



WEYBETTERWEYBRIDGE REGENERATION PROJECT

Update and View from the Chairman



I can still recall visiting a community hub in Chester in February 2018, some six months after the tragic loss of Weybridge's medical facilities to a fire in July 2017.

My overwhelming feeling during that visit was that a real sense of community across all ages was thriving there at the Chester hub, but that sadly, we had nothing approaching this sense of place and connection in Weybridge.

In fact, here the opposite was true, and it was not just the destruction of the old hospital site that had left a gaping hole. In Weybridge a whole series of public buildings were defunct or disconnected. For many years, our 'community centre', run by Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), had been – and still is – used primarily by the elderly. Housed in a tired building tucked away in a cul-de-sac, it has no interaction with most of the local population. Nearby, the Weybridge library, operated by Surrey County on its own schedule, has no close outreach either with local groups or any central

coordinating role in the community. One of the library building's upstairs spaces has been empty for years as an ex-museum site, whilst the adjacent hall is rarely used, and that too is managed separately and from afar, rented piecemeal and not connected to Weybridge life. Similarly, our town hall, owned and operated by EBC, remains shuttered. After a glorious history as a town cinema, it too fell into disrepair and disuse during a period of random rentals. For years now it has been at the mercy of authorities' various ideas for re-use.

Meanwhile, our local church halls, which are seen and felt to be vibrant community spaces, are booked months and years in advance, so that there is a chronic shortage of public space for meetings and events. Quite simply, we

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have no place that qualifies as a lively community hub or public area where various individuals and groups might overlap and interact.

I and other Society members were convinced that we needed such a gathering place in Weybridge and that the loss of the hospital building provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create one, in a coordinated way that might solve many problems at once. Two months later, at the AGM held in April 2018, the Society announced its support for building such a hub. Initially, this was to contain the library and medical facilities but soon came to include the Elmbridge community centre as well. A few months later, in July 2018, we were invited by the NHS to make a presentation on our outline proposals. They had a positive reception, which encouraged us at the Society to work internally on ideas. By 2019, we had launched **WRAP – the Weybridge Rebuild and Advance Project** – to ‘build back better’ what we needed. We formed an internal working group and even commissioned an architect to draw up a possible building, concepts which we made public in June 2020.

Until then the authorities had been working separately on their various remits, but quickly thereafter, in the autumn of 2020, a sense of momentum and cooperation took hold. With support from Surrey County Council (SCC), EBC and various NHS bodies, and under the auspices of a six month consultancy project led by Well North Enterprises, our **WRAP became the WeyBetterWeybridge Regeneration Project**. Lesia Scholey, the Society’s energetic magazine editor and communications lead, became the Project Champion, and in that position, worked tirelessly to bring local groups together for feedback about what was

needed for a new hub and how it might be accomplished and work in the future, as well as liaising with new project architects on preliminary studies.

Unfortunately, the project was halted in April ahead of elections in May 2021, as various authorities cited political sensitivities. This phase of the project was then officially decommissioned. The name **WeyBetterWeybridge** and some of its concepts were subsequently taken up by an organisation comprising representatives of SCC, EBC and the NHS, and **Simon Angeledes**, a long-time NHS consultant, was appointed Project Manager. He is now responsible for progressing the rebuild of our local health and community services buildings.

Having interacted with public organisations during my working life, I had anticipated that getting three public bodies to work together would not be easy and would be time consuming. This has proved to be the case. We are now three and half years on from our own April 2018 presentation, and for those that haven’t been involved with the programme or details, it may appear that nothing much has progressed. Whilst our local GPs were re-provisioned in temporary buildings very quickly, their facilities have remained less than ideal. The onslaught of the COVID pandemic meant our two practises faced doubly difficult circumstances. They have done an excellent job, however, and we are all grateful to our doctors and their staff for their efforts during this trying period.

I understand that some residents and local workers feel that our hospital building should have just been re-built as usual by the NHS, with the library and community centre buildings tackled separately with refurbishments. Some argue this would have enabled the GPs

to return to far more suitable permanent facilities sooner.

But what did (and continues) to contribute to the slow pace of re-provisioning are **major initiatives** taking place across all three public bodies concerned with the Weybridge project. These internal reforms at much higher levels have taken up much of the attention of our authorities. They include the restructuring of medical services and provisioning within the NHS, both across England and the North West Surrey Clinical Commissioning area, as well as at the county level, with the creation of Surrey Heartlands, a wider and more linked-up social and health initiative. SC has also been embroiled in a vast overhaul of its library services. EBC, for its part, has been slow to commit to long term plans for local resources or to re-invent how it provides services across the borough amid a cascade of budget constraints. And of course, the pandemic – which needless to say hit the pause button repeatedly on meetings, site visits and workload.

To their credit, public bodies did and do want to fit the Weybridge regeneration project into their various plans and internal organisational reforms, and to step up responsiveness to local needs, or at least, consider resident views more than they had in the past.

Since the organisational shift last summer, local opinions are being channelled via a new '**stakeholder reference group**' of residents, which is the NHS preferred method of harnessing feedback. As a Society, we see this as somewhat of a step backward for community interests. The reference group 'responds to' design plans instead of being 'involved in' the generation of the community hub as was the case before the summer. Moreover, the loss

of a community champion to bring people together and facilitate communications has resulted in far less grassroots connectivity and transparency.

As to the speed of project delivery, after a stall in momentum last spring when the authorities stopped and reorganised, now there is a palpable sense of urgency. Recently it has been announced that Weybridge's medical centre will be re-provisioned on the existing hospital site, with **visible work promised in 2022**. A second phase will see the demolition of the library building and the creation of a community hub, together with a public space, which could be used for farmer's markets and other community events.

Public information on the draft proposals is expected to be made available by the project authorities early next year and the public will be requested to express their views. This will hopefully provide an opportunity for all area residents and groups to be not just informed but to influence how our community centre is built and works so that it can truly meet our needs.

So was it worth the wait? For me, so far, yes. The input that residents have been able to give thus far have made authorities take notice of local circumstances and at least try to tackle problems in a more holistic way. I believe that when we see the draft proposals they will be **significantly better** than what we otherwise would have seen, had the NHS, SCC and EBC continued to work in completely separate silos. We continue to hope that WeyBetterWeybridge will elevate the regeneration of Weybridge into something greater than the sum of its parts, fostering a greater sense of community and generating a greater sense of pride in our town.

SHARE WITH CARE

CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE TRAVEL AROUND WEYBRIDGE

Do you remember how pleasant it was to walk or cycle along Weybridge's roads during the COVID-19 lockdowns? Sadly, we are now back to 'normal', with local roads congested and our town again famous for standstill traffic. Getting around on foot or cycle isn't easy either. As ever, it's only for the alert, brave and fleet-footed to safely navigate road junctions like Weybridge railway station or the roundabout by the cricket green.

The Weybridge Society thinks this situation must change and wants to form a local team to address a host of travel concerns. We are now looking for people to join this team to make travel round Weybridge safer and more comfortable.

As one of three Elmbridge towns that regularly breaches emission targets, Weybridge is a place where excessive pollution is already leading to high rates of respiratory illness. Surrey County Council, which manages the local road network, has also acknowledged the need to reduce emissions to meet climate change targets. In its recently published Surrey Transport Plan, 'Active Travel' is a core strategy, aimed at discouraging people from using their cars for short journeys and encouraging healthier modes of travel that increase both physical exercise and opportunities for social interaction. Walking or cycling to school can help set healthy habits for life. Moreover, such



Sally Bean leads new healthy travel team

active travel can benefit local businesses, providing people with greater opportunities to pop into shops as they pass whilst also reducing parking stress.

The Weybridge Society once ran a Transport Panel that produced a transport strategy of its own. It advocated for more cycle-friendly and joined-up routes across town, but until recently, authorities had not made as much progress as we would have liked.

However, Surrey County Council (SCC) re-energised local efforts with the Brooklands Accessibility Project, which gave the Society an ideal opportunity to re-engage in transport matters. Over a period of three years, this strategic project – now complete – implemented a range of measures to create a safe route for walking and cycling between Weybridge town centre and the community park at Brooklands. Among the changes are a new shared path along Heath Road, new sign posts, and informative display boards designed by Brooklands Museum. The project was developed by SCC in partnership with Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), and substantially funded by a regional enterprise partnership.

Spurred on by its impact on her neighbourhood, last year Society executive committee member Sally Bean formed a small team to contribute to the project at the start of its final phase. This phase focused on widening the paths around Churchfields

Recreation Ground, increasing the gap between barriers and installing additional lighting. Other local groups also contributed, with the Weybridge Charity generously offering a small amount of land, which helped to smooth out a sharp bend, whilst the Weybridge Park Residents' Association cooperated by agreeing to have their adjacent hedge cut back.

Living near the paths, Sally was aware of the concerns of some residents about the risks of increased cycling on the paths and felt it was important to delve into the social and behavioural aspects of the issue. Accordingly, the Society ran a survey of users to understand their needs and concerns and how to address them. Their feedback enabled the Society team to assist the SCC project team with aspects of design, such as the spacing between chicane barriers and improved lighting.

Crucially, we also proposed 'Share with Care' signage to encourage a culture

of reciprocity on the paths, and now we are collaborating with Heathside School on a safety-awareness campaign. We are also working on a proposal for a path maintenance partnership with adjoining landowners to ensure path boundaries are kept clear of encroaching vegetation.

At the time of writing, our campaign and the erection of signage has been delayed by a public inquiry to gain legal approval for cycling on the paths. This illustrates the kind of dilemmas that councils and residents face when trying to improve transport infrastructure. While most respondents to our survey felt the paths around Churchfields Recreation Ground were safe for sharing, around 13% of respondents thought that cyclists should be banned from them. Furthermore, a few people made formal objections to the proposal. The inquiry thus had to formally weigh up the danger of diverting cyclists, including schoolchildren, from these greener paths and onto Weybridge's narrow busy roads, against the risk to pedestrians of increased cycling on these paths. We are still awaiting the result of this inquiry.

Meanwhile, the Government is changing the Highway Code this year to define a hierarchy of users, putting people at greatest risk of being harmed in a collision at the top of the hierarchy and requiring people lower down to give them priority. That does not mean giving some users a free pass to take no heed of what's going on around them. The only practical solution in any community is for all users to be aware and considerate of each other.

Our 'Share with Care' campaign is designed to promote just that – mutual respect and consideration – as it sets out guidelines that apply to all users of





The Society would now like to establish a more permanent 'Healthy Travel' team – an updated reformulation of our old Transport Panel – with a number of activities already planned. Among these are finding ways to involve people who live, work and study in Weybridge in the active travel goals and to collaborate with councils on their active travel plans and other relevant citizen engagement initiatives. We will be setting up a Facebook group for discussion of local issues and ideas, promoting council consultations and getting out and about to

the Churchfields paths. Whilst at times the 'Active Travel' concept may seem to focus more on cycle infrastructure than on those who walk, it is not meant to ignore the behavioural aspects of change, or to make non-cyclist pedestrians or drivers feel marginalised.

At the Society, we now think it would be more helpful to talk about 'Healthy Travel' – defined as getting into the habit of using the healthiest forms of travel suitable for each individual, but also being aware of other people's needs. The key is to make sure one person's travel choices don't interfere with others' safety and enjoyment. Another concern is to ensure that area residents have a greater voice in improving local routes and traffic infrastructure, critically, at an earlier stage in the process.

look at trouble spots.

In the short term, we want to encourage better maintenance of path boundaries, so that the full width of a path is always available. We would also like to create a local map of the best ways to get around Weybridge on foot or bike, identifying opportunities to open up better routes in the longer term. We are also investigating ways of gathering data more systematically on people's experiences of walking and cycling in this area and researching the experiences of other places that are trying to do similar things.

If you would like to get involved with our new healthy travel team or have views you'd like to express, please contact us at healthytravel@weybridgesociety.org.uk

NEW WEYBRIDGE ARTS INITIATIVE PLANS FOR JUNE 2022 EVENT

An Arts Initiative launched recently by the Weybridge Society is already gaining fast momentum, with plans for events around a weekend town fayre in late June 2022.

The Initiative first arose from discussions among a few Society members who felt that Weybridge as a community would benefit from more artistic and cultural activities in town and that the Society could make a valuable contribution to getting these off the ground.

‘There’s a lot happening in Weybridge on the arts and culture fronts, though these groups and individuals don’t always get the support and publicity that they should,’ said Society member Neil Gallagher, who was one of the main proponents of the Arts Initiative. ‘There may also be a number of artistically gifted people in the town who are not getting the opportunities they deserve to showcase their talents.’

Gallagher initially approached Dave Arnold, Weybridge Society Chairman, and was delighted to find that he shared his views. A subsequent discussion at the last Society AGM in May confirmed broader members’ support for the project and began a period of research and discussion with interested parties. That culminated in a meeting on 16th November of Society members interested in launching the Arts Initiative officially as a group and activity.

‘Our ultimate goal is a Weybridge Festival, but a fully-fledged week-long festival would demand significant resources and entail a high level of risk,’ said Dave Arnold, Weybridge Society Chairman, at the November meeting. ‘So what we have in mind is to build our capabilities and acquire experience in a more measured way, delivering a smaller number of high quality events initially, and learning from the process.’

For the year ahead, the Initiative

hopes to build on Weybridge Society’s excellent relationship with the Weybridge Town Business Group, which is always keen to promote and stage artistic and cultural events and supports the idea of a permanent project group to help take these events forward regularly. Together, they envisage cultural events clustering around the weekend of the Weybridge Town Fayre, a biannual event held at Christmas and in early summer, with the next one planned for 25-26th June 2022.

Already the Initiative planning group intends to seek permission from Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) and Surrey County Council (SCC) to hold events at Churchfields Recreation Grounds and car park and around town. The Initiative will also be looking for sponsorship for hire of a marquee for performances and hopes that town shops and businesses will offer space to display artistic or cultural works or accommodate performances.

‘We are very excited to be taking this forward, and we will encourage contributions from all age groups, in particular welcoming participation by younger residents,’ said Arnold. He noted that schools and Brooklands College were among the organisations the Initiative would approach.

The Society is now looking for more residents who are interested in helping the Initiative move forward. If you would like to be involved, please email arts@weybridgesociety.org.uk.

Equally, if you would like to stage an artistic or cultural event anywhere in Weybridge on or around the weekend of 25-26th June 2022, or would like to sponsor an event of this nature, let the Society know so it can liaise appropriately and include you or your group in the programme of events.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Like 2020, this year has proved to be very difficult due to COVID. In 2021, the pandemic meant postponing our involvement with the Midsummer Madness Fayre until early September, holding a virtual AGM and suspending any public talks. Now, with the focus on the Omicron variant, we might all wonder whether 2022 will be any easier.

Yet there is promise in having learned how to carry on. Despite all the challenges, over the last year the Society was involved in a number of community activities, and our much lauded and useful assessments of planning applications continued uninterrupted!

To give a quick summary of what we did in 2021, the Society kept working with three public authorities on the WeyBetterWeybridge project (see my update and personal view on page 1-3 in this magazine) which will re-provision medical facilities in town and create a new community hub. I hope that early next year draft proposals of buildings and outdoor spaces will be made available to the public.

Many may have also noted and hopefully used the upgraded paths around Churchfields, so you will also know that much work has been done there. Sally Bean, one of our committee members, has been a key part of the team led by Surrey County Council in upgrading these paths. In particular, Sally helped carry out surveys of path users and developed



signage to be used if the 'shared use' of the path is formally granted.

If you have noticed a number of signs in the town headed by the Society's logo, you might also recognise more of our work, another initiative by Sally and the Surrey team. In 2022 Sally will be heading up a new task group (perhaps it can be viewed as the

heir to our old Transport Panel) which will evaluate how healthy travel can be encouraged in Weybridge. As our town has not traditionally been a welcoming place for pedestrians and cyclists – pavements often narrow or even non-existent, and cycling routes poor – we think Weybridge can use more inducements and improvements for walking and cycling.

The Society has also been assessing whether it should become more active in the arts in Weybridge, following a suggestion from one of our members. As a result, as you can read elsewhere in this issue, you will see we are on the case. It is only early days with our new Arts Initiative, so we are keen for anyone with an interest in this subject to join in with discussions as to how we should take it forward.

I hope many of you managed to attend the late Summer Fayre on September 4th. It was really pleasing to see a large number of local organisations and visitors attend. Brooklands Radio did a marvellous job with the music, its roving reporter and PA system. The performance given by the Weybridge Male Voice Choir was brilliant and well received. I must also offer our

local newly elected Elmbridge councillor Judy Sarsby and councillor Vicki Macleod our grateful thanks for their amazing organisation of the event. Together with the Weybridge Town Business Group, the Society is looking at holding an expanded event in late June next year.



Finally, over the last year, the Society made good on its promises to try to work more closely with local educational institutions. In the summer, we made a contribution to Brooklands College to help repair horticultural sheeting damaged in storm, much needed as part of the college's new student gardening initiative. In the autumn, the Society sponsored a competition for teams of students at Brooklands College for proposals of what could be done to our High Street to make it more inviting for shoppers and visitors. Our new committee member Pauline O'Sullivan is leading this activity on behalf of the Society, and results of the students' work will be available soon and we will share them as soon as we can.

I would like to say a big thank you to all Society members who throughout this year gave up their time freely to engage in the Society's activities. Without you the Society could not function!

I also want to thank in particular our magazine editor and communications coordinator, Lesia Scholey, though sadly I must also announce that she will be

stepping down from her communications coordinator role and the executive committee at the end of this year, and from the post of editor at the five year mark next spring. As this may be the last time she will be publishing our magazine, we will be looking for someone to take on the editorial post. Lesia has graciously agreed to help in the transition.

Over the last four and a half years, Lesia has done a terrific job both as editor and comms coordinator. With her enthusiasm for the Society, she brought in many new people to the organisation and got others to take on more active roles, whilst shaping our communications both in print and online. Under her charge, our publications were transformed as Lesia used her professional journalistic skills and firm hand to get the material needed. Many of you commented to me personally on what a wonderful job she has done, and this has included not only coming up with ideas for pieces and themes for entire issues, but also soliciting and editing others' copy whilst writing many articles herself. As a perfectionist, Lesia has spent significant time on each issue, checking and re-checking text, but she also found time over the years to take a leading role in our town regeneration project.

As a Society we are indebted to all the effort Lesia has expended on our behalf, and her departure – although thankfully over time and not suddenly – is a great loss to the Society. Lesia, please accept our sincere thanks for all your time and effort, it is appreciated! Best wishes for your next ventures, whatever they may be!

Now as the year draws to a close, may I wish you all a safe and enjoyable Christmas and best wishes for the New Year!

Dave Arnold
Chairman of the Weybridge Society

WEYBRIDGE'S BELOVED VICAR BRIAN PROTHERO RETIRES

Weybridge town centre's iconic church of St James's, home to our local parish of the Church of England and a bustling community of volunteers, organisations and activities, bid farewell this autumn to its beloved and popular vicar, Brian Prothero, who formally resigned his office on Dec 3rd. Weybridge Society caught up with Brian in mid-November, following his final service at St James's on Oct 31st, to talk about his experiences in ministry, in Weybridge and his plans for the future.

Interview by Lesia Scholey



Predictably, his last service was packed to the rafters, with more than 300 people attending. The house where he's lived for 18 years, The Rectory on Churchfields Avenue, was now also predictably in a state of chaos, or preparation for moving. Of a collection of some 3,000 books, Brian and his wife Jocelyn were only keeping 150 each, so the setting for where we were to speak was a distributional mess: shelves being emptied, possessions lined up to be sold on E-bay, donated or discarded. To be honest, it was hard to tell what would stay or go.

Much like Brian himself, who was much looking forward to stepping down from his work to take up a new life in Godalming, but admitting that the last months have been emotionally challenging. Mentally he's not totally ready. Not yet.

'I'll be glad to escape the rigours of my job for which I was never prepared,' he says smiling, as he serves a 'cheeky coffee from

Costa Rica.' Like so much Brian says, it's hard to tell what might be a joke, half-truth or full-on confession. But he does mean it.

'My duties when I signed on were to preach, teach, celebrate the sacrament and admonish the wrongdoer,' he says, adding. 'I'll be looking forward to doing far more admonishing once I've escaped what I wasn't prepared for, all the admin.'

Ah yes, the admin. And he launches deeper into the trials of wrestling with local bureaucracy, most especially and lately, the NHS sending 12 people to talk to him about the rebuild of the hospital, a case he had made clear earlier via official channels and community activists like the project champion. Which was me, the interviewer. (Full disclosure: that was how we first met, only a year ago.)

'They're back to reinventing the wheel,' he huffs. Then he spares no diatribes against Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey County Council and the officials he's encountered there. And he wants it on the record.

'I won't miss the incompetence of local authorities, there are far too many vanity projects and a failure to attend to serious overall planning,' he says, singling out the costly refurbished pavement outside Waitrose, the lack of vision for Weybridge town centre, or any implementation of coordinated and lasting improvements. As he himself has developed asthma since

living here, why has no one dealt with important issues like pollution caused by the ‘rat-run’ of cars through town?

It’s typical Brian – open and brutally honest, telling it like it is. But far from being cantankerous, Brian is upbeat. He profusely thanks Dave Arnold, our Weybridge Society chairman, for turning the organisation into a more inclusive, less NIMBY group. Even as he takes another swipe at Weybridge’s defects in socio-economic divisions, he knows that social critiques must be issued and worn lightly.

‘A new career in retail awaits me,’ he says brightly, announcing that in the future he’ll take up shifts at Waitrose in Godalming, ‘if my application is successful’. That will be just to connect to the people and community, and again it’s hard to tell if he’s joking, though welcoming people at a service desk is something you could definitely see him having fun doing. Because most definitely, it has been the constant work with people that he will miss.



‘I’m one of the richest people in town because of all the people I meet,’ he says, noting it takes him a couple of hours just to pick up a packet of bacon rashers at local shops for all the conversations he falls into along the way. ‘I have met so many amazing people, and I only hope I have been successful in responding to ‘the call’ – albeit badly.’

Ah yes, the call. So now we’ve gotten to the serious bits of his job – his ministry

– which he went into more than 50 years ago in 1968. Actually he hates the term ‘the call’, so he calls it the ‘mustness’ – a ‘gotta do this’ – that took hold of him in his early teens and took 14 years to realise was real.

Fourteen years? But the conversation has moved on, and Brian is focused on the amazing moments he’s had in Weybridge, like regular encounters with certain parishioners, especially a lovely child named Freddie.

‘He thinks I’m Jesus, which is cool,’ Brian pauses, ‘though not cool for Jesus.’

It’s hard not to fall down laughing and pointless to try to reroute the conversation, which has sped ahead to Jean Pierre de Caussaude, an 18th century French priest who urged people to find the divine each day in their current circumstances. Caussaude’s famous ‘sacrament of the moment’ has come up because I, the interviewer, personally told Brian the day before not to prepare for our chat and that we’d let it run and I’d ‘report on the moment’.

So, at this moment, the mention of Caussaude leads to talk of his translator Kitty Muggeridge, then Malcom, her journalist husband. Famously, Muggeridge was one of the only reporters globally in the 1930s to accurately report Stalin’s forced famines in Ukraine, but later in life, Malcolm got into trouble with John Cleese. So onto talk about the ‘*Life of Brian*,’ and that famous televised debate between Monty Python and Malcolm, which then leads to the then-drunken Archbishop of Canterbury.

Which somehow brings us back to bishops and Weybridge and being a people person and starting the day with doubts. Which brings me back to why. Why fourteen years to recognise ‘the mustness’?

‘It was a journey to make sure I wasn’t apeing someone else in my family,’ Brian

smiles, referencing what transpires to be his brother. By sheer coincidence, the two later ended up in neighbouring parishes in Devon.

But at the beginning? How did it all start, this life in the church? The way Brian tells it, he was about 20 years old when he went on a selection course and was recommended for training for the priesthood. But doubt set in – for a whole decade.

‘I let that ride until 1981 and then went into a deep depression and felt that nagging again,’ he says. Thanks to the support of his wife Jocelyn, he was able to progress and negotiate the complex process of the Church of England, becoming a deacon in 1986 and ordained a priest in 1987.

He first served as a curate in St Mary’s Thornbury near Bristol, then from 1989 as a vicar of St Georges in Goodrington, Devon. Then in 2003, he was ‘strangely headhunted’ and offered the post of Rector of St James’s Weybridge. The decisive date was 29 April 2004, when Brian was inducted as the last ‘freehold incumbent’ of Weybridge’s CoE parish church. That means, Brian notes, that the next incomer will have less independence and more rules from the Diocese of Guildford.

Looking back and forward again, what was easiest and hardest? What will he miss? Again it’s people that were easiest, with the caveat being that the worst was having to break through various stiff social veneers.

‘I’ll miss Café One, the Jolly Farmer and the Prince of Wales – before it was knobbed by property developers,’ Brian muses.

Always that social conscience lurking, and with Brian, there are many more serious points he could make, or social wrongs he’d like to right, than can possibly fit in this tribute. So how about an easier question, like a specific memory. What was

his significant high point as the vicar?

‘Easily a visit from Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to consecrate St James’s new altar, 25th of November 2007, the Feast of Christ the Universal King,’ Brian says, almost starstruck. On an intellectual level, one can see these two having a proper chat and a whale of a time.

And since we’re on the topic of thinking, any good books he’d like to recommend as a parting gift to Weybridge from his compassionate but rebellious soul and curious mind?

Of course, it turns out to be an unexpected set of suggestions. *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* by Louis de Bernières, *New Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton, and especially, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a translation from an anonymous wandering Eastern Orthodox Christian spiritual seeker that Brian calls his ‘desert island book’.

That last one is the book that taught him to pray, he says reverently. Kind of. Then briefly he’s back to Merton and stressing the need for self-care.

‘The monk’s first duty is his own salvation,’ he reminds – and I’m not sure if that’s for me or himself or anyone that he’d like to send that message. Now sent.

It seems a fitting way to wrap up a conversation or a farewell with a man that doesn’t seem inclined to wrap up or go, but he’s got another lunch with a parishioner to hurry off to, a testament to his enduring popularity. Like all the thank you, retirement and we’ll-miss-you cards overflowing the mantelpiece.

We keep chatting even as I make my way to the door, where of course, I am gifted a book on a topic we’ve only just happened to fall into. It’s an impossible farewell, as I’m sure many people feel. You can only really say good bye to Brian and feel good about that knowing that Godalming is just down the road.

WEYBRIDGE FAYRE - 4TH SEPTEMBER 2021





LOCAL PLANNING ISSUES

As ever, the Weybridge Society brings you the latest on what is happening in planning decisions at Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), our local planning authority, for various property developments in our area.

Several times a year, the Society issues a comprehensive update in our email bulletin. The last one appeared in July 2021. Here, in the magazine, we provide another update on local planning applications, following a summary of major issues and trends in planning regulations that will impact all residents.

Changed Regulations: Permitted development

To alleviate the national housing shortage, former Housing Minister Robert Jenrick introduced major changes to the country's planning system by extending 'Permitted Development' rights. Permitted Development allows applicants to change the use of commercial buildings to residential buildings and to increase the height of residential buildings without the need to submit a full planning application. The outcome of these Permitted Development applications is determined by the local borough Planning Officers within very strict time limits set by the government.

Michael Gove, the new Secretary of State for Housing, is currently reviewing planning issues. It remains to be seen whether there will be significant changes to the current planning system, including these new Permitted Development rules.

Impact on Weybridge: Additional storeys on existing blocks of flats

Owners of existing purpose built blocks of flats can now apply under Permitted Development rights to add a further

two storeys on top of existing buildings. Below are just two examples where these changes could have significant implications for existing residents.

2021/0395, Two Oaks, Castleview Road, at the top of Monument Hill.

Prior Approval – permission that is issued without a detailed application and given on principle – has been given under Permitted Development rights to add two floors to the existing building to create a further 12 dwellings with no additional parking provision. The neighbouring house is also significantly overlooked. Although there were 26 objections to the proposed scheme, due to the application for Prior Approval, it was approved by the Planning Officer without referral to the Planning Committee.

2021/3585, Beechcroft Manor, in Otlands.

In this case, Prior Approval was sought for an additional storey on each of the four blocks of flats to create a further 11 dwellings. There were 112 objections, many from existing residents who had only recently paid out significant sums for major roof works. We can report that this proposal has recently been withdrawn by the applicants. We will be alert to any further applications.

Impact on Weybridge: Conversion of commercial premises to residential

As reported in our earlier magazines and e-bulletins, applications to convert office accommodation into residential dwellings can be granted under Permitted Development. In Weybridge we have seen several applications in the town centre, as well as head office style corporate buildings located in the Brooklands area. Of major

concern are the proposals relating to the buildings at Benchmark House on the corner of Brooklands Road and Locke King Road.

Benchmark House – In a chaotic series of submissions and withdrawals by the developer, Prior Approval has now been given to convert three buildings from office accommodation to residential dwellings, while subsequent amendments involving the same buildings have been withdrawn. The Planning Panel is paying particular attention to these proposals in light of the LEOS DEVELOPMENTS hoardings around the site. The company's website (www.leosuk.com) reveals plans to create

St GEORGES GARDENS in this location, a huge development comprising some **500 homes**.

The concern is the impact that such a large-scale development will have on our already congested roads, oversubscribed schools and full doctors' surgeries. None of the buildings at Brooklands are within reasonable walking distance of these amenities, meaning that for most people who would live there, a car journey would be a necessity. This would massively increase parking stress and traffic in the town centre. We will be keeping a close watch on further applications involving these proposals.

PLANNING APPLICATION UPDATE

This list is up to date at the time of writing, but for the latest and most accurate changes to planning, please consult EBC or our website at weybridgesociety.org.uk, where you can also check the Planning Update in previous newsletters for more background and history on individual cases.

2021/4101, GlaxoSmithKline – Apart from the multiple consents to convert existing offices into residential dwellings at Brooklands, health care company GlaxoSmithKline proposes to construct a prestigious UK based headquarters comprising a global campus and innovation centre for their consumer healthcare company at The Heights, Brooklands, where the company proposes to accommodate 1,400 staff. This initial application is in regard to the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment. Further details can be found on the EBC website: elmbridge.gov.uk/planning

Clive House, 12/18 Queens Road – The conversion of Clive House from defunct office space to small residential flats continues, with the most recent applications seeking 'Compliance of Conditions' approval. We are still unaware which of the consented schemes is being implemented, but no doubt the dwellings will soon be marketed.

2020/1007, 91 Queens Road – This application for a two storey building containing six flats with access from South Road was refused consent by Elmbridge and was subsequently taken to appeal. The Appeal Inspector dismissed the appeal on grounds that the proposed scheme would be poorly related to its surroundings.

2021/0864, Oak House, 19 Queens Road – The Society lodged an objection to this scheme to replace the existing nursing home with a building comprising 10 flats. This scheme was subsequently withdrawn and a new scheme 2021/3517 has recently

been submitted. The 'Arts and Crafts' style elevations in this later scheme are markedly different from the previous 'Regency' style elevations and are much more in keeping with the existing character of the area. Although we consider the provision of 12 car parking spaces inadequate, we are not intending to object.

Former Café Rouge, 85 Queens Road and land behind – A number of the outstanding applications for this building and its rear section fronting South Road have now been determined.

• **Former Café Rouge, 85 Queens Road:**

2020/3366 sub-division of existing flat to create two flats – refused

2020/3289 increase in the roof height to create an additional dwelling – refused

• **Land to the rear of 85 Queens Road:**

2020/3188 offices for the visually impaired – refused

2020/3190 a detached two -storey building to display works of art – refused

2020/3213 a two storey building to provide four flats – refused

These applications were mostly refused on inadequate parking provision. The only outstanding application is **2021/2765**, a proposal to construct a pair of semi-detached dwellings on this parcel of land. To date there have been 26 letters of objection, including a comprehensive letter from the Triangle Residents Group.

2021/0245, Wessex, South Road – The consented scheme for nine flats is currently under construction. We await a decision on this latest proposal to add another storey to create an additional flat.

2021/1879, Queensgate House, South Road – This 'Variation of Condition' application to allow alternative use as a Day Nursery was refused permission due to an increase in vehicle movements and a harmful impact on the adjoining residential properties by virtue of noise disturbance.

2021/1365, Land at rear of Maple Down, 139, Queens Road – This application to construct a substantial detached house in the rear garden of Maple Down, which sits at the end of a long private driveway on the north side of Queens Road, is still being considered by Elmbridge's planning department.

2021/1356, Land rear of Southlands, 40 Queens Road – This application to construct a pair of semi-detached houses in the rear garden of the host property was refused outline permission in part, rather worryingly, because of the proposal's low density, which failed to meet the most efficient and effective use of land in a sustainable urban location.

2021/0712, Land West of 17 High Pine Close – The outcome of this application which was registered on 1st March 2021 is still pending. There have been a number of amendments to the application, which has led the Weybridge Society to submit three letters of objection in support of local residents. We have concerns over the lack of affordable housing finance.

2019/1781, Petrol Station Brooklands Road – Following a refusal of this application, a further application was submitted to EBC: **2021/2381**. This application to demolish the current buildings and replace with a new sales area was initially valid from the end of June. There

have been subsequent amendments, and the deadline date for comments is now 17/12/21. We have previously objected and will be evaluating the latest amendments and will comment accordingly.

2019/2722, 2020/0224 and 2020/2215, Silvermere Haven Pet Cemetery and Crematorium – Elmbridge objected to these consultations from Surrey County Council, as did the Weybridge Society. These applications relate to significantly expanding the Crematorium facility. We will be evaluating the latest consultation document from SCC **2021/4083** and will respond accordingly. Further information can be viewed on the SCC website quoting reference SCC **2019/0125**.

2021/2255, Oatlands Park Hotel – Installation of a car park management system and **2021/2253** Listed Building Consent for a car park management system have both been refused by Elmbridge on grounds that the number, size and materials of the signs would not respect or complement the setting of the Listed Building and the registered park and that it would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

2021/1802, Oatlands Park Hotel – This application to erect railings to a height of 1.8 metres on the west side of the north access road was withdrawn on 26/11/21.

2020/2436, 2020/2821 and 2021/3554, Warehouse 47 Thames Street – Multiple applications for the conversion of this warehouse into a dwelling are extremely complicated and have been continuing for a long time. We expect an appeal against the refusal of application **2020/2821**, which has already been constructed.

2021/2887 Locke King House, 2 Balfour Road – This application is for a two-storey rear extension to the existing office accommodation. This follows refusal of application **2017/1681**, which was for a detached two-storey building for 10 flats, also dismissed on appeal. Locke King House, formerly the Weybridge Cottage Hospital built in 1889 in the Arts and Crafts style, sits within the Weybridge Conservation area.

2021/3349, Heath House and Heatherbank, Firfields/Cobbetts Hill – This application seeks to demolish the existing Victorian property, which has been divided into two semi-detached dwellings, and to construct 26 flats in its place. There has been much interest in this application as the existing property is of significant importance as the former home of George Fergusson Wilson, a horticulturist whose garden at Wisley became RHS Wisley and whose landscaped gardens at Heatherbank/Heath House contain a number of specimen trees. In addition, there is currently a pending application for the property to be nationally listed.

To date 179 letters of objection have been received, including a number supporting the heritage aspects of the site, as well as from the Weybridge Society and The Victorian Society. Apart from the scale, mass, height and bulk of the proposed building being totally out of keeping with the existing detached character of the properties in Firfields/Cobbetts Hill, there are significant issues with respect to the proposed limited parking provision (33 spaces, including two visitor spaces) and the impact on a dangerous section of road at the Brooklands Road/Cobbetts Hill/ St George's Avenue junction.

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