

THE WARWICK SOCIETY

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

Autumn 2011

AUTUMN EVENTS: THE FUTURE, OUR PAST

THURSDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER 2011

MY VISION FOR WARWICK TOWN CENTRE

With Jeff Downes, Corstorphine & Wright Architects

Corstorphine & Wright is a leading practice in commercial architecture. Jeff Downes, who leads the firm, will illustrate how Warwick town centre could be opened up to create a pedestrian route and make best use of its intrinsic value.

Location: The Lord Leycester Hospital

Time: 7.45pm start.

WEDNESDAY 12TH OCTOBER 2011

THE SALTISFORD CANAL ARM - WARWICK'S OWN CANAL

With Nigel Hamilton

The Chairman of Saltisford Canal Trust, Nigel Hamilton, will host an illustrated talk on the history and restoration of the Saltisford Canal Arm of the Warwick and Birmingham Canal, and its importance in the history of the town in the 19th Century.



Location: The Lord Leycester Hospital

Time: 7.45pm start.

TUESDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2011

45 YEARS ON – REVISING PEVSNER'S WARWICKSHIRE

With Chris Pickford

The Warwickshire volume of the 'Buildings of England', with which Alexandra Wedgwood assisted Nikolaus Pevsner, was published in 1966. Both the buildings of the county and understanding of its architectural history have evolved hugely since then.



The long process of revising Pevsner has at last reached Warwickshire, and Chris Pickford, formerly the County Archivist of Bedfordshire, has returned to his

native county to take on the task.

He is in the middle of his research, and the new edition, covering Warwickshire without 'Greater Birmingham', is not planned to be published until 2015. He will be able both to tell us about the processes of study and revision, and perhaps bring early news of discoveries about some of the buildings – though Warwick itself has not yet been reached.

Location: The Lord Leycester Hospital

Time: 7.45pm start.

TUESDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2011

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN WARWICK

With Bryn Gethin

The County Council Archaeologist Bryn Gethin will discuss archaeological work in Warwick in recent years and the latest findings from the work at Kenilworth Castle. Archaeological sites will include the 2008 excavations on the new bus station site on Market Street, Warwick, the excavations on the site of the 'lost' medieval church of St Lawrence, on Stratford Road, Warwick.

Bryn Gethin will also explore the evidence of the English Civil War that can be seen in the fabric of Warwick Castle and the excavation work carried out at Kenilworth Castle over the past 10 years.

Location: The Lord Leycester Hospital

Time: 7.45pm start.

SAVE THE DATES

THURS 24TH NOVEMBER 2011

VICTORIAN EVENING

Warwick's celebrated Victorian Christmas Evening takes place on **Thursday 24th November** from 5pm-9pm.

FRIDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2011

CHRISTMAS MUSICAL SUPPER

This year's **Christmas Musical Supper** will be held on **Friday 9th December** at the Court House Ballroom, Warwick. The ticket form will be in the winter edition.



THE CHAIRMAN'S DIARY...

Warwick Society Chairman James Mackay writes on current thoughts, issues and topics.

Midsummer brought great sadness to the Society. Within a few days, Barbara Fletcher, Jim Haywood, Roger Higgins and John Turner all died. Each had been devoted for decades to the aims and the work of the Society. Obituaries will appear in the Annual Report. For now, I renew my expression of sympathy, on behalf of every member, with the families of each of those who have left us, and my appreciation of what they did, each in their own way, for the Warwick Society.

Under that cloud, the routine of our business seems mundane. But it continues. Here is a summary of the most significant issues of the last three months.

Town Centre Plan

A brief paragraph in the middle of an article on another subject in the Courier of 22 July slipped out the announcement that '*consultation on the Warwick Town Centre Action Plan ... has again been delayed*'. The Partnership is making little progress, its scope for action to improve the Town Centre having been badly limited by the County Council ruling out consideration of any change of use in the Shire Hall offices.

Independently, but with no visible success, the County Council has been seeking new uses for the old Shire Hall, vacated by the Courts, and it is looking again for development opportunities on the other side of Northgate Street. The emphasis of the District Council is also on potential development sites. Our task, at meeting after meeting, is to remind both councils of the obligation to consider first the conservation and enhancement of the historic buildings and streets. We would be in favour of good new development, for example of the Barrack Street site, if it strengthened the town centre economy and improved the townscape. So far, neither council is working towards these goals.

A new Chair – the third in two years – is however paying attention to the failure of the Partnership either to work as an effective team or to produce any results, so

perhaps we have reached the bottom of a trough. This question will be very much on the agenda at our September meeting, when Geoff Downes will present his proposals, a radical option which could transform the town centre's rôle and image. I am sure that the ensuing discussion will be lively.

Local Plan

Much though I dislike carping from one paragraph to the next at the attitudes of the District Council, its draft Local Plan provokes more of the same. The draft consists of nine pages of text largely unconnected with the copious background material, and lacks any basis in either evidence or analysis. The defective logic of the draft puts the section on solutions before that on objectives.

The first requirement of central Government planning policy, to reduce CO₂ emissions, is ignored. Instead, the plan promotes development at all costs, providing houses in much greater numbers than are necessary to meet local needs; and proposing employment development to 'balance' the growth and employ residents. It is a circular argument. The benefits of development are not set against any consideration of its disbenefits. There is no recognition that it is excessive development, in recent years as well as in the future, which gives rise to most of the problems which even more of it is supposed to resolve.

While specific sites are not proposed at this stage, it is inevitable that so many new houses would be built on greenfield sites, submerging Warwick in suburban sprawl and flooding its roads with even more traffic than they already handle.

At the June public meeting arranged by the Town Council it was suggested that such development could only take place after the necessary infrastructure had been provided. Fair enough: but no-one asked where the roads necessary to serve the sprawl would run, nor whether they would be welcomed where they cut swathes through town or country.

I write this just after reading two and a half pages of the *Sunday Telegraph* on 7 August. It explained the

campaign started by the National Trust and the CPRE against George Osborne's intention to make economic growth, not the environment, a main objective of planning policies. Warwick is not alone. In our view, the District Council should be ruled out of taking planning decisions because it suffers a conflict of interest. It will benefit financially, in grants from central government, for every house it enables being built. So it has a strong incentive to over-ride the opposing, and well-informed views of its electorate.

We did not expect that 'Localism' would mean so little, so soon.

We much regret that the opportunity has not been taken, with the removal of the top-down requirements of the Regional Spatial Strategy, to develop a plan which meets the needs of and has widespread support from local communities in Warwick District. The matter is almost too big for the Society to take on. We're writing, but I also urge you to tell every councillor, every politician, every planner you meet your own view of what is proposed.

Court House

At last, cause for optimism. The Town Council's bid for lottery funding for the refurbishment and improvement of the Court House now has a date for the funding decision: 20 September. A new planning application has been made, better than the one withdrawn earlier in the year. It would enhance the building by removing and not replacing the former toilet block by the Castle Street gate to the Pageant Garden. We're not sure that the proposal for step-free access, by a lift to a narrow door, is yet right; nor is there evidence that the kitchen requirement for serving a meal to eighty in the Ballroom has been calculated properly. But perhaps those are details that can be sorted out. The necessary repair of the building depends on the bid succeeding. You can learn more about it, and lend your support, through the internet at www.unlockingwarwick.co.uk.

CIVILISING HIGH STREET AND JURY STREET

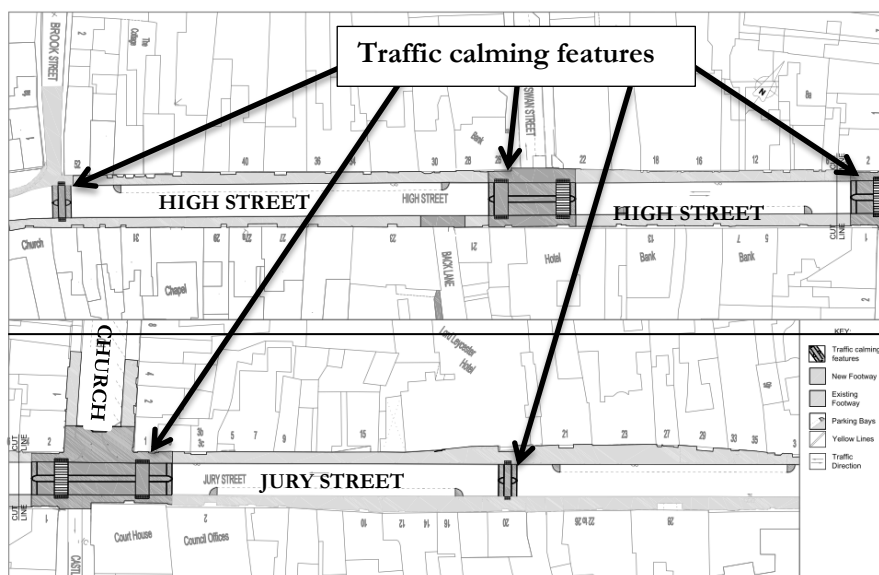
In June, the Round Table meetings on the measures to reduce the impact of traffic and to *civilise* High Street and Jury Street were concluded. All present agreed that what is planned is worth doing - though of course some have reservations, and others would be more radical.

The Forum has worked hard to achieve a consensus, and I am very pleased that we have made enough progress for the County Council to consult formally on the proposals. The notice, probably published by the time you read this, will describe the main changes and invite comments. Depending on these, the proposal should go to the Council's Area Committee in October, and - we hope - be implemented between Christmas and Easter 2012.

These will be the first works to lessen the ill-effect of vehicles, and to make it safer and easier to walk in the town, to cross the roads, to use the shops, ever carried out on any of the main town centre roads.

Fifty years ago, Castle Hill was widened to help more traffic flow better, twenty years ago the Saltisford roundabout had the same objective; and both made it much less pleasant to use the streets on foot or a bike. Many other towns, in Britain and in mainland Europe, were already doing the opposite, recognising that, while we depend on the car for access, the first purpose of town centre streets is for people to walk in, to stop and talk, to window shop, to shop, to admire the surroundings.

Depending on the response to the formal consultation, pedestrian islands will be introduced, opposite



Not the final proposal, but an earlier drawing from the Round Table meetings.

Brook Street, at Swan Street, at the 'Cross' with Church Street and Castle Street, and in Jury Street by the entrance to the Lord Leicester Hotel. So we shall only have to cross half the road at a time, making it more than twice as easy to find a gap in the traffic.

If the proposals are implemented, cars will go more slowly, because they will have to weave their way around the islands, and between parked cars, with some parking spaces moved to the opposite side of the road. They will also be slowed by ramps at the approach to each island - a slight change in level, deterring speed but not disturbing neighbours.

Eventually, a 20mph speed limit will be introduced, but by then everything should be going more slowly anyway. It will be proposed that Brook Street will be closed at its High Street end, making a little *piazza* to enhance the Lord Leicester Hospital. It will be proposed that the present zebra

crossing outside Margetts' office will be removed and replaced by two 'semi-formal' crossings of a new design. They can be where people actually want to cross, opposite Swan Street and between Church Street and Castle Street. Vehicle movements out of Church Street and into Castle Street, important for local residents, will continue as now.

The County Council is also seeking views on a Design Guide for the streets of the town centre, setting standards for surfacing materials, street furniture, lighting, and so on. It proposes applying, as projects follow each other street-by-street, designs which achieve the functional requirement of slowing vehicles and also enhance how the town centre streets look.

Every detail of both sets of proposals is a fine balance between competing, often conflicting uses of the narrow street space, between frontages, which were laid out in 1694, not on the model of Milton Keynes. Each of us might find some part of the proposals less than perfect. But I am absolutely sure that they are the best that can be done, given those competing uses, the overall objectives of the programme, and the funds available. The alternative would be to do nothing, to allow traffic to dominate the streets, and hope for some miracle solution. That is a mirage. I hope that you will look at the High Street proposals in detail, and tell the County Council that you support them.



Brook Street could be closed at its High Street end, creating a little *piazza*, while the main crossings could be moved.

A CALL FOR ACTIVISTS – GET INVOLVED

The Society's first object is:

to conserve, for the benefit of the public, or to encourage the conservation of, the natural, artistic and cultural amenities of Warwick and its neighbourhood.

The desire to improve standards of new development to enhance the setting of old buildings is established as the second key aim.

We should note what the Society is *not*. It may join neighbours in opposing some changes, and many of its activities are sociable, helping it to cohere. But the Society is neither a 'nimby' residents' association nor a social club. Its efforts are directed to the public benefit, conserving and improving the town environment.

The Society has only two direct instruments of power, the time and capability of those who voluntarily carry out its work, and its capital reserve, largely endowed twenty years ago by Philip and Dorothy Styles. Its statutory rôle is very limited.

So it relies on influencing the decisions of others. Clearly, this requires having a body of **members** who are numerous, informed, energetic and influential.

It also needs us to collaborate with **other organisations** which share our aims. The Society, less still its Committee, cannot take on everything that we would like to achieve. But, with others, we can do a lot more than we can alone. So the Society needs to nurture its connections with a range of bodies, and this takes time.

It must also work to affect wider **public opinion**, on which word of mouth - meeting and talking to people - is also influential. Though the local **media** are weak, they provide a more 'mass-market' route to public opinion, and need and welcome nurturing to cover 'our' stories well.

Finally, we must build relationships with the bodies and the people who are actually the **decision-takers**. This is most demanding of all in diplomacy, patience and time. Neither councils nor property owners and occupiers are necessarily open to our objectives, exemplified by the remark of a council officer at a recent Town Centre Partnership meeting that listing buildings is undesirable as it constrains developers.

But devoting a lot of time, care, and expertise can affect the outcome, as we have proved to ourselves with the action on traffic of the Town Centre Forum. This started from outright hostility with the authority, but now achieves real progress, above all, by building collaboration and consensus among everyone involved.

Equipping the Society to exercise what influence it can needs us to use the experience of earlier years and to renew and strengthen our capabilities.

We need to involve more members more fully in the Society's activities. Attendance by members and friends at lectures is good when the subject is current and important. Volunteers open gardens for the summer evening walk, and help the preparation and serving of the pre-Christmas supper. Others distribute Newsletters, saving a lot of postage. There are lots of unused willingness and abilities among the membership, but we generally only learn this when someone volunteers.

Now, **we need activists**, to get the Society onto a

virtuous spiral of impact and influence.

There are perhaps four kinds of people who could make this happen:

- ❖ **Existing members of the Society** who might not wish to join the committee but could help with events, specific tasks or projects, to get involved.
- ❖ **Volunteers for the committee.** Other members who have not until now volunteered for the committee but who - perhaps on reaching (semi) retirement, now find themselves able to help make the Society work.
- ❖ **Former committee members**, familiar with what we do, who might, perhaps in changed circumstances of their own, be happy to rejoin.
- ❖ People who may **not** be members of the Society, but who share its goals, and have specific professional and technical capabilities that we need - in planning, architecture, communications, finance and administration; and in practical things like the speaker system, writing for the press, even serving drinks.

There is no shortage of ideas as to what the Society could do. The people we seek are those who would like to be part of a wider volunteer team, putting the ideas into action, sometimes hard but often enjoyable work. If you could be one of these activists, do please get in touch.

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THE
WARWICK SOCIETY

*To preserve the heritage and improve the town environment of
Warwick by encouraging high standards of design,
architecture and planning.*

MEMBERSHIP & CONTACTS

The society is proud to have almost 400 members. If you know someone who would like to become a member please contact John Fletcher on the number below who will be pleased to send a membership form.

<i>Chairman</i>	James Mackay	498381
<i>Treasurer</i>	Antony Butcher	492975
<i>Membership</i>	John Fletcher	493066
<i>Programme</i>	Liz Holroyde	492329
<i>Newsletter</i>	Mark Robertson	496643
<i>Website &</i>	Richard Eddy	496643

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