

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2020

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

REGENERATION. It is going to be an increasingly important topic of conversation in the Spalding area over the coming months. High Streets across the country are facing significant challenges and change as a direct result of Covid-19. There can be no more important a moment to start the work of regenerating our town than now.

I am sure that everyone will welcome the news that the Town Centre Regeneration Steering Group held its first meeting towards the end of last month. I was pleased to represent the Society at that meeting, held via a Zoom teleconference call, and it's good to be able to report how positive it was amongst those present, and how everyone recognised the importance of giving some new life to the town.

The meeting was attended by district and county council officers, councillors, representatives from business groups, town traders, market traders, art and cultural groups, health & wellbeing groups and transport providers.

Over the 90 minutes a wide range of ideas was put forward, such as holding more outdoor events, reinvigorating the market, exploring free parking, improving signs and information boards, addressing the challenge posed by empty shops, the provision of a bus into the town, improved marketing of the town and making it a more attractive place to be in.

In particular, it was pleasing to hear that Sir John Hayes had recently invited the director of the Prince's Trust to Spalding, who was impressed by a lot of our architecture and the setting of the river. This was good to hear, as it

reinforced one of the key parts of a paper that we prepared for the meeting, which highlighted the need to improve the appearance of many of the buildings in the town centre; not just at ground level, but over the whole frontages. (See below.)

All contributions made were intended to provide positive solutions to the immediate challenges arising from the knock-on effects of Covid-19 on our economy, but also to offer long-term gains to the town centre. Whilst the details are to be discussed at future meetings, there seemed to be agreement that there are plenty of small changes that can be made fairly quickly, which collectively can lead to a big change in what people feel about the town.

Spalding is our town. It was not built by a Council; it has been evolved over many centuries by those who lived here. Now it is our turn to take the town forward to the next steps in its history. I hope that a wide range of local organisations, businesses and individuals will all play a part in making Spalding a better place in which to live, shop, work and socialise, so that we can all pass on to the next generation a better town than it is now.

We as a Society and as a member of Civic Voice, the national charity for the Civic Movement that seeks to make places more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive, must make the most of the [Page 2 ►



MARION BRASSINGTON

MEMBERS will have been shocked and saddened to learn of the death on 18 September of Marion Brassington, the Society's secretary until recently. Marion was involved with many different Spalding organisations and worked enthusiastically for them all. They will all, I'm sure, miss her as much as will the Civic Society.

Marion was secretary of the Society for many years – perhaps one of its longest-serving secretaries – work much appreciated by the committee and members. She was very interested in, and enthusiastic about, the history of Spalding and the surrounding district. She independently researched the history of many Spalding houses and churches in the area, and published a number of books and pamphlets on the subject.

Marion will be greatly missed by many, not least by me. I was glad to call her my friend for over 40 years. **Vivien Berry** (*sometime Chairman of the Society*)

Marion was a mine of information about local history and the history of the Parish Church. We did a number of guided tours of the church together and whenever someone asked a question that went beyond my limited knowledge, I never doubted that she would have the answer.



She was churchwarden and an active member of the Friends of St. Mary and St. Nicolas Church and last year became its chair. One of the projects she was keen to see completed was the renovation of the statue of Elizabeth Johnson, 'The White Lady', to be found on the south side of the church.

Marion contributed to a number of the church guides. She helped to update *The History of a Fenland Parish* and played a major part in the revised Church Guide, published just after I came to Spalding. She was the main author of guides to the stained-glass windows, the hatchments and, with which I assisted her, the memorials; and of leaflets on the chancel ceiling and the lives of John Perry and Robert Ram. **David Jones** (Vice-Chairman)

Marion had also been a member of the Gentlemen's Society since the 1970s. She was working in Spalding Library and in her spare time helped to catalogue the Gentlemen's Society library. Retirement saw her developing and managing a computer base for it to replace the old card index system. "She was not afraid to let people know if they got something wrong," recalls **Tom Grimes**, the Society's President, "but at the same time always very willing to help them in their research."

◀ *Page 1*] opportunity of contributing to the work of delivering a town in which we can all feel pride.

As these meetings are expected to be monthly, the Society will be providing updates on how we feel that the discussions are proceeding and we will be sharing our thoughts, and our input to the discussion via our website, and we will of course update you in future newsletters.

Besides the Town Centre Regeneration, one other significant development over the summer has been

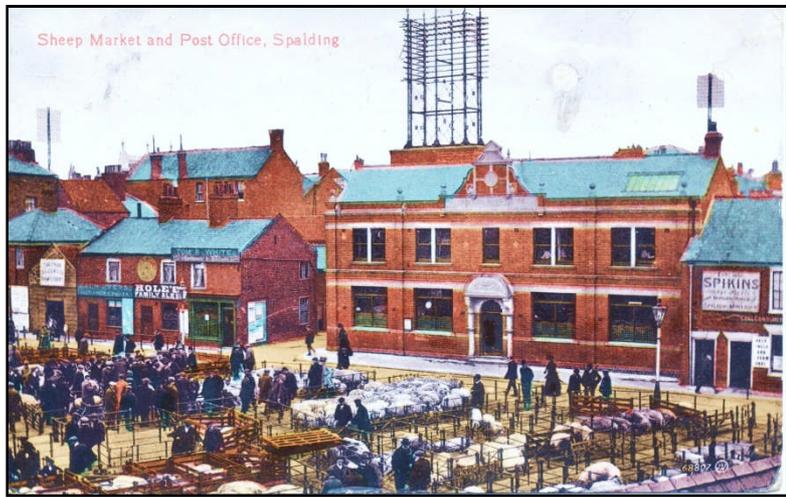
the consultation on the government's planning reforms, which closes on the 29th October. If you have not already done so, do have a look at the consultation documents at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

We are working on a response, and if you have any thoughts about it, do let us know. **John Bland.**

FURTHER TO ...

the 1913 postcard
of the Sheepmarket
from
Pat Wensor's
collection



THE “UGLY STRUCTURE” on top of the Post Office would not have been for *telegraphs*, as the last Newsletter had it, but would most likely have been for the distribution of *telephone* lines. The telephone pole on the extreme right of the postcard is the top of an 85-foot pole then in Francis Street (where there is a loading-bay now to the left of the *Free Press* Office), to which wires would have gone from the ugly structure. The similar 85-foot pole on the left of the postcard was right in the middle of Hall Place. A newspaper article about a London forerunner of Spalding’s distribution structure describes the “innumerable wires [radiating] in every possible direction over the dirty housetops of the City. Most of these wires are bare and unenclosed; others are in cables each

containing twenty wires” (*Pall Mall Gazette*, December 1883).

Long-distance trunk lines had to be of heavy gauge, as amplification was still a thing of the future. On the London to Edinburgh route, which passed through Bourne, each wire of a pair weighed 800 pounds to the mile. Two people in conversation, therefore, had nearly 300 tons of copper entirely to themselves for the duration of the call.

Back in Spalding, the telephone exchange was on the upper floor of the Post Office building in 1913. For *telegraphs* there would probably have been two or three morse keys. My uncle was a “sorting clerk and telegraphist” at that time. He didn’t do any sorting. He was on the counter, but would go and operate a morse key when needed. **John Tippler**

PLANNING MATTERS

THE BIG RECENT APPLICATION is the Springfields expansion. Now approved. Although the high-value goods they propose to sell in the extended section of their site would be unlikely to attract much custom if they were available in Spalding town centre, nevertheless we need to watch very carefully to make sure Springfields keep their part of the deal: i.e. to advertise the town centre and encourage customers to pop into the town and see what we have to offer. We look forward to the day when the Society’s Market Art trail becomes a destination in itself. Many of us will have seen *The Hiring* shown as an iconic piece of art recently on BBC TV – let’s hope that visitors to Springfields will wish to satisfy their curiosity and, while they are about it, browse around our shops.

There is, of course, a view that the expansion of Springfields has led to the planned closure of Hill’s department store; on the other hand, Springfields could have taken their business elsewhere, like Grantham for example. The main thing for us all to do is actually to patronise our town centre shops, and

hope that worthy successors are found to occupy the premises of Beale’s and Hill’s.

We hear that at long last a buyer has been found for the former GPO sorting office in the Crescent, so we may not be stuck with that eyesore for much longer. The neighbouring former fitness centre is also up for sale again. We hope, therefore, that the two sites can be taken as a combined whole, in a development worthy of its key location, rather than two fragmented sets of buildings.

We are also keeping our eye on the proposed housing development at Lock’s Mill Farm, off Cowbit Road, where all the houses are to be ‘affordable’. Outline permission was originally granted for 26 houses. The developers now want to make it 42 – which immediately suggests rabbit-hutch living. (Our minimum room-space regulations are the meanest in Europe.)

How long, one wonders, before SHDC Planning Department receives housing applications like the developments proposed for the outskirts of York? Zero carbon emissions, with energy coming from solar panels and air-source heat-pumps; [Page 5 ►

BETHANY STINSON

Town Centre Improvement Plan Coordinator



I HAVE LIVED in Spalding my whole life and know the area like the back of my hand! I am new to Local Government, however, my previous career having primarily involved the performing arts. I performed professionally as a dancer after training in teaching and performance and then went on to teach dance across many primary schools as part of their PE curriculum. I have also worked as a financial advisor for a Spalding bank. As a performer and teacher, providing people with a happy, positive and exciting experience is what I have found most satisfying.

My new rôle is to ensure the effective delivery of the Town Centre Improvement Plan projects. So I will be engaging directly with businesses, organisations, community groups and individuals to support them in delivering the projects that will transform our town centres for the future. “Town centres” should not be taken too literally, however. Which ever parts of Spalding and Holbeach can contribute to creating a safe, clean and vibrant environment, building confidence in our community and attracting more footfall to the centres, will be within my focus.

What do you think are some of the town centre’s most valuable features? We are so lucky to have a beautiful river running through the centre, with fabulous walking and cycling trails around it. A walk through the town reveals all of its history and heritage (Ayscoughfee Hall Museum and Gardens, Chain Bridge Forge, Spalding Gentlemen’s Society). Not to mention fascinating small quirks such as the blue plaque that reveals Jimi Hendrix once stayed at the Red Lion Hotel! And there’s the history of our Market Town and Sheep Market. Spalding is full of history and beauty and I am hopeful that the improvement plan will enhance these qualities.

A recurring feature of the *Holbeach and Spalding Town Improvement Works Report* is the need to increase footfall in the town centre. How do you think this might be achieved? As my rôle is to support and work with many individuals, businesses and organisations to shape and deliver projects, the improvement plans will be the outcome of a collective contribution. Therefore, the suggestions below are purely personal and have yet to be discussed in such a setting.

To get more residents using the centre to shop and socialise, a good start would be to enhance the

aesthetic appeal of public spaces within the town, beginning with street audits to identify areas where existing installations need improving and others where street furniture, planters, etc. need introducing. Secondly, a great way to induce greater footfall is to redefine and strengthen the street market, by engaging regularly with market stall-holders, providing regular specialist markets (such as food markets, youth markets, entertainment, etc.), and improving the market’s aesthetics through new signage, banners and advertisement. We are a market town and our market certainly has the potential and capability to increase footfall.

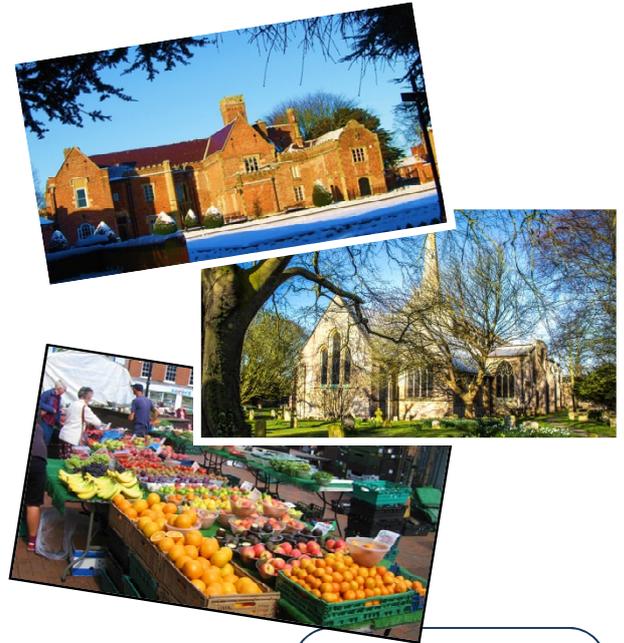
To attract outsiders to visit the town and return, I believe a town centre events programme for the future (Covid-secure) that celebrates our brand and heritage would attract visitors. Activities, shows, specialist markets and celebrations. Along with the clean, welcoming and vibrant aesthetic mentioned above. Arts trails are also a great way of improving the aesthetics of a place and I could see the Civic Society’s Market Art Project tying in nicely with some of the proposed themes of the Improvement Plan. I believe public art can certainly enhance spaces. I also hope the Council could look at potential talks and partnerships with Springfields to consider ways in which more of the Springfields visitors might include the town centre in their day’s visit.

Which of our assets do you think could be strengthened or developed to increase its attractiveness? We are very lucky with the assets we have. Short term, we need to “get the basics right”, especially since the pandemic: improvements to street furniture, planters, empty shop fronts, cleanliness and creating a safe, clean environment will ensure people’s confidence in our town centres. Long term, we can look at ways to enhance key sites such as the River Welland and Ayscoughfee.

Anything else you would like to add? I feel very privileged and thankful to be able to play a part in improving our town centres and I look forward to working with our businesses, individuals, organisations and partners to bring the plan to life. I am very passionate about creating a better future for the people, visitors and businesses of South Holland.



COWBIT, QUADRING SPALDING and WHAPLODE



Thirteen beautiful photographs of Spalding and round about, some well-loved views but others surprises. Interesting captions. Spaces for appointments, birthdays and reminders. The Society's A4 colour calendar is on sale at Bookmark and Spalding News, but only direct from the Society at the members' special discount price of £5.00. Free delivery locally. Otherwise add £2.50 per calendar for postage and packing. Would make ideal Christmas present. Please send cheques to: Melvyn Price, 3 Morus Close, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2QL.

Members' discount price
£5
 includes envelope

Please send me.....calendars @ £5.00/£7.50 each. I enclose a cheque for £..... made out to
Spalding and District Civic Society

Name..... Address

Tel..... Email

◀ Page 3] cars banished to the corners of the sites, with the streets devoted entirely to people, bicycles and play spaces; and, instead of tarmac driveways and dead-ends, generous green corridors permeating allotments and fruit trees. These particular developments are council-led, with 40% of the houses affordable.

There is a shortage of small homes for single workers locally. But it is no answer to attempt to

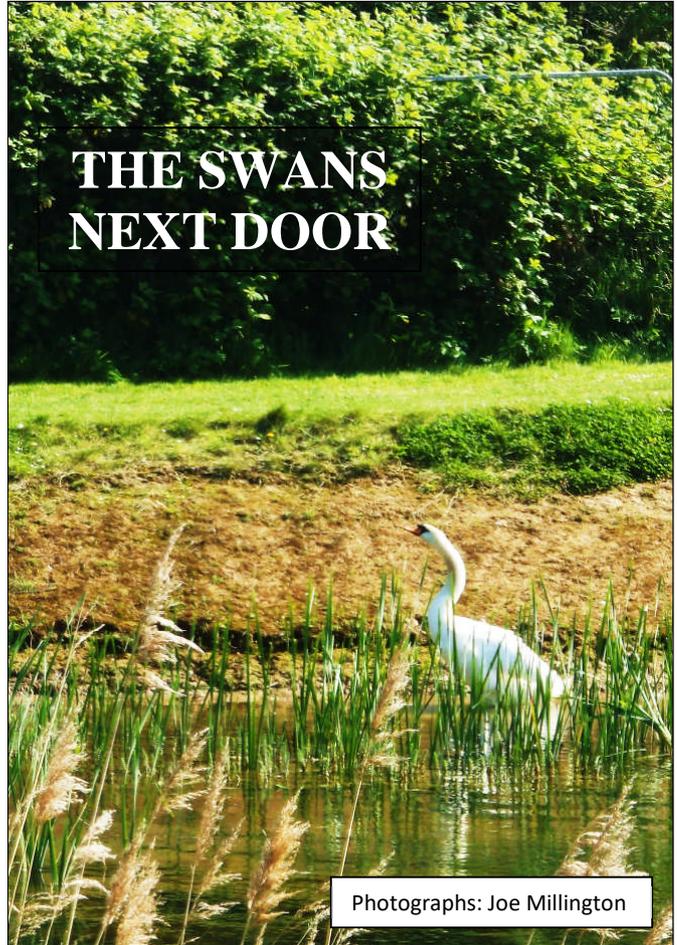
take over family homes to turn into HMOs (houses of multiple occupation) – as, for example, a recent application in West Elloe Avenue, which we opposed and the Council refused. If that kind of accommodation is what many people want and need, we must encourage their establishment in more appropriate places. The upper storeys of town-centre business premises is one possibility that comes to mind.

David Jones



IMMEDIATELY outside the boundary of Holland Park, the vast housing development now going up on Spalding Common, there is a largeish pond. In the spring a pair of swans built a nest there and raised four cygnets. As these grew larger, the pond was no longer able to sustain the family and the parents needed to bring them all to a larger stretch of water, such as the river. With the cygnets not yet able to fly, it would mean a walk. But the nearest way was now blocked by the developer's tall wire boundary fence.

So they set off, for the river – down Hawthorn Bank, along Winsover Road and through the town centre, protected from traffic (and photographed) by passers-by. The parent swans occasionally paused, and the cygnets sat down. It was well over a mile after all. Can any ornithologist member explain how the adult birds knew how to reach the river through this completely built-up area? It will be interesting to see if any of them return to the pond next year.



THE SWANS NEXT DOOR

Photographs: Joe Millington

SOCIETY NOTES

A WARM WELCOME to new member Graham Boor, who helped to get the big historic photographs installed on the side of Hughes Electrical in the Sheepmarket.

It is over a year now since the Addo Food Group donated *The Bakers* statue to our Market Art Project. We are still in discussion with the Council about its siting and are hoping for an outcome sooner rather than later.

We hope you like the 2021 calendar and will be con-

sidering some for Christmas presents, and encouraging friends and neighbours to buy, too. If it sells as well as last year's, we shall be on the lookout for photographs for a 2022 calendar and would like to include ones from a wider spread of members or their relatives and friends, so do have your camera or smart phone with you when you are out and about. Pictures which have a seasonal feel to them are particularly welcome.

SPALDING AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

I enclose a cheque for:- [] £8 for individual membership; [] £12 for 2 persons in the same household;
[] Free if in full-time education; [] Details of a standing order mandate

Please send to **Melvyn Price, 3 Morus Close, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2QL**

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Registered Charity Number 259956

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