be essential reading for all Maidenheadians, whether by birth or adoption! It will also make an excellent Christmas gift. 'Maidenhead Voices' will be published in late September or early October.

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is open Tuesday – Saturdays
90 Moorbridge Road, Maidenhead SL6 8BW, ☎ 01628 780555
www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk

PLANNING DIGEST

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Group met in April, May, June and July to review the plans for the 41 applications that had been selected from the weekly listings for March, April, May and June. All the sites were visited and reviewed in detail. Comments were submitted to the planning department on 28 of the applications and the full text of these can be seen on the Society's website.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Amongst other things, we have written two letters to the Maidenhead Advertiser, and it is worth reproducing them here in the Newsletter to show how the Society is trying to engage public support in its attempts to influence the Council in its decisions:

“Partnership in Planning”

The first appeared on 21st May and tried to encourage people to respond to the Council's planning questionnaire:

“Sir,

Do we care about Maidenhead? Do we groan at decisions taken in the town hall? Do we have an idea for making it a better place to live and work? If the answer to any of the questions is “Yes”, then we should be telling the Council what we think. And this weekend, we should be filling in their *Partnership In Planning* Response Form. Delivered to every household a couple of months ago, completed forms are due back on Monday (May 24th).

What difference will it make? Well, frankly, it's not the best of surveys, it's too prescriptive, but there is space to express our own views. And, let's face it, if the council don't have our views, it's difficult later to call them to account. That's why the Maidenhead Civic Society applauds the Council's attempt through consultation to draw up a Local Development Framework containing “detailed policies and proposals to guide development in the borough until 2016”.

The Civic Society, as part of its strategy for enhancing the look and feel of Maidenhead – preserving the best, improving the rest – is pushing for integrated bus, train and transport links with better parking, improved open spaces, parks and gardens including the restoration of the York Stream, and a proper long-term approach for new building and planning. The Society has already told councillors what it would like to see in future and we shall be publishing details of our strategy shortly. Did you know, for example, that even though there is a riot of house building activity, Maidenhead is under no real pressure from Government on its housing quota? There is no real shortage of new homes in the town – and certainly no shortage of office space! What is desperately needed is affordable housing – but that, of course, does not appeal to developers.

So we urge everyone who cares to express their opinion. Fill in that form! Of course you could also make sure your voice is heard in the RBWM “Cabinet” by joining the 500 or so members of the Society – we welcome people with a passion for the town. See our website at: www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk”

Blocks of Flats

My second letter sent on 29th June called attention to the growing threat from the numerous applications for developments of blocks of flats:

“Sir,

Concern expressed recently though your news and letters pages is well justified - Maidenhead is experiencing a significant increase in applications to build blocks of flats in place of single dwellings.

This is already leading to deterioration in the environment and the character of certain areas – notably Shoppenhangars and Riverside – as well as increased traffic and parking problems. There’s a price to be paid too by the environment in loss of open space and wildlife habitat. What we prefer are affordable homes in the town centre in place of empty office buildings.

While the government, through its planning policy guidance (PPG3), calls for denser housing, it says increases in density should not be achieved at the expense of the desirable characteristics of the areas concerned. PPG3 also requires local authorities to develop with local communities a shared vision of the types of residential environments they wish to see in their area and articulate this through their development plan policies.

Maidenhead Civic Society applauded the Council’s initiative for the public consultation which concluded last month as part of the preparation of a Local Development Framework (LDF) which will contain the detailed policies and proposals to guide development in the borough until 2016. But we worry that by the time the LDF is published the damage will have been done.

We urge the Council to fast-track the housing policy, incorporating the guidelines, to control the number and type of developments and to ensure they are appropriate and of the highest quality. The types of new housing appropriate to different neighbourhoods should be agreed before any more ad hoc applications for increasing density are approved.

And we ask councillors to consider whether there is really pressure to build so much. The current level of planning applications suggests that the Royal Borough’s published target of 4,100 dwellings between 2001 and 2016 is likely to be exceeded easily!”

Although the letter wasn’t published until the July 9th edition, it did lead to an article headed “**Flats Spoil Character of the Area**” in the edition of 2nd July. Councillor Vicky Howes, who has borough cabinet responsibility for planning, was given the opportunity to comment and the Advertiser reported: “....councillors have repeatedly refused applications for permission to tear down houses and build flats. But, she said, they have seen their decisions overturned by Government inspectors when they considered appeals lodged by the developers. Cllr Howes said ‘A lot of people feel the local authority has more power than it has. We have no influence over the planning applications put forward by developers. We just have a statutory responsibility to determine them. We obviously don’t like it, but we are quite likely to have a much higher quota of homes imposed on us by the Government later this year.’ Along with other local authorities in the Southeast, Cllr Howes wants central Government to change its planning ruling which is encouraging development companies to build many flats. The ruling states that urban sites used for housing previously, like a single house and garden, can be redeveloped at a ‘more efficient’ higher density.”

Nigel Cockburn

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 15th September 2004
Talk by Brian Clewes

“Red Kites in the Chilterns”
Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Saturday 2nd October 2004
Outing

Houses of Parliament & Cabinet War Rooms

Wednesday 20th October 2004
Talk by Michael Bayley

“Ghosts & Traditions of Middle Thames”
Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Wednesday 17th November 2004

44th Annual General Meeting
Methodist Church hall, 8 p.m.

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2004

Parish Centre in St. Luke's Church, at 7.45 p.m.

14th January, 11th February, 10th March, 14th April, 12th May, 9th June, 14th July, 8th September, 13th October, 10th November, 8th December.

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 17th November 2004 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 8.00pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 1st October 2004.**

(Unless otherwise acknowledged, photographs taken by Ann & Brian Darracott using the Society's digital camera purchased with a grant from the Kidwell's Trust)

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