

WEYBRIDGE SOCIETY

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE PERIOD FROM APRIL 2019 TO JULY 15th 2020



1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the postponement of the AGM set for April 22nd and the holding of a virtual AGM on July 15th in order to conduct the annual formal requirement of accepting the Trustees' Report, Annual Accounts, elect trustees, Executive Committee members and Accounts Examiner for 2020. I am pleased to report that all motions were passed.

I hope that you and your family have kept well during the COVID-19 outbreak; my deepest and most heartfelt sympathies go out to those who have lost loved ones during this difficult time. Coupled with the global pandemic emergency, we are now feeling the impacts of the unjust killing of George Floyd. At this juncture I would like to be clear that the Society is an inclusive organisation which abhors any form of racism, overt and subtle, and I do hope that here in Weybridge and all around the world people can come together to stamp out prejudices and resolve differences in a positive manner.

During the lockdown we experienced significant reduction in traffic and the welcomed positive of less pollution which during the spring and early summer saw dramatic changes for us all. I am sure many of us have been enjoying, perhaps for the first time, the benefits of Zoom and other technologies as a new way of communicating with families and friends. Some will have experienced a virtual consultation with their GP. These and similar experiences herald a major change in the way in which we live our lives in the future. Potentially the massive increase in the number of people working from home will continue. Many companies are committed to continue home working when things return to the 'new normal,' so taking into this into account and our experiences during the lock down, now is the time to ask big questions about our future and how we can best shape it.

What does the pandemic ultimately mean for Weybridge? Will there be less traffic, less commuting, how do local councils ensure that more of us walk and cycle? Can we become more local in our shopping habits and regenerate our High Street shops? These and other considerations will need careful evaluation. No doubt it will take time before any 'new normal' settles into place, but like the fire that destroyed our old hospital site and brought many new challenges, negative developments like the pandemic helps us to identify opportunities to envision significant improvements in our town and environment. Let us hope we can seize the benefits that the recent events have identified and create a better Weybridge for everyone.

2 TRUSTEES' REPORT ON THE SOCIETY'S ACTIVITIES IN 2019

Every year the Trustees submit a brief report on the activities of the Society in an annual report to the Charity Commission, this is covered in this section 2. Note it includes the new Object 4 which has been accepted by the Charity Commission and agreed at the AGM on July 15th.

TRUSTEES SERVING AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2019

David Arnold, Barry Judd, Richard Marshall, Raymond Spary and Nick Thripp.

REPORT ON THE YEAR'S ACTIVITIES BY OBJECT

Object 1. To promote high standards of planning and architecture in or affecting the area of benefit:

- The Planning Panel continued to evaluate and make representations with regards to Planning Applications with emphasis on high standards and of ensuring that developments were in-line with the local plan;
- The Society made extensive comments during consultations on the draft of the local council's new Local Plan.

Object 2. To educate the public in the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area of benefit:

- The Society hosted a talk on February 7th by Steve McCarthy entitled "The amazing Dr Eric Gardner, Weybridge's greatest polymath";
- The Society hosted a talk on May 16th by Ray Pennock on St John Ambulance experiences in Weybridge;

- The Society hosted a talk on September 12th by Philippa Holcroft entitled “History of Healthcare in Weybridge and What the Future May Hold”.

Object 3. To secure the preservation protection development and improvement of features of historic or public interest in the area of benefit, including parks, open spaces, footpaths and facilities for recreation, health, education and transport:

- The Society promoted the development of a community hub in the centre of Weybridge based upon the Hospital site to include health, library and senior citizen facilities;
- The Society responded to building applications that would potentially have had a deleterious impact on Conservation Areas and locally listed buildings such as Salisbury House.

Object 4 to promote civic responsibility and good citizenship in the area of benefit by the dissemination of information on local matters affecting the community and the organisation of community related activities, including but not limited to regular newsletters and electronic messaging, educational talks and competitions to encourage student participation:

- The regular use of Social Media to raise awareness of local issues and assisted in increasing membership;
- The Society published 4 Newsletters (the January edition was distributed throughout the KT13 area); it issued over 20 e-blasts circulations covering local events and issues of interest to members;
- The Society continued to support Heathside School prizes for 6th form students.

3 KEY ACTIVITIES

3.1 WEYBRIDGE REBUILD AND ADVANCEMENT PROJECT – (WRAP)

Further detailed work on the Society’s proposals for a community hub has been undertaken. Detailed assessments have been made on what facilities residents view as beneficial additions to medical and library facilities. Meetings have been held with the team, lead by Surrey County Council and including the NHS and Elmbridge Borough Council, carrying out the initial feasibility study on hub possibilities. In parallel the NHS is reviewing how medical facilities should be arranged across the whole of NW Surrey; this will inevitably delay the decision on what medical facilities additional to the two GP surgeries will be provided in Weybridge. Feedback from residents and businesses has shown support for a community hub and the significant benefits that it would bring to Weybridge. These include re-vitalising the High Street with additional footfall for retail, the provisioning of desperately needed additional community facilities, work areas for start-ups all needed to meet the requirements for residents over the next generation and beyond.

3.2 LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATIONS

Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) is currently drafting a new local plan which will cover the years 2021-2036. To date there have been several consultations and meetings in which the Society has participated; the Society has submitted its preference for Option 5 of the 5 options specified by EBC for consideration. The draft plan was due for a 6-week representation period in the autumn before submission to the Planning Inspector but has been delayed due to the COVID-19 emergency; it is not known what way forward has been selected by EBC or when the representation period will begin. Currently the Plan is responding to the Government target of 9,345 new homes to be built in Elmbridge, an increase of 16% on current stock. To achieve this figure, it would be necessary to increase building densities or build on green belt or have some combination of the two. Such an increase is seen as a major threat to the current environment coupled with exacerbating the current problems of inadequate infrastructure. In March 2020 the Office of National Statistics issued its population forecast from 2018 to 2043. For EBC the increase in overall population is forecast to be less than 1% although in the 60+ group of the elderly the population is expected to rise by around 38%+ in the period to 2036. This brings into question whether using the Government target of 16% currently is realistic. EBC is aware of this latest forecast and has stated that *“Officers are working from the bottom up from our evidence base, national planning policy, the representations of residents and the Council’s aims and objectives to produce a plan for the borough for the next 15 years. We are not blindly chasing the Government’s housing target; it is a starting point for us to assess what is possible to deliver in the borough not a final position”*.

3.3 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Panel spent another active year reviewing a multitude of planning applications and commenting on cases where planning applications do not meet the needs of Weybridge. Many proposed developments continue to be too massive, with designs that are unsympathetic to the local characteristics often coupled with a lack of sufficient car parking spaces which exacerbates parking stress in the neighbourhood. The continued lack of a definition of sustainability with respect to public transport is lamentable and requires correction urgently; its absence used by planning applicants to justify reduced parking provision is risible. The Society accepts and understands that EBC is under pressure to increase housing stock, notably affordable, but this has to be balanced against the need to protect and enhance the environment and to ensure that neighbours' amenity is protected and not degraded, for example, by reduction in natural light and increased parking stress.

The Society's Planning Panel reviews many applications and reports on them via the newsletter. Below is a selection of the more significant applications reviewed recently.

The saga regarding Clive House on Queens Road continues. Following the dismissal of the Appeal on 2016/4126 on the grounds that although the provision of 30 flats was welcome this consideration was insignificant to the harm that the mass and design of the proposed building would have on the local street scene, two further similar applications have been made. One 2018/2252 was refused by the Planning Committee and subsequently an appeal was made in November 2019. A third application 2019/2286 was submitted in 2019 and refused by the Planning Officer in January this year. This decision has been appealed and it is understood that both outstanding appeals will be heard together at a date when Inspectors become available again to hold meetings. The Society asserts that neither of the revised designs have over come the fundamental reasons elucidated by the Planning Inspector in dismissing the first application and both appeals should therefore be dismissed.

The Society welcomes the decision by the Planning Inspector in May 2019 to dismiss the Appeal to replace Locke King House in Balfour Road with a two-storey block of 10 flats (2017/1681); the main reason being the effect of the proposal on the Town Centre Conservation Area. The Inspector noted the scale and bulk of the proposed design would be out of character with the rural quality of the conservation area.

Another example of over-development is St Catherine's House Beales Lane 2019/0386. In this case the developer proposed a very large three-storey block containing 20 maisonettes and eight units of social housing to replace a modest size care home building just opposite St Georges Junior School. The Society objected, together with ~135 other objectors, on the basis of height and massing being out of character with the surroundings, loss of trees; these points were agreed to by the Planning Committee who rejected the application in June 2019. An appeal was lodged in November and has just been allowed. This is a disappointing decision and illustrates again that the need to strengthen planning requirements is urgently required to ensure that the characteristics of Weybridge are maintained and not eroded.

Last year I reported on the concern of members regarding the provision of parking spaces associated with developments and, no matter what the standards say, its obvious under-provision. This continues and there is little apparent action from SCC and EBC to resolve the problem. In late 2019 EBC issued a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for consultation. Its aim is "*to ensure that all new developments provides well-designed vehicle and cycle parking, in order to avoid the problems and issue associated with the provision of inadequate or poorly designed parking for vehicles and cycles*". The Society believes that the draft is not sufficiently robust to achieve its aim and in February provided a comprehensive list of comments and suggestions on how to make improvements. We await an update on the SPD with interest.

The hard work and vigilance of the Planning Panel will continue to monitor developments and will keep members up to date. I know that the panel's work is seen as one of the key and valued functions of the Society. I am pleased to report that 3 members have joined the Planning Panel, they are Kay Williamson, Martin Cummins and Michael Freeman; Kay and Michael have taken on

the role of Joint Chairman together with Raymond Spary. Additionally, I wish to mention and thank the other members of the committee who are Cay-Joachim Crasemann, Eric Hammond, Barry Judd, Richard Marshall and Alan Wright. Finally, I would like to say a special thanks to Tim Williams. Tim resigned from the panel after being a member for a number of years. I know that panel members valued Tim's contribution which was always professional and aimed at protecting Weybridge's environment for the benefit of all. Personally, I would like to endorse the panels thanks having worked with Tim personally on several applications.

3.4 MEMBERSHIP I am pleased to report that our membership continues to increase, and we now have over 700 members. The Society is indebted to the tremendous efforts of Trevor Lewis and Steve McCarthy in the maintenance of the membership database and in resolving membership queries.

3.5 WEBSITE Following the major relaunch in January 2019 the website is regularly updated with information covering local events, key planning applications and community news. It also provides the link for those wishing to join the Society. We must thank the webmaster Steve McCarthy for his diligent maintenance of the site. We would welcome good quality photographs that could be used on the site. If you have some photographs you wish to be considered please send them to webmaster@weybridgesociety.org.uk.

3.6 NEWSLETTER Four editions of our newsletter were published during 2019, Lesia, our editor, continues to produce high quality publications for which we are very grateful. We welcome Becky Roper, a young Leeds University graduate living in Weybridge, joining as newsletter reporter and who has already contributed to a number of articles. Andy Richardson has continued to sell advertising space in the newsletter; in 2019 this raised £2,155 contributing some 37% to the costs of producing and distributing the newsletter. We will continue to sell advertising space but will keep it to less than 20% of the newsletter. In 2020 we have decided to postpone the KT13 widespread distribution of the newsletter until later in the year. A winter newsletter was published in January but due to COVID-19 it was decided to combine the spring and summer issues into a bumper edition. Hopefully by the time you are reading this report you will have read and enjoyed this 44 page edition. Many thanks go to Leisa and her team for the newsletters.

3.7 SOCIAL MEDIA The Society has recognised the growing power of Social Media in communicating with both members and Weybridge Residents. During the year Rob Steel, another young Leeds University graduate and resident of Weybridge, has joined us to lead our efforts on re-vamping our Facebook Page and starting up an Instagram account. He also liaises with Sally Bean, who manages our Twitter account, and our WebMaster Steve McCarthy who looks after our eblasts (see below).

3.8 COMMUNICATION WITH MEMBERS The Society issues more than 20 eblasts a year to members; these emails contain information which the Society considers is important to members. We must thank Steve McCarthy for all his efforts in preparing the eblasts which contain details of forthcoming planning applications, 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.

3.9 WEYBRIDGE WAR MEMORIAL Preparatory work on the design and scoping of requirements for the upgrading of the lighting and surrounding area of the war memorial has been suspended pending the outcome of a Surrey Highways study on traffic flow improvements for Temple Market. This study may determine that the War Memorial should be relocated in order to improve traffic flow at this junction.

3.10 WEYBRIDGE SOCIETY TALKS Since the last AGM the Society hosted talks on May 16th by Ray Pennock entitled "St John Ambulance – 80 years in Weybridge", on September 12th by Philippa Holcroft entitled "The History and Individuals behind Healthcare in Weybridge from Victorian Times & what the Future may Hold" and by Andy Richardson on February 27th on "Britain's V Bombers – The Ultimate Peacekeepers".

The Society normally hosts a few talks each year which are of local interest. If any member has a topic which would be of interest please contact me.

3.11 SUMMER PARTY The summer party in 2019 was cancelled due to ill health of Anne Lindsay and due to COVID-19 none have been planned for 2020.

3.12 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. It sponsored two prizes in 2019.

3.13 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 a contribution of £100 for the Christmas tree lights.

3.14 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHANGES In late 2019 Anne Lindsay a long serving member of our committee sadly died. Anne made a massive contribution to the Society's efforts by co-ordinating the delivery of newsletters and kindly hosting the summer party. There have been no other changes to date. However, I must re-emphasise yet again the need for new blood in the committee. I would ask members who could offer their services to the Society and perhaps become a committee member, to contact one of the committee members. As a first step you could come along to one of the regular committee meetings; the dates can be found on the Society's website.

3.15 TRUSTEE CHANGES

In line with the constitution I resigned as a trustee and was re-elected at the virtual AGM. I am pleased to say that the other four Trustees, Barry Judd, Richard Marshall, Nick Thripp and Raymond Spary continue in their roles as trustees.

4 THE FUTURE

We are entering an interesting period for Weybridge with several initiatives in the pipeline that will have a significant effect on the future of the town in the way it looks and functions. These include WRAP, the community hub in the town centre, the Wider Brooklands Traffic Patterns Study, the Surrey Highways High Street Study and the Future High Street programme. Additionally, the EBC Local Plan will be available for its final consultation period before submission to the Panning Inspector. The Society will be fully involved and will make members aware of progress and conclusions.

The way forward on the future development of a community hub, to house medical facilities, the library and the community centre and other facilities, should become clearer towards the end of 2020. It is critical that the opportunity created by the unfortunate fire at the hospital site will not be wasted. The right design on the right site will generate a fantastic opportunity for Weybridge. It will give us a focus as town, generate community spirit and be used by all ages. It will generate a sense of pride in our community. We need to "get it right" and you can be sure that the Society will be highly active in ensuring that residents' views are listened to by those leading the regeneration project.

Hopefully, we will see the end of the COVID pandemic soon and life can then get back to normal.

Keep safe

Kind regards

Dave Arnold
Chairman Weybridge Society
July 15th 2020
Dave Arnold
Chairman, Weybridge Society