

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



It is my pleasure to present the Chairman's annual report for the year just ending. This is my fifth year as Chairman, and I would like to thank Richard Marshall as vice chairman and all on the Main Committee for their support.

WEYBRIDGE HOSPITAL FIRE This year has seen a major change to the centre of Weybridge with the tragic loss of the Weybridge Hospital building and the interruption to the medical services as a result. We must applaud the way in which the community dealt with the immediate fall out of the fire and in particular to Rector Brian Prothero who opened up St James Church to those immediately affected by the fire and to Elmbridge Council for the use of Churchfields Centre. We must also commend the two Doctors' surgeries with the manner in which services were quickly setup in Walton within a day or two; we all welcomed their return to Weybridge later in the year. The Society understands the local feeling and disappointment that the "walk-in-centre" has not been reinstated in the temporary buildings currently in use but appreciates that this is due to a number of real practical problems e.g. regarding screening for X-Rays etc.

The destruction of the hospital building has coincided with a review by the Clinical Commissioning Trust of the organisation of the health services it needs to provide in the future. The outcome of these studies will determine what specific services need to be provided in Weybridge and consequently what facilities will need to be housed. This will take some time to formulate. In the meantime, the Society believes that the need for new accommodation to house town centre health services presents a unique once in a lifetime opportunity for thinking about how other services, for example the library, additional car parking and a community centre, could be co-located. In addition, the current library requires refurbishment and repurposing (the second floor is now mostly vacant) so could a joint approach of how the hospital and library sites could be used open the way to think more broadly and deeply about how Weybridge's town centre might be revitalised and the limited space available optimised for various public services and parking. The Weybridge Society is currently assembling ideas and formulating a plan to be made available to the public, with an advisory group composed of member and outside experts. The public is invited to contact the Society with any forward-looking thoughts on how to best recommission key public services whilst revitalising the town centre in a manner which is fit for the 21st century.

REVIEW OF SOCIETIES ACTIVITIES The year has seen a number of major notable achievements for the Society a new membership database system, a revitalised website, a reformatted newsletter, the award of £32,500 for the refurbishment of the Weybridge War memorial and the town parking survey. Comments about each of these and other activities during the last year are reported below.

MEMBERSHIP DATABASE The Society is indebted to the tremendous effort of Steve McCarthy, Sally Bean and Trevor Lewis on introducing the new membership database system. This system allows members to update their own membership details, setup direct debit instructions for their subscriptions and tell us about how they could contribute to the Society's activities. Critically it allows new members to join the Society and setup their subscription payments in around 2 minutes – this, together with KT13 wide distribution of the newsletter, has benefited member recruitment. Since the last AGM we have had 91 new members and have lost 18, the largest increase in membership for many years.

The Society understands that some current and prospective members have had difficulties using this system, initial reports suggested that problems occurred when using Apple devices but latterly difficulties have been reported when using PCs. If you experience problems please report them to the membership Secretary.

WEBSITE UPGRADE The website saw a major relaunch in January this year. It has been completely overhauled, rewritten and redesigned by a team including Steve McCarthy, webmaster, and Lesia Scholey, editor, as well as local resident Phil Wragg, who was hired to help redesign the site. The website has a new navigation system, a bright fresh feel and is compatible with modern devices such as smart phones and tablets.

NEW NEWSLETTER FORMAT

The last year saw a major transformation of the newsletter. Lesia Scholey became editor in May 2017 and introduced the A5 format for the summer and later editions. The new format has been well received and in January newsletters were delivered to the majority of KT13 addresses in order to raise the profile of the Society and attract new members. As a further change it has been decided that adverts will be allowed in the newsletter.; the March edition has adverts from the National Honey Show and Weybridge Beekeepers. Later this year we plan to increase the number of adverts to subsidise printing and distribution costs. We continue to be indebted to Anne Lindsay and her band of distributors for delivering the hard copies of the newsletter to over 400 members; together they save the Society over £1,000 a year in postage costs.

COMMUNICATION WITH MEMBERS

The Society issues around 25 emails a year to members; these emails contain information which the Society considers it is important to members. An excellent use of this occurred in July as a result of the hospital fire when details of the contact details for the new doctor's services in Walton were sent to members shortly after the fire. Other emails contain details of forthcoming events, road works, etc. If you are a member and don't receive these emails please make sure the membership secretary has your email address. We also use Twitter and Facebook in the communication process and must thank Sally Bean and Haley Jenkins respectively for their efforts in maintaining these accounts.

WEYBRIDGE WAR MEMORIAL

In a first and major win for a project which the Weybridge Society has long championed, Elmbridge Borough Council's Community Infrastructure Levy fund (CIL) awarded £32,500 to support the Society's scheme to improve lighting and surroundings of the town's War Memorial, located at the roundabout near the cricket green. In line with the Society's ongoing commitment to improve and enhance the environment of Weybridge, this project will tackle a much-needed refurbishment of one of the town's most important historical monuments. Of the total sum, £2,500 will go to fund a professional study on the lighting design, to provide full specifications for lighting requirements. The Weybridge Society plans to complete the project by November, in time for the centennial of the end of World War I. The project marks a first for the Society in terms of securing major CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funding, and the Society hopes other town improvement projects will follow. Our thanks to David Bounds who did all the background research work and in preparing the CIL bid proposal.

PLANNING

The Planning Panel spent another active year reviewing a multitude of planning applications and we must say a special thank you to all those involved. The panel continues to comment on a significant number of Applications in cases where planning applications do not meet the needs of Weybridge, and in particular, where proposed developments are inconsistent with maintaining the characteristics of the local environment. We are all aware of the differences between Oatlands, Queens Road Village and the town centre, and the Society wishes to support developments that maintain and enhance these differences. Clive House Queens Road is one such application which was vigorously opposed by the Society and local residents and was refused by Elmbridge then taken to appeal by the Applicant. The Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal on the grounds of the failure to respect the character of the area including its harm on Salisbury House a locally listed building.

Another significant and welcome development has been the recognition of the high parking stress levels within areas such as Queens Road Village and north of the High Street as a factor in the determination of planning applications. As an example, an extension to Salisbury House in Queens Road was refused because loss of car parking spaces and the consequential displacement of cars onto local roads would create an unacceptable increase in parking stress to the local area.

An area of concern to the Society is the increase in the number of retirement homes in Weybridge. During the year another 43 dwellings (extra care) were granted approval for the St George's House site on Queens Road and currently consideration is being given for a 59-flat development the St George's Road and Queens Road junction. Some developers have stated that building retirement homes encourages down-sizing thereby releasing larger homes for growing families. However, the Society has learnt that a significant proportion of retirement homes are sold to buyers from outside the borough who move in to be near their own children. One consequence of this is that

the age profile of Weybridge is being distorted towards the older adding, for example, growing pressure on medical services.

The block of 11 flats at the junction of Baker Street and Monument Hill is near completion. During the Planning Application phases the Society pointed out that the proposed boundary wall would significantly decrease the sight-lines for pedestrians crossing Baker Street in a westerly direction. This decrease in visibility was confirmed by Surrey Highways and agreed with by the, then, Weybridge Surrey County Councillor during the Planning Committee determination; Elmbridge officers advised that as the Highways Authority had not formally stated the adverse effect on pedestrian safety it could not be taken into account. A formal complaint was made to Elmbridge that it had failed in its duty of care to residents; Elmbridge rejected the complaint stating that due process was followed. The Society referred the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Recently the LGO has dismissed our complaint stating that there was no evidence that Elmbridge had not considered all safety issues and the LGO could not challenge the professional judgement of officers. The Society is appalled at this decision; Planning Authorities have powers to restrict the height boundary walls adjacent to the highway to a maximum of 1 m in order to ensure that highway safety is not compromised. The Society is currently considering if and what further action could be taken.

The Planning Panel will continue to monitor developments and will keep members up to date. I would like to thank all those involved: Raymond Spary, Eric Hammond, Barry Judd, Richard Marshall, Tim Williams and Alan Wright. The Panel would welcome new panellists and any member interested should contact Raymond Spary.

WEYBRIDGE PARKING REVIEW Over the last year the Society, in partnership with the Weybridge Town Business Group (WTBG), has conducted a survey of the parking requirements in Weybridge, with particular emphasis on the areas around the High Street and Queens Road Village. The survey identified the high level of on-street parking stress being experienced in these areas, much of this being generated by day long parking by workers parking near to their place of employment. This is aggravated by the lack of affordable off-street parking either owned by the businesses or Elmbridge. The survey indicated that up to an additional 1,000 spaces are required to solve the problem. A meeting with Elmbridge and Surrey Councillors was held in February where it was recognised the complexity of the implementation of any improved scheme but gave the review and proposals virtually unanimous support. County representatives offered to take the document as a specific item to the newly-formed Joint Committee designed to give executive powers to both councils on an equal basis in matters of shared responsibilities. Given that any solution will require both councils to work together, this is a welcome step. In parallel Elmbridge is undertaking a review of its off-street parking and the conclusions are expected at the end of June. The Society believes some immediate gain would be achieved by more efficient use of existing car arrangements (e.g. herring bone geometry) and variable pricing to encourage more use during the currently quieter periods. We must recognise all the hard work that Mike O'Sullivan and Paul Povey (Chairman of WTBG) put into the Review.

WEYBRIDGE SOCIETY TALK Since the last AGM on September 27th we had a presentation by Jason Debney on the work of the Thames Landscape Strategy (TLS). Jason gave us an insight into the history of TLS and its plans for the future. You may remember the Society supported TLS's CIL bid for funds to upgrade the car park at Weybridge point and associated signage; implementation work on both aspects of the project is due to start soon.

SUMMER PARTY For many years Anne and Ray Lindsey have hosted a Summer party at their home's tranquil setting by the River Wey. We again thank Anne and Ray for allowing members and guests to enjoy a summer afternoon in their garden, to Margaret Wicks for all her help and to Michael Aspel our patron who presented the raffle prizes. At the request of Anne Lindsey, the surplus from the party was donated as follows; Sam Beare Hospice (£360), Macmillan Cancer Support (£180), Princess Alice Hospice (£90) & Weybridge Charity (£90). We hope the party will be held again this year, please keep a look out in the next newsletter and the Society's website.

LIAISON WITH SCHOOLS The Weybridge Society supports young people working to make Weybridge a better place to live, and each year recognises students at our local state secondary school Heathside who have excelled in the subject of history and in community service. This year's

recipients are James Derham, for the Weybridge Society Award for History, and Nancy Scott, for the Weybridge Society Award for Sixth Form Contributions to the Community of Weybridge. Both are talented and high-achieving students well deserving of recognition. James had outstanding GCSE results in all four units of his exam and delivered a fine WWI remembrance assembly in year 9. Nancy became a ward volunteer at the Princess Alice Hospice and volunteers with RYA Sailability which supports disabled sailors. A very fine athlete and active in many areas, Nancy worked hard in every area, earning a place at Cambridge to study medicine. Best of luck for the future to both our winners.

The Society wishes to increase its involvement with students of local schools and as part of that has recently launched a photographic competition for ages from 7 to 18. Entries are required to be submitted by June 1st.

WEYBRIDGE TOWN BUSINESS GROUP Our association with the Weybridge Town Business Group (WTBG) continues. The Society, through Barry Judd, has maintained close contact with WTBG and made two contributions of £100, one as a membership fee (which covers miscellaneous running expenses) and another £100 for the Christmas tree lights. As reported above the WTBG has partnered with the Society in undertaking the Weybridge parking review.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHANGES Since the last AGM we have welcomed two new members to the Executive Committee, Lesia Scholey as the new Editor of the Newsletter and Mervyn Grieg. However, I am sorry to report that due to ill health John Hanafin, who has been our treasurer since 2013, has had to stand down; we wish him a speedy recovery. I am sorry to announce the well-earned retirement from the committee of Trevor Tarring; for 15 years Trevor has been our committee minutes secretary.

I am pleased to report that Raymond Spary (a past Society chairman and chairman of the planning panel) and Andy Richardson (a former RAF Officer) are offering themselves for election to the executive committee. However, I must re-emphasise yet again the need for new blood in the committee; we have been without a secretary for several years now and now are in urgent need of a Treasurer. Members who could offer their services if any of you who could offer their services to the Society and become a committee member, please contact one of the committee. As a first step come along to one of the regular committee meetings; the dates for this year can be found on the website.

TRUSTEE CHANGES

In line with the constitution John Hanafin has resigned as a trustee; unfortunately, his current state of health means that he cannot put himself up for election at this time. I am pleased to say that the other three Trustees, Richard Marshall, Barry Judd and myself will continue their roles as trustees. Additionally, Raymond Spary and Nick Thripp are standing for election as Trustees at the AGM.

THE FUTURE

Now a few words about the future. For many years the Society has focused its efforts organising talks on local issues, responding to planning applications and generally keeping a watching brief on policies and issues related to local government which may affect our local environment. We believe that these should still be fundamental to our main objectives for the Society. However, the advent of becoming a charity does open up a new route for attracting additional funding which could be used to benefit the local community and be in-line with our objective of “keeping Weybridge special”. The War Memorial refurbishment project is a first for the Society and hopefully this will be the first of a series of initiatives led by the Society to improve the environs of Weybridge. We welcome any suggestions from members on suitable projects that the Society could initiate and from anyone who would like to led the Society’s interest on this topic.

Finally, thanks to all our members for their friendly support and open discussion!

Dave Arnold
Chairman Weybridge Society