

# KING'S LYNN CIVIC SOCIETY



## ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

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# King's Lynn Civic Society

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### **Chairman's Annual Report May 2016** by Alison Gifford

The whole population of West Norfolk will be affected by the Government's allocation of new housing to the authority of 12,000 new houses with 7,000 in the King's Lynn urban area. There is no doubt that there is a shortage of housing in the southern part of the country though we have all seen television programmes where rows and rows of decent houses have been shut up and abandoned in some parts of the country where old industries have gone and the populations have relocated. Could economic regeneration ever equalise the south and the north east and give these houses families again?

In October each year Council Tax returns to central Government produces official statistics of "vacant dwellings" and the latest set record over 600,000 empty homes. We think creating homes from empty properties has a valuable role to play in meeting housing needs in an environmentally sustainable way. We also know that people see empty homes as a blight on their neighbourhoods and that bringing them back into use can also bring wider improvements to local areas. At the same time, we recognise that to meet housing needs more homes need to be built too. Both building homes and creating new homes from empty properties should play a role in tackling the housing crisis. At the end of June 2013 there were 2,382 empty homes registered with the Borough Council. 656 of these were subject to Council Tax exemptions/discounts, for example, those that were waiting for probate. Not all empty houses are problematic, because housing markets need some empty properties to function. But 1,026 properties were long term empty. That is 1,026 families who could have a home in a few months if the proper legal action was taken. The owners would get the market price and someone would have a much needed home. There is an

Empty Home Strategy but it seems to consist of writing about the Empty Home Strategy though no doubt I shall be corrected on that.

There is also the second home syndrome. In West Norfolk that is estimated to be 2,900 houses (5% of the housing stock). In North Norfolk it is a whopping 9.5% depriving local people of a house in their village, pushing up house prices and leading to ghost communities.

This brings me to one of the problems we have been thinking and writing about this year – Lynnsport housing development. Liz James writes about this on page 9. This may have been triggered by the “Clenchwarton Effect”. West Norfolk Council lost a High Court challenge to an inspector’s decision to grant planning permission for a housing development in Clenchwarton. The judgment in London was on a judicial review challenge brought by the authority against the decision earlier this year in which the planning inspector rejected their opposition to the 40 home scheme on the disused Fosters sports ground on Main Road on a flood plain.

A planning inspector had ruled the project could go ahead because **he did not feel the council could demonstrate that it had a five year supply of deliverable housing**. The Council challenged this but, dismissing the challenge, the judge, said the decision was one the inspector had been entitled to make.

Now, of course, any private developer must feel they will get permission to build wherever they like in the Borough and the Borough Planners are also racing to show they do have plans for 5 years of deliverable housing. Coming soon near you – 20 tiny houses and no parking – flood plain or not.

Ian Price will describe the state of planning permissions given but no build started which also blight the housing process on page 13.

Helen Russell-Johnson has written letters of good sense on many planning matters big and small from really good schemes in the Townscape Heritage Initiative Area (Wennis and The Old Bank) to hideous outsized illuminated signs demanded by banks. Why would you need a lit up sign if you are closed when it is dark? They are all refused of course as they should be. She is helped by Society

President Desmond Waite, Committee members Rick Morrish, Liz James and John Loveless and advised by Julian Litten.

I have written letters of support for Heritage Lottery Fund applications for the bells of St Nicholas and others which we hope may be started soon. I have also received support from Councillor David Collis (NCC) to remove some of the horrible ugly posts which are now blighting the South Quay as part of the new parking scheme. I have also asked Chris Bamfield (KLWNBC) for advice about the missing bench outside the Town Hall which has been in place for over two hundred years. This is the Illustration on the cover by W.H. Oldmeadow c 1820.

Heritage Open Day was really fantastic and a great showcase for this Society. Please put the date into your diaries for 2016 – Sunday 11 September. Volunteers are greatly appreciated.

We had some very interesting lectures and you will be able to listen to Darren Taylor the CEO of KLFM after the AGM. Find out about him on page 15.

May I lastly thank Margaret Worledge for her time as membership secretary, always efficient and dependable. Sandra Coleman will very ably step into this position.

## **Planning**

**by Helen Russell-Johnson**

2015 has been another busy year for the planning group. The heavy work was the response to the Borough Council’s Site Allocations and Development Management Policies. This is a large document and as usual the policies were full of warm words but had little content about heritage and green infrastructure. The planning group responded by producing a twelve page document identifying what was lacking, what needed tightening up, what was illogical, contradictory or just not good enough. We also asked to speak at the public examination of the document to put forward the views of the Civic Society on the parts that concerned us. As you may know the Inspector stopped the examination after the first morning as there was still work to do on the document. One member of our planning group is now part of the Council led Green Infrastructure committee so can input into discussions, plans and decisions.

There have been some worrying planning applications for large developments in the last year to which we have objected on several grounds. Marsh Lane, 130 dwellings permitted, former Alderman Jackson School, Marsh Lane - 24 dwellings permitted, former NCH building, Marsh Lane – 12 dwellings permitted. All of these will increase the density of housing in the area and reduce the open space available. The only associated infrastructure development planned was the new road through Lynnsport which is unlikely to help to reduce congestion around Marsh Lane.

Plaxtole House on Goodwins Road is threatened with demolition and replacement with 18 dwellings. The Civic Society has argued that the house should be converted and any additional buildings should be designed in a similar style to complement the old house. As it is an outline application no detail is given of what Freebridge have in mind. Freebridge has a history of building very small dwellings in cramped spaces so we are watching this one closely. An earlier application in 2008 for a smaller number of properties was permitted so a precedent has been set. Unfortunately Plaxtole House is unlisted so there is no protection there. We have asked the Victorian Society to take an interest in the building but to date there has been no response from them. There is also a huge problem of access to the site and the possible loss of many mature trees.

Another worrying outline application is the prospect of 110 houses at Gaywood Hall. This building has had a request for listing refused recently so also lacks protection. Imagine the impact of an extra 100 cars trying to get out onto the main road in the morning. We have objected to this application on numerous grounds.

Freebridge won their appeal to build four tiny houses on a tiny plot of land at the back of Austin St. There are no parking places so the long term car park will continue filling up with residents' cars, leaving fewer spaces for people coming into King's Lynn to work.

The application for an anaerobic digester using maize on Cross Bank Lane has been withdrawn and we await a more sophisticated submission. The main concern here is the number of

trucks and tractors on John Kennedy Road and Edward Benefer Way during the harvesting season.

Some applications have been very welcome and we have supported them. The former Blockbusters on Railway Road will be redeveloped into commercial and residential property. This will fill and tidy up the derelict space at the entrance to the bus station – a welcome improvement. Purfleet Street will be having a face lift. Limes House, the former Lynn News building on Purfleet St, will be developed to form 17 flats above the commercial premises; there are no parking spaces. Number 17 Purfleet Street, the 1930's industrial building, is being redeveloped. Not everyone is happy about the plans but a finished functional building has to be better than dereliction. Again this lacks parking space. The County Council owns the land in between these two properties which is currently used as parking space - as yet there is no application for an infill development. Norfolk Street will have six houses built behind the old Subway shop and again there are no parking spaces available.

Not all planning applications are for new housing, some are for details of listed buildings and there have been two for new flues for restaurants. These require close scrutiny as the impact on neighbours can be great. The planning group has objected to several applications for illuminated signs on the High Street. The Borough Council has guidance about shop fronts in the Conservation Area but these appear not to have been consulted before submission of applications. A specific guide for King's Lynn shop fronts will be developed as a result of the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). This will be very welcome.

The THI has brought several good and successful planning applications to bring the buildings in the Saturday Market Place and St James Street back into use. These include Wenns, the Royal Order of Antediluvian Buffaloes and one of Prior's shops which is now a newsagent. Next year should see many more.

A recent trend has been a flush of applications for building new houses in the gardens of existing properties. Some are good sensible modest plans that have not upset neighbours; some are ill thought out, inconsiderate and greedy. Parking and access issues are

often problematical as the Highways department at the County Council likes parking spaces to be at right angles to the road and (fortunately) insist on good visibility at access points. We await the outcome of many of these applications and are watching carefully.

**Looking forward to 2016** we expect to see some plans for the South Quay development. I do hope they will bring life to the area without towering over the many listed buildings nearby. The Borough Council owns the old silo site and a ‘sale agreed’ sign has recently appeared on the Sommerfeld and Thomas warehouse. McCarthy and Stone have still not removed their signs and flag. This year should also bring a planning application for Purfleet House which has recently been sold. On the down side we anticipate further applications for the Lynnsport site and more losses of important open space in that part of the town. Plans are also expected for 650 houses at Knight’s Hill. Perhaps they will also bring plans for some transport infrastructure to help cope with the inevitable increase in traffic – one can only hope.

## **Membership**

**by Sandra Coleman**

I have recently taken over the post of membership secretary from Margaret Worledge. I would like to thank Margaret for all her hard work and for helping me in the take-over. A reminder that subscriptions are due in April each year and most standing orders are paid at the beginning of April. The current fees are £11 for individual membership and £18 for joint membership (two people at the same address). It is very helpful if subscriptions are paid by standing order so thank you to all who pay this way. If you don't pay by standing order at the moment and would like to change to this system, please get in touch with me and I will send you the necessary details.

I have been asked by our treasurer, Ian Price, to remind members about gift aid. He advises that if you are a UK tax payer the society is able to claim gift aid on your subscription (in the case of joint membership claims can only be made for each individual who pays tax and we need to know about each of you). Many members are already registered but if you are not please advise the membership secretary in writing so that the society can make a

claim. If you are unsure, please contact Ian on 01553 762323 or by e-mail at [ian.price.civic@gmail.com](mailto:ian.price.civic@gmail.com) so that he can check the records and advise you.

If you have any queries regarding your membership please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address is [secoleman@btinternet.com](mailto:secoleman@btinternet.com) and my telephone number is 01553 771108. My postal address is Sandra Coleman, 17 Trinity Quay, Page Stair Lane, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 1NQ.

There will obviously be an interim period where subscriptions will still be sent to Margaret but these will still be processed.

## **The Lynnsport Housing Development Plans: An Update by Elizabeth James**

In this report you will see the current position with the planned housing developments, under their development area titles:

**“Lynnsport 3”** (grassland south of the Bawsey Drain, opposite the houses on Front Way): At time of writing a planning application for 54 dwellings is in the pipeline. The old Town Council acquired this land for allotments in 1955, partly to replace those disappearing under the Seabank Estate. Part became the present North Lynn Allotments; of the rest (Lynnsport 3) has been to date freely accessible. A seasonal football pitch, laid out there until 2008, appeared on the overall Lynnsport site plan published in 1988-9; the whole was later described as a “Leisure Park” containing “70 acres of landscaped parkland”, with space for “informal leisure activities, such as walking, cycling and picnicking” as well as the pitches. So what happened in official terms to that magnificent provision and why did it not appear as parkland on the map of greenspace in the Council’s 2006 Open Space Assessment, which demonstrated on the contrary none at all in this part of Gaywood?

National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 74 states clearly that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and playing fields should not be built on *unless the land can be shown to be surplus to requirements; or will be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable*

*location.* The Lynnsport 3 application made no attempt initially to demonstrate that the land is surplus to requirements. “Three key areas of public open space” are included but, as no extra space has been provided, they do not compensate for space lost to houses in terms of quantity. The “wildlife conservation area” south of the “Lynnsport 2” playing field, while welcome, is hardly “alternative provision of equivalent quantity”; it has always been open and accessible.

Just before the closing date for objections, this application gained a new Open Space Assessment. It claims to demonstrate fulfilment of NPPF 74 by showing the land as surplus to requirements and calling the new sports pitches “equivalent alternative provision” which, remember, must satisfy in quantity as well as quality. These pitches however are not part of this application for houses and are only replacements to release Lynnsport Site 1 for more housing!

This assessment relies heavily on a long 2009 report, forming an appendix. Its own starting point however is that Lynnsport *itself* was believed under-used, partly blaming its “convoluted access”. This feasibility study’s aim was to identify ways to “rationalise” use of the surrounding open land by development, recommending housing. Funds raised would enable the authority to maximise Lynnsport’s attractions by adding a swimming pool. It notes that areas not under sports pitches provide open space “valuable for the local community” but then claims they are “underutilised” areas of grassland or scrub and not “of significant ecological value.” It does NOT however demonstrate this under-utilisation nor offer any evidence for it and in the report’s own context it could even be read as “under-utilised” for development. The claim is not proven in terms of amenity use and therefore hardly constitutes a “demonstration” to counter NPPF74.

“**Lynnsports 4 & 5**” (bordering Greenpark Avenue between Columbia Way and Lynnsport): A “consultation” for the development here of 88 houses, sited on either side of the road, took place, at unacceptably short public notice, on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016. Most of this land was bought late in 1952 for allotments, which were

laid out on it immediately, visible on the 1968 OS map, to replace those due to vanish under the Seabank Estate. The Greenpark Avenue approach to Lynnsport bisects the land, previously an orchard, and Robin Stevenson’s *King’s Lynn Flora* noted plum tree “thickets” there; at time of writing several such trees were flowering, set back behind the pleasant greens lining the road; dense brambles, annually cut down, hide them completely by harvest time.

The 88 houses from Columbia Way almost to Lynnsport car park will change this approach dramatically. This amenity differs from Lynnsport 3: not somewhere you take a picnic or play ball but a landscaped approach to an important leisure building. That 2009 development report was unhappy over a “limited sense of arrival upon reaching Green Park Avenue”, a puzzle for those who appreciate the change from built-up Columbia Way to the pleasantly curving green Avenue, which surely itself confers a real “sense of arrival”. Instead several small closes will each open onto the road, which itself, despite calming features, will be a busier through route from the A1078. Watch out for the application later this year, remembering that next year “Lynnsport 1”’s own application will appear.

“**Lynnsport 1**”, north of the playing field (“Lynnsport 2”) and Bawsey Drain, is an interesting area of ex-orchard and bird-sown woodland, post-Lynnsport tree plantation and unmown grass: a favourite with dog-walkers. An ecological study is expected in advance of the application but all local natural historians should examine it closely over the seasonal changes this year and let the Society know what you find. It contains a number of fruitful plum, apple and pear trees.

Finally: don’t forget **the playing field “Lynnsport 2”**, that wide-stretching green lung saved from development last year, but so far only in intention. A promise to have it permanently protected survives in the February 2015 Council Minutes and as a FAQ on the Council web-site, which states that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration has asked officers for a plan for protecting it from future development. Surely an approach to Fields in Trust would be a good start.

**Our verdict:** King's Lynn Civic Society has formally objected to the Lynnsport 3 scheme, stating our intention of remaining fundamentally opposed to building on existing green spaces within the town until there is an agreed green infrastructure strategy for King's Lynn that clearly demonstrates how residents will be compensated for such losses of public open space. We believe that the Borough Council has failed to grasp that Lynnsport's grounds and setting function as an important public park for the local neighbourhoods, where the only other greenspace is largely school playing fields or allotments. It provides informal recreation space and other environmental services: a vital 'green buffer' to assist air quality and microclimate within the town.

We see no significant alternative green space proposals being made for Kings Lynn. The local population increases steadily and its continuation around the town edges will place more pressure on Lynnsport as a facility. Indeed it seems very short-sighted even to constrain future sports and recreation development at the site by building on its environment. We feel this development meets neither NPPF74 conditions nor indeed Core Strategy policy CS3 's promise that "open space and recreational facilities will be provided within and around the town to serve the needs of the existing residents and to meet the needs of the growing population".

An aerial view of western Gaywood/North Lynn shows how alarmingly open space in this area has decreased in the past two decades. New hockey pitches and tennis courts as recreational provision are not satisfactory alone. Many people do not, and often cannot, play football or tennis. The need to encourage people (particularly the young and elderly) to spend time in the open air is recognised with national concern; it cannot be addressed without attractive green amenity parkland for informal personal exercise and refreshment with easy foot access.

At the Local Plan examination the Inspector flagged up BCKLWN's responsibility to mitigate potential impacts on Habitats Regulation sites in the County. If recreational green space provision does not satisfy residents in built-up areas, they will travel out to reserves and coastal areas – causing the associated traffic, pollution

and impacts on sensitive reserves that BCKLWN say they are trying to address. It is therefore illogical to remove green space from urban areas when the town population is growing. The best mitigation for our reserves (and roads) is ready access to excellent green space within walking and cycling distance of residents' homes.

Having opposed development at 'Lynnsport 3' we will review the applications to come on their emerging merits. We will continue to ask that BCKLWN develop and implement a new strategic green infrastructure strategy for the town (and its setting) that will provide for adequate, sustainable formal and informal recreation space, an interconnected network of non-vehicular cycle and footpaths, biodiversity development and space for other environmental services (such as flood attenuation and pollution mitigation). Only when it is clear that loss of any existing green space (or degradation of green space through increased user pressure) has been adequately compensated by new provision will we be able to support building on existing open spaces.

## **Annual Report (2016) - Conservation Areas Advisory Panel (CAAP)**

**by CS Representative Ian Price**

The total number of referrals last year (to March 2016) was 66 compared with 69 in 2014/15, of these 12 (previously 20) referred to the King's Lynn Conservation Areas. Within this number for King's Lynn two sites were submitted on two occasions thus making the ten sites listed below.

1 The demolition and replacement of existing South Quay entrance plus new lobby at The Hanse House. The panel felt that a simplified design would be preferred.

2 The conversion of 9-11 St James' St. (Courts) to 6 town houses. This was a revision to an earlier approved application for 7 flats. The panel preferred the new version but felt that the 'dummy doors' to St James' St should be openable.

3 The conversion of the first floor and addition of 2<sup>nd</sup> storey to create 6 flats at 33-39 Tower St. (over British Legion Club). This was considered acceptable by the panel.

4 The erection of 7 new houses at Waverly Warehouse between Blackfriars Rd and Kirby St following demolition of existing buildings. This replaces a previous application for 8 houses that was withdrawn (It was deemed too intensive and there was no parking provision). The revised application was supported by the panel.

5 The refurbishment and alteration at 7 St James' St (Former BUFFS Club) to bring the Victorian Savings Bank back into use as a bistro and accommodation (This will be partially funded by the THI – Townscape Heritage Initiative- scheme). The panel commended the owner on the presentation of the scheme and welcomed the enhancement of a significant building in the Historic Quarter.

6 The refurbishment and updating of the Police Station in St James' St. The panel felt that the changes to the rear elevations would enhance the street scene from Regent Way and the multi-storey car park.

7 The conversion and extension of existing buildings to form 4 apartments and 6 town houses at 6 Norfolk St whilst retaining the existing retail units (former Subway). This was initially presented as a pre-application which the panel thought acceptable. The plans were re-presented as a full application 3 months later and are now approved.

8 The construction of 24 flats following the demolition of existing office building at Greyfriars House, Birch Tree Close (behind Greyfriars School). This replaced a previous application for 24 x 2 bedroom flats and 12 x 1 bedroom flats proposed in 2014. The panel felt that this new scheme was still too intensive. This application is still not determined.

9 The proposed development of 8 dwellings and 2 commercial units following the demolition of 18-20 Railway Rd (Blockbuster Video). This application by Freebridge Housing was seen as a huge improvement to the area as it is intended to replicate the Victorian style of some of the existing buildings.

10 Wenn's Hotel, Saturday Market Place following a change of ownership. A revised application to make better use of the upper

floors was submitted and fully supported by the panel. Again this is part of THI and work should start soon.

### **Darren Taylor is our speaker at the AGM who will talk about King's Lynn BID.**

Darren Taylor is Managing Director of KL.FM and Chairman of the King's Lynn Town Centre partnership.

He is a member of the Mayor's Charity committee, a former member of the Festival Too committee and vice chair of the King's Lynn BID Steering Group.

Darren lives in King's Lynn with his wife Kate who is currently studying for a PhD, and Stanley his border terrier.

Outside of work, Darren's interests range from trying to learn something about art history to trying to cook the perfect steak.

### **King's Lynn BID**

King's Lynn town centre businesses are proud of our town and want it to prosper. To do this we have to look forward and not simply rest on our successful past.

With threats to the town centre from new retail parks, destination cities like Norwich and Cambridge and the internet, a group of local business leaders are now campaigning to set up a Business Improvement District (BID).

A BID is a geographical within which local businesses agree to pay (subject to a successful ballot) an additional levy on their business rates. This levy is then spent by the businesses themselves on projects and schemes they feel will benefit the town.

There are currently over 200 successful BID's in the UK.

It is estimated that the proposed King's Lynn BID could generate over £1.2million over a 5 year period to be invested back into securing the prosperity of the town centre.

**King's Lynn Civic Society**

Registered charity 298916

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**Heather Bolt, Jean Tuck**

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**Vice Chairman: Jean Tuck**

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