

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2022

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

“Places are more than their councils. Place transformation comes through collaboration and partnership working across the public, private and civic sector.”

(Professor Cathy Parker, Co-Chair of the Institute of Place Management and research lead for the government's High Streets Task Force, 2020)

IN THE LAST NEWSLETTER, I drew attention to the lack of any *Statement of Community Involvement* on the SHDC website. This lack of transparency about how the Council will engage communities in the preliminary stages of plan-making has come home to roost with the Johnson Drinking Fountain (*see page 4*). Now that the leadership team and senior managers of the South Holland, Boston and East Lindsey partnership are in place, I hope that the production of a published *Statement of Community Involvement* on the three councils' websites will be treated as a matter of urgency.

In the case of South Holland, when such a *Statement* is put together, I hope that it will take heed of both the High Streets Task Force and the Institute of Place Management, whose guidance recognises the importance of civic societies.

At the beginning of the month, the Government identified 'pride of place' as a key measure of the levelling-up agenda. On the same day, the High Streets Task Force announced the names of a further 68 local authorities it will provide with expert

consultancy and training. Civic societies were specifically identified as partners that local authorities should engage with. Amongst those 68 fortunate authorities were our neighbouring authorities of Fenland, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, and Boston. But not South Holland. There is a real danger of South Holland getting left even further behind.

I hope that we will not have to wait until it is South Holland's turn to receive expert training before the Council accepts that it should work with local stakeholders, including the Society, in a genuine spirit of partnership, as Professor Parker above advises. A belated New Year's Resolution perhaps? To see the Society as being a partner in the regeneration that Spalding so desperately needs.

Finally, I would like to welcome to our number those who have joined the Society over the last year. I hope that members, old and new, will come to our AGM – *at the Baptist Church in Swan Street this year* – and perhaps even consider joining our committee. The more who are involved, the more we can do to promote and encourage Civic Pride in Spalding.

John Bland

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PLANNING MATTERS

THE JOHNSON HOSPITAL and the Bull and Monkey have been a disgrace and embarrassment to the town for decades. One can't get at the 'ultimate beneficial' owners of these properties, however, to press or shame them into action, as they hide behind off-shore trusts, and so their names and the names of others like them are not recorded in the Land Registry's records. We have called for **a change in the legislation** in order to get the names of these owners out into the open. It has the full support of Sir John Hayes, as reported in the last Newsletter.

The minister's reply, however, has been overtaken by events. A long-delayed bill to make the foreign ownership of UK properties transparent has now been strengthened and rushed forward to 7 March as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Transparency of ownership will make financial sanctions against those "using the UK property market to launder ill-gotten gains" easier and more effective – "particularly those linked to the Putin regime". It's not suggested, of course, that the secretive owners of the Johnson Hospital and the Bull and Monkey are money-laundering Russian oligarchs, but a side-effect of the strengthened bill may make it easier to get at the negligent off-shore owners of these properties – provided it deals with the *trust* loophole. In any case, it's a start.

Meanwhile, the Society has put in a strong objection to the proposals for the **former Royal Mail Sorting Office** in the Crescent. Not to demolish the eyesore but to turn it into shops with flats above. We have no objection in principle to shops and flats on the site, but the applicant sought to justify the retention of the building on the supposition that every building in a conservation area is of architectural or historic value and contributes to the conservation area's local character and distinctiveness. In any conservation area, however, there will be occasional buildings that have

a negative impact on its character. Often because they were built before the conservation area was created. The Sorting Office is a prime example. Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the local authority has a legal duty to "preserve and **enhance**" a conservation area. In the case of the Sorting Office it could be argued that demolition is the only way of



achieving that goal. The folly of the proposals can be seen above by the space allocated for customers' car parking. LCC Highways have unsurprisingly objected. We await the outcome of the application.

The planning application for **Calthrop's** former premises (Grade II listed) in the Market Place proposes the retention of the ground floor for office use, with the floors above converted to 12 flats. The SHDC Conservation Officer has no objection, as character features are being preserved and additional subdivisions will use fully reversible stud walling. If approved, we should like to see the option of a return to retail use reinstated and a condition attached for the cleaning of the brick- and stone-work of the frontage.

The application to demolish **Station House** on King's Road has been refused. We hope that the London-based applicant gets the message. They should be restoring a significant part of our local railway heritage, not demolishing it. **John Bland.**



February 2022

It's not often a pothole reveals a piece of history to immediate view. High Bridge was built in 1838 and the granite setts uncovered here may well have been the original surfacing of the bridge.



HAYES AND THE HOUSES

BEAUTY' AND 'BEAUTIFUL' are words rarely found in planning documents. Until recently, that is. Now, however, they have stepped forward into the spotlight of the revised *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF), no less – along with their partner phrase 'good design'.

Their new importance is clear: "The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental" (NPPF, §126). And local planning authorities are instructed: "**Development that is not well designed should be refused**" (§134).

The Society welcomes this new emphasis. Beautiful public spaces? Well-designed houses? Yes, please.

The snag, of course, is the vagueness of the key terms. What does 'beauty' mean, when it has to be applied equally to developments as diverse as power stations and primary schools, bandstands and bungalows, viaducts and village halls?

The revised NPPF therefore recognises the need to be more precise. A **well-designed** development, it spells out, will :-

- function well and improve the quality of the area;
- be visually attractive in its architecture, layout and landscaping;
- be sympathetic to local character and its setting (without discouraging innovation);
- create or maintain a strong sense of place;
- use the site to achieve a mixture (including green and other public spaces), with access to local facilities and transport networks;
- create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible, and that promote health and well-being;
- ensure new streets are tree-lined and incorporate existing trees elsewhere (§§130 & 131, *condensed*).

So how useful is this list going to be in helping planning committee members to justify their gut-feeling about a proposed development? Readers may like to test it out on the two examples of modern housing at the top of the page. Well designed or not? And why, according to the criteria above?

There is even more precise guidance in the government's *National Model Design Code* and

National Design Guide. Developers should have no excuse for third-rate designs. Or planning committees for accepting them. Further, local authorities are required to draw up *local* design guides as well, reflecting "local character and design preferences", whilst allowing "a suitable degree of variety" (§128).

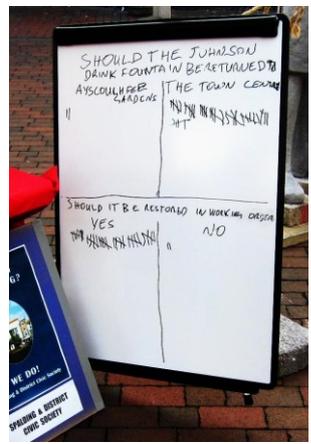
The advisory body set up to steer the two national design guides above is oddly named the Office of Place. On its board sits Sir John Hayes, the only MP appointed to the body. Its remit is "to support communities to turn their visions of beautiful design into local standards all new buildings [in their area] will be required to meet." It's potentially an important and influential body. And the people of South Holland, are fortunate to be in a position as his constituents to influence Sir John in their turn.

It would be useful, therefore – and interesting – to know which of the NPPF's bullet-points across Sir John feels South Holland could particularly benefit from. And is there anything he would like to add to the list?

It would also be interesting to have one or two photographs from Sir John of recent housing developments that he regards as beautiful or well-designed, and why. We should then have an idea of the kind of design features he will be seeking to get incorporated in the national design guides. The Office of Place has the opportunity to shape, for good or ill, the kind of homes and neighbourhoods people will be living in in years to come. How to ensure that those houses and neighbourhoods are beautiful, comely, well-designed, practical, comfortable and sustainable – and genuinely affordable – without creating a stifling uniformity that is the demanding and exciting challenge facing Sir John and his colleagues **John Charlesworth**.

□

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) recently singled out SHDC in its newsletter for setting a good example (*Fieldwork*, Winter 2021, p.13). By rejecting the Persimmon's housing proposals for Weston, the CPRE said, the Council had shown how the revised NPPF now empowered local communities **to insist on good design**.



Johnson Drinking Fountain

WHY WE HAVE LAUNCHED A PETITION

ONE OF THE SOCIETY'S longstanding aims has been to see the Johnson Drinking Fountain returned to the town centre, as a working fountain. Amongst other desirables, this would enable it to be part of the solution to plastic pollution in general and would help reduce the amount of waste from single-use plastics, such as water bottles, that the Council has to dispose of.

The Society has identified a number of funding sources that we believe could be explored to help finance the cost of restoring the fountain. They are:-

- **Anglian Water Services.** I feel an approach would be appropriate in view of the many years in which The Chatterton Tower was their HQ before privatisation. Their website suggests that they would be able to provide the expertise to connect the water supply free of charge. <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/community/community-volunteering/>

They are also actively involved in the regeneration of Wisbech. <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/community/wtoisbech-regeneration/> Would they be willing to contribute towards the cost of restoration?

- **The Drinking Fountain Association** would be another potential source for expertise and a possible grant (up to £2,000). <http://www.drinkingfountains.org/>

- **Heritage Lottery Fund** – <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/national-lottery-grants-heritage-10k-250k>

- **Historic England** – <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/grants/our-grant-schemes/>

- **Crowd funding.** Many people in the town would like to see the fountain restored. How much could be raised through a public appeal?

We have also identified a number of examples of historic drinking fountains being restored to working order, some quite recently.

- **The Bristol Fountain in Sleaford** was restored thanks to a Heritage Lottery Grant of £34,000, plus local donations, during 2019.

- Water supply was restored to **North Walsham Drinking Fountain** during 2020

- **The Tomblands Fountain in Norwich** was restored during 2020 for less than £30,000.

- A drinking fountain just metres from **Turnham Green Underground Station in Hounslow** was

restored during 2020 at a cost of £14,000 with the support of Thames Water.

- A second drinking fountain in **Hounslow** saw very extensive restoration during 2020, with its water supply being restored for the first time in 50 years.

- **The Bear Flat Drinking Fountain in Bath** is being restored to working order as part of a regeneration project.

It had been our hope that, through the town centre regeneration Steering Group, there would be an opportunity to explore the viability of various sites in the town and to explore the funding solutions that the Society has identified to arrive at some fully costed options, which could then have been put to the public for their say. It is a matter of regret that this course of genuine engagement with the community has not been followed. Instead, we received a phone call, just a few days before an announcement was to be made, informing us that a Council sub-committee had decided to return the fountain to Ayscoughfee Gardens.

We were told that the matter had been discussed at length in numerous meetings. We have requested sight of the minutes of those meetings but, at the time of writing, have not been supplied with them. This lack of engagement is one of the reasons why we have launched our petition calling for the Johnson Drinking Fountain to be restored to the town centre in full working order.

The Society has for years put forward proposals that would have made a real difference to the town. A consistent element has been the restoration of the Johnson Drinking Fountain to the town centre. As reported recently by the *Spalding Guardian*, 30 years ago external town planning consultants came to the same conclusion as we have: the Johnson Drinking Fountain must be returned to the town centre. If you are not amongst the hundreds who have already signed our petition, it can easily be found at <https://chng.it/btqLPwXFJc>.

Given the public reaction in support of our campaign, we hope that the Council may yet come back to the table and engage in meaningful discussions with the Society and other stakeholders, which is what it should have done over the last year.

John Bland



PROGRESS REPORT: SLOW

WHERE have *The Bakers* been since they joined the Society's Market Art Project in late 2019? For the past two years or so the figures have lain supine

in a shed in Pinchbeck like mediaeval effigies in a fenland church. Then, back on their feet, they made a brief appearance in Hall Place on February's blustery SuperSaturday, and are now in Lincoln for some specialist treatment.

So why is it all taking so long? First, there was finding the right location for the sculpture. Our first two choices – near the Magistrates Court or on the grassed area in Double Street next to the Lincolnshire Poacher – proved unacceptable. It was Ian Marshman's inspired idea of adding some trees that brought us back to Swan Walk, a site we'd previously rejected as too bleak. Statue and trees

Then there was the need to choose a spot that did not turn out to stand the statue right on top of a gas pipe or an electricity cable. We thought it would be a simple, straightforward job to find out where in Swan Walk the utilities' pipes and cables run. There'd be a map somewhere showing where they all are. Not a bit of it. Each utility would have to be contacted separately.

Anglian Water do not supply maps, having outsourced their mapping rights to an outside firm, which would have charged an extortionate £72, we discovered, for two A4 photo-copies, one for water, one for sewage. (We found another source.)

It took two months to find out the line of the electricity cable supplying the Swan Walk streetlight; during which time we were misinformed about who owned the light and learned that the electricity supply company does not have maps of the spurs that connect streetlights to a mains cable.

And so on

We'd thought statue and trees might all be installed by the end of March. It now looks more like the autumn – we hope!



Photo montage to give an idea of how it could look

together, however, will create a distinctive place – computer montage above – out of what is at present a bare, featureless space that people simply walk through on their way to somewhere else. (It would, incidentally, be very much in line with the government's revised *National Planning Policy Framework*, with its new emphasis on place-making and street trees – see 'Hayes and the Houses', p.3).

[Many thanks to Nick Pitts for the storage space in Pinchbeck. Ian Marshman is the LCC Historic Environment Officer and Chairman of the Heritage Sub-Group for the SHDC regeneration of the town centre. The Society is working in partnership with Transported Art on the Market Art Project, which will make a striking contribution to the Council's town centre regeneration programme.]



THE DAFFODIL ROUTE

WE READ IN THE PAPERS that the Daffodil Route is to be refurbished – but many people will no longer be aware of what and where the Daffodil Route is.

Around the turn of the century, LCC Highways wanted to draw attention to the possibilities of cycling. To do so, they set up designated cycle routes named after different flowers. The first one was the **Tulip Route**. This runs from Springfields to the town centre, via Queen’s Road, St.Paul’s Road, the Twin Bridges and the riverside path, ending at the Holland Road footbridge.

The **Crocus Route** has less specific destinations. It seems to begin near the Grammar School and heads up Welland Road, over the footbridge and along Bratley’s Walk, past the Parish Church School, along Matmore Gate and out towards the A16.

The **Daffodil Route** was originally planned to link the town centre to the Wardentree Lane Industrial estate, starting at the town end of Pinchbeck Road, following it on the west side as far as the cemetery gates and then on the old railway track-bed to Wardentree Lane. Detailed changes have taken place in the meantime, and now the route starts just north of the cemetery gates and connects with Moortoft Lane as it heads to Wardentree Lane.

One of the conditions on the opening of the new Johnson Community Hospital was that the Daffodil Route was to have been made fully serviceable by then. South Holland District Council failed to com-

ply with this condition. As a result, people do not see the Daffodil Route as a favoured way to get to the hospital– as had been hoped. It would have been a great opportunity to reduce the number of cars on the road. However, all the Council did was to lay some inappropriately coarse gravel on the railway track-bed as far as the Vernatt’s bridge. In 2010, PEDALS involved the Ombudsman, who found in our favour, and as a result the SHDC was supposed to spend £7000 on improvements.

In more recent years, some S106 money has become available from the power station, to improve links from Spalding to the industrial area. PEDALS has had some productive meetings with SHDC officers, and we look forward to the route receiving a proper porous surface, which should make cycling and walking comfortable and free of potholes and puddles.

Those who cycle and walk their dogs along the route enjoy a delightful path, quite rural in nature, skirting the Vernatt’s nature reserve, and the whole area ought to be a vital element in SHDC’s tourist offer. I do wonder if they will spot this potential resource, or whether they will just repeat their slow response to the Civic Society’s efforts towards making the town more attractive, notably through the Market Art trail and the drive to see the Johnson Drinking Fountain back in the centre again. Is the road to hell paved with missed opportunities?

David Jones (PEDALS Chairman)



Perhaps a suitable spot could be found for a drift of daffodils somewhere along the route? Editor.

SPALDING AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

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[] Free if in full-time education; [] Details of a standing order mandate

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SPALDING BAPTIST CHURCH

SWAN STREET, SPALDING

**Tuesday, 15 March
7.30 pm**

250 Years of Local News

plus

Illustrated talk by

David Jacobs

News stories about Spalding and its surrounding villages found in newspapers from America, Canada, Australia and around the UK from the 18th century to the 1970s.

Funny, sad, strange and gruesome.

Everything from bomb-throwing schoolboys to naked cricket, and a vicar refereeing women’s wrestling, and a lot more in between.

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

WORK ON OUR WEBSITE continues apace. Besides refreshing our home page, we have added a new section called *What the Papers Said*. We want to build up an archive of news reports of significant events that have taken place in the town, or of news stories relating to significant buildings or features of the town. These will be full transcriptions of the news stories as they appeared at the time. The newspapers from which the extracts are taken have been digitised and form part of the British Newspaper Archive. The first two topics to go live in our new section are the Johnson Drinking Fountain and the Johnson Hospital. Here is a sample of the sort of thing you’ll find:-

Stamford Mercury

FRIDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER, 1875

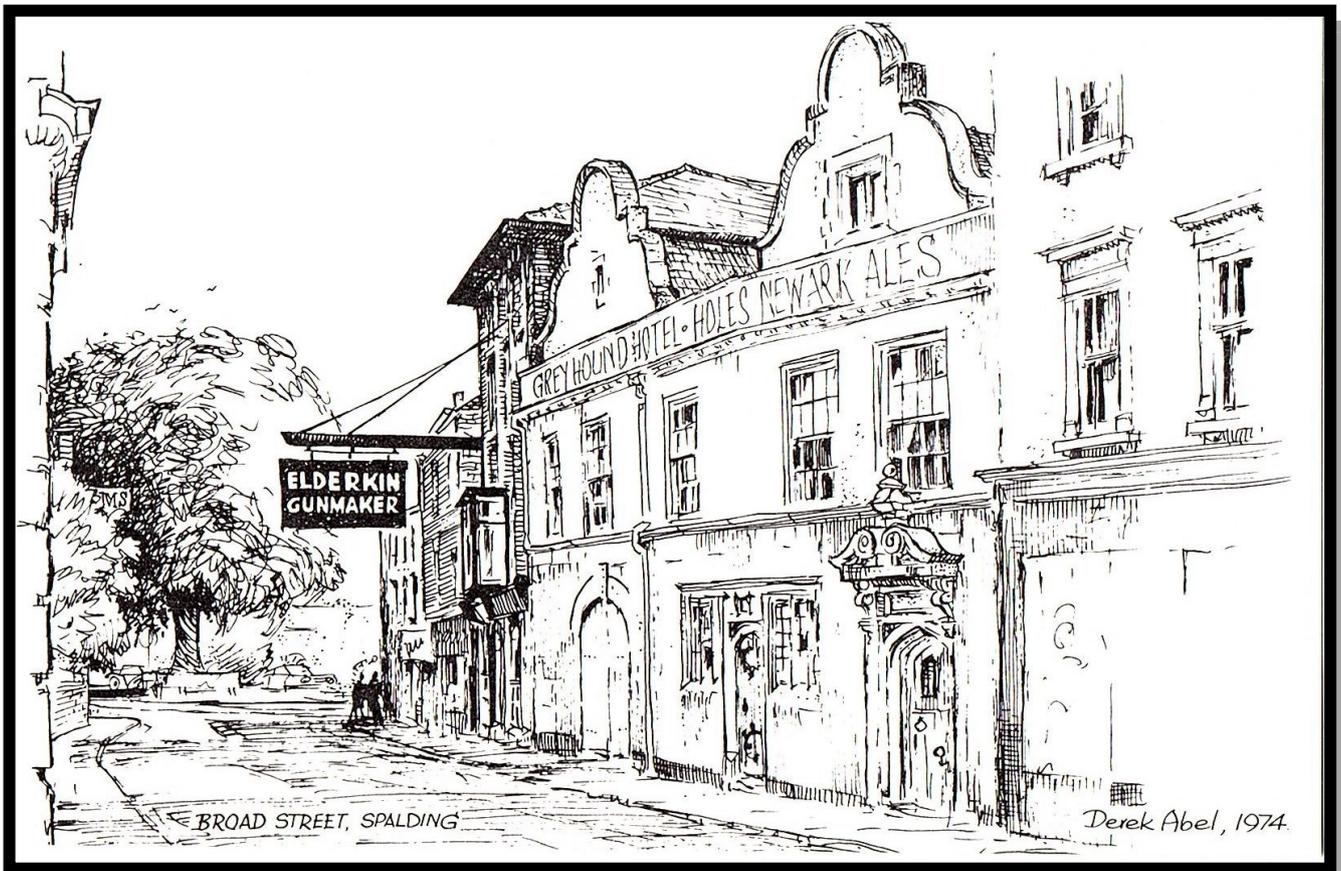
Accident. — On Saturday last a waggon and two horses, the property of Mr. David Smith, which were passing through the Market Place Spalding, were frightened by a boy snapping a whip. They became unmanageable and bolted in the direction of Hall Place, getting into collision with the new fountain erected about twelve months since by Miss Johnson, of Fairfax House. Happily, they had not ran far enough to have attained very great speed, or the fountain must have received material damage; it escaped with few chips and scratches.

SOCIETY NOTES

A WARM WELCOME to new member **Mark Loosemore**.

The Society’s 2022 calendar proved a big success. Our initial order sold out completely and we had to put in a supplementary order. Both Bookmark and Spalding News sold out their orders; likewise with the extra copies they asked for. We hope you’ll keep in mind the possibility of contributing to the 2023 calendar when you’re out and about. Familiar scenes and the out-of-way both welcome.

Society members Vivien Berry and David Jones kicked off the New Year with letters published in the national press (in consecutive issues of *The Guardian* at the beginning of January). Vivien’s was about a less than useful domestic science lesson they had had at school. David’s letter read: “Of course [the All England Lawn Tennis Club] should not build over Capability Brown’s wonderful handiwork at Wimbledon – but have they thought of moving the whole thing to somewhere like the Hull area? That would be a massive step towards ‘levelling up’.”



1970s SPALDING



- Broad Street
- Church Street
- Double Street
- Church Gate and Cowbit Road

SALE
at the AGM

PRINTS, POSTCARDS (10 pack), NOTELETS (10 pack) – £1 each

Talented artist Derek Abel was advertising manager at the *Lincolnshire Free Press* and a member of the Society in its early years.

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