



Dear Rye Conservation Society member,

It is good to be writing this as Summer arrives and people are more visible on the streets, perhaps this month there is more cause for celebration as finally it seems that the lockdown is slowly being lifted although not yet completely. May and June seen most shops reopening with people able to mix in outdoor groups in parks and beer gardens. It will be very good to be able to plan ahead again. I am happy to report that the Executive Committee has continued to meet using the Zoom facility monthly since September and that we continue to consider local planning proposals and have been able to comment monthly to Rother Council. I thank Julian Lockett and the Planning Committee for all their hard work and expertise in this area.

We have not been able to meet up for social gatherings, but if by then we are fully out of lockdown we are hoping to be able to hold our Annual Summer Garden Party in August with Nikki and Andy at Little Orchard House on Sunday August 22. We will also want to restart our programme of visits as soon as it is possible to do so and a visit to Charleston House and Gardens remains an aspiration.

We aim to hold our AGM when indoor meetings are allowed, this realistically could be sometime in September or early October with a luncheon for members and guests in the Mermaid Hotel as in the past.

I enjoy receiving e-mails about our activities or drawing attention to some unfortunate building work, but it was unusual to get one from Ohio inviting me to a crop growers convention until I realised that our e-mail address Ryeconservation@gmail.com had been mistaken for rye the crop and not Rye the town, I replied, it's unlikely that we will get another invite but they might come and visit us!

David Beckless

RCS Awards

During Lockdown we were pleased to note a number of excellent refurbishments of buildings on the High Street and excellent design elsewhere so that we are able to announce five winners of our Awards to be presented, hopefully at our Garden party. The winners as agreed by the committee are for the following:

The Rye Hub on the Hill A health care complex of 5 buildings on one site, offering a range of services. The Hub on Rye Hill provides a new cutting-edge community wellbeing centre. The Hub opened last August and has drawn much praise from local users. It seems to us to blend in with the landscape and provide a much needed range of services and an attractive café.

The Rye Bank Art Gallery, a beautifully refurbished space in the old HSBC Bank and an attractive addition to the range of galleries in the High Street.

The Inside Out Bar at the Landgate. A refurbishment of John Bragg's long established Antique shop. The bar space has been sympathetically restored and provides a wonderful close view of the Landgate.

The Old Ashbees shop. The external restoration which has kept the signage and frontage of the old butchers, including the brass fittings is an excellent example of a High Street restoration for a new use.

Tatners ex the Old Forge This too is a fine example of a change of use, in this case from an antique shop to a restaurant. Many members will recall it as the Old Forge which was famous for grilled steaks. It now has an excellent diner menu in unusual surroundings.

Membership Subscriptions

Just a reminder for those who are annual members and who pay by cash or cheque their annual subscription for 2021 is due from January 1st. The Committee are grateful for your ongoing support and loyalty even if you are not getting the all the activities that we normally offer, we are keen to enter our 50th year in a healthy state. Membership forms are available on our web site, www.ryeconservationsociety.org

Subs remain at £6 for a single person or £10 for joint membership. Could you please drop the cash or cheque (payable to Rye Conservation Society) to Andy Stuart, the Society's membership secretary at: Little Orchard House, 3 West St, Rye TN31 7ES.

Alternatively you can pay us by bank transfer, Sort Code 30-90-28, Account Number 00710394.

Landgate Problems Continue

Undoubtedly the Landgate is the iconic Rye feature, but also one that is a difficult and expensive structure to maintain, its history dates back to the 13C when it was the only entrance to the town and there are pictures of it, some on our web site, dating back to its earliest days. Pictures from the 19C show it in poor condition, worse than now, and debate about its upkeep is not new. In 2018 there was a clean up and netting was installed which for a time seemed to have done the trick. But the pigeons were still able to roost and before very long there was regrowth of vegetation and much pigeon guano. Unfortunately the group that had met to organize the clean up disbanded and then COVID arrived so we are almost back to square one. In our view the only answer is a roof to keep the pigeon muck out and prevent further damage. Netting does not seem to work for long, is cruel to the birds, and needs regular maintenance which has not happened. However the cost of even a basic roof is probably prohibitive as are costs associated with altering ancient monuments, not to mention bureaucratic hurdles. So it is not surprising that despite much discussion the future of the Landgate is far from sorted. It is of course owned by Rother Council who would dearly love someone else to take on the task of managing it, but once again it's not obvious who would wish to do so.

Motorcycle Noise

The Society has written to our MP Sally Ann Hart and to the Minister for Transport, Grant Schapps to express concern about the excessive noise made by motorbikes in and around Rye particularly on summer weekends. Copies of our letter were printed in Rye News together with the responses. There are studies taking place using audio meters which work like speed cameras to detect excessive noise but as yet the technology is not considered accurate enough. However we will continue to press for existing laws to be enforced and are engaged with the Police Commissioner.

It's not our intention to ban motorcycles, they can be an interesting attraction to the Rye scene, and provide an income to traders around the Strand Quay, but it would be good to try and keep the excessive noise down for residents at weekends, a meeting of Rye Councilors and motorcycle representatives is arranged in July.

Conservation Society - Nearly Fifty Years

Rye Conservation Society's Executive Committee recently hosted its 500th meeting. To mark the occasion we took the opportunity to look back at what the Society has achieved over the period.

The Rye Conservation Society was established to oversee all matters related to the built environment of this vibrant, historic and unique town on behalf of its members. This is something it has done with enthusiasm and dedication ever since it was established in the early 1970s. During this past year, the Society has continued its work with the Executive Committee meeting on-line, as it did for the Executive's 500th meeting in March this year. Whilst this is a significant milestone, the Society is now looking forward to the Society's 50th anniversary in 2023 and we hope this will present a better opportunity for a celebration. However, to mark this current occasion, a recent review of the Society's archives has created an opportunity to prepare a short history of the Society, its activities and the fortunes of Rye as observed by the Committee over the five decades of its existence. This history is available to read on the Rye Conservation Society website.

The history includes a number of significant episodes that have engaged the Society, and the town. This has included battles with developers over large residential and commercial marina proposals on Rock Channel, fending off waste processing proposals for Rye Harbour Road and securing the listing of several of Rye's valuable historic buildings so that they are protected from potentially harmful development. There were many successes but also some frustrations, not least a number of perennial issues that continue to concern the town such as the condition on the Landgate, the damage to the conservation area caused by insensitive commercial signing and advertising and a host of issues around the town's transport.

Looking back through these decades of change for Rye, a constant has been the Conservation Society and, at its core, its Executive and Planning Committees. This passionate group of people give their time, expertise and enthusiasm in order to serve the Society's objectives, namely to safeguard and enhance Rye and its surroundings; to provide a forum for discussion of issues; and, to provide information and advice relevant to the local area.

Some Committee Members have given decades of service to the Society as well as their invaluable professional advice on sometimes complex and contentious issues. Inevitably, with the passing of time, the group changes but it is hoped the experiences and lessons are passed on. For instance, since the first Planning Committee over 5,000 planning applications have been reviewed during which, in assessing proposals, the Committee has to take a careful line in balancing the issues, which are sometimes contradictory, as well as the personal interpretation of the design by members and officers. Whilst the Society's role is advisory and not statutory, it is hoped that by providing a strong and knowledgeable local voice, Rye is a better place than it would have been otherwise. For every intractable issue and bad planning decision, there are breakthroughs and wins and always the hope we can positively influence where we can.

This review of our history concludes in this strangest of years which has seen Rye swing between lockdown stillness and 'staycation' vibrancy, and it heralds an uncertain future for the town and its vital visitor economy. As ever, on-going change is assured, but the pace of change looks like it will increase substantially. Also on the horizon are the proposed changes to local government and the dismantling of long-standing local land use planning controls, potentially the biggest change in planning since the original Town and Country Planning Act in 1947 and was featured in the last Queen's Speech. An excellent summary of these changes based upon the initial consultation proposals and their potential implications for Rye was provided by Julian Lockett, the Chair of the Planning Committee, in the Society's most recent Annual Report.

Rother are currently updating the Local Plan which is likely to have to incorporate the comprehensive reforms proposed in the Planning Bill presented in the Queen's Speech.

With a change of emphasis towards greater certainty on planning decisions enshrined in the Local Plan there is likely to be less influence over individual applications.

There is a risk that the hard work invested in local and neighbourhood plans will be eroded and we are already seeing the effects of this as in the scramble to meet nationally imposed housing targets which represents an additional 400 homes a year in Rother over what is currently proposed in the Local Plan. If the planning system and local government management continue to be streamlined as planned, a local organisation that understands, and is passionate about the town, will be more vital than ever.

(Can anyone help? We are only missing the RCS Annual Reports for 2006 and 2007.)

Beauty is in the eye of the Beholder *By Julian Lockett*

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has selected 14 local planning authorities in England to apply the new National Model Design Code (NMDC) to their areas for a six month trial period. Three are in the South East namely Guildford Borough Council, Buckinghamshire Council and Portsmouth City Council.

The national design code seeks to ensure that new developments are "beautiful, well-designed and locally-led". Developments should also fit in with local character. The government explained that the code gives local planning authorities a toolkit of design principles to consider for new developments, such as street character, building type and façade. It also features environmental, heritage and wellbeing factors.

The government's planning white paper, Planning for the Future, which was published in August last year, proposed that local planning authorities and neighbourhoods (through neighbourhood plans) would play a "crucial role in producing required design guides and codes to provide certainty and reflect local character and preferences about the form and appearance of development".

In February this year, housing secretary Robert Jenrick published a draft national design code for consultation, in response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report Living with Beauty, which came out in February 2020. It was published alongside proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sought to place 'greater emphasis' on beauty and placemaking.

At the time, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) said the code provides a checklist of design principles for new developments. In a statement on 21 May, MHCLG said the code means "the word 'beauty' will be prioritised in planning rules for the first time since the system was created in 1947" and that "We should aspire to enhance the beauty of our local areas and pass our cultural heritage onto our successors, enriched not diminished."

"In order to do that, we need to bring about a profound and lasting change in the buildings that we build, which is one of the reasons we are placing a greater emphasis on locally popular design, quality and access to nature, through our national planning policies and introducing the National Model Design Code. These will enable local people to set the rules for what developments in their area should look like, ensuring that they reflect and enhance their surroundings and preserve our local character and identity".

"Instead of developers forcing plans on locals, they will need to adapt to proposals from local people, ensuring that current and new residents alike will benefit from beautiful homes in well-designed neighbourhoods."

It will be interesting to see how these principles are determined in practice particularly given the lack of investment in the planning system, which is one of the main causes of the perceived failure of the current planning process. To counter this the Royal Town Planning Institute has argued for a Design Quality Fund of £81 million which they say is needed to support cash-strapped local authorities through design training, specialist expertise and design-focused decision making policies.