

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November 2022

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

“The council should have engaged with the public a lot more and seen where the preference would have been, but we didn’t do that.”

“I think it’s an example of how not to ingratiate yourself with the public.”

THESE WERE JUST TWO of the comments made by councillors on the Planning Committee that approved the plan to return the Johnson Drinking Fountain to Ayscoughfee Gardens. [See p.4 for more.] They were right. The Council’s proposal was developed without any open and transparent pre-application discussion to explore all potential options. As a result it has shattered the trust that many had in the Council’s plan-making process.

Those who pursued these plans failed to engage with the Society and other interested parties on the future of the Drinking Fountain or with the wider public of Spalding, despite the many public requests for that to happen. They have pursued a plan that potentially commits the District Council to spending an estimated £24,000 of public money without exploring other options, including sources of external funding.

The situation that has arisen must never happen again in Spalding. Back in November 2021, I highlighted that South Holland District Council has failed to publish a *Statement of Community Involvement* on its website, despite it being a legal requirement for it to do so. If trust in the way that the Council produces its own planning proposals in South Holland is to be restored, then it needs to fulfil its legal obligation and publish a *Statement of Community Involvement* in the plan making process at the earliest opportunity. The *Statement of Community Involvement* published by East Lindsey District Council in December 2020 would be a good starting point.

This document includes the following statements: -

“Prior to an applicant or developer submitting a planning application, applicants or developers are encouraged to discuss the proposals with the owners / occupiers of neighbouring land / premises before making an application. This will assist in resolving any objections and conflict prior to a formal planning application being submitted.”

and

“In addition, for significant development schemes, there is a statutory requirement for applicants or developers to carry out their own early consultation with the local community to inform the application process, as set out in the Localism Act 2011. with district, town or parish Councillors, neighbourhood plan steering groups or making information available. Such consultation methods could include community consultation events, public meetings, meetings available either via a website, leaflets and posters or contacting residents and businesses by writing to them.”

The applicant in this case of course is South Holland District Council itself. If it had been required to meet the above pre-application consultation requirements, then the situation facing the Planning Committee when having to consider the Council’s own planning application would not have occurred. The Council would have had to engage with those who have an interest in the future of the Fountain *before it submitted its application*. There is every likelihood that an alternative proposal would have been developed through those discussions – one that would see the Fountain restored to the town centre in working order and potentially at less cost to the local taxpayers.

Whilst we cannot rule out the possibility that the Society could ask the planning ombudsman to review the decision-making processes that led to the decision to return the Drinking Fountain to Ayscoughfee Gardens, I hope that the Council will still be open to exploring alternative options that could save £24,000 of council tax payers’ money, which could be better spent in the difficult times ahead. To take one alternative example: could the Johnson Drinking Fountain be considered an Asset of Community Value? Under this arrangement, a community group could be potentially established to take on the ownership of the Drinking Fountain.

Given how the public have supported the Flower Parade venture, is it beyond the realms of possibility that there are enough in the town who want to see the Johnson Drinking Fountain returned to the town centre who would be willing to come together to make that happen?

John Bland



PLANNING MATTERS

A LOT HAS HAPPENED on the planning front since the summer. Our frustrations over the Johnson Drinking Fountain can be found on Pages 1, 4 & 5. Merkur Slots is dealt with on Page 6. So I will pick up on some of the other developments in the town.

The changes to the front of the former Great Northern Hotel [left], made without permission, are one of the worst examples of visual vandalism to a building that we have seen for a long time. In our objection to the retrospective application we took the opportunity to urge the need for a policy to tackle the high number of blanked-out frontages disfiguring the town. Visually evident from the Conservation Area, this new advert-smothered frontage breaches Policy 29 of the *South Lincolnshire Local Plan*. The policy requires that proposals affecting views out from a conservation area preserve features that contribute positively to the area's character, appearance and setting. In particular, it requires an application to mitigate against any negative impact a proposal might have on the townscape. The space covered by the advertisements is also well over the maximum limits set out by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007.



◀◀ Winsover Road
◀ The Sheepmarket

We are pleased to note that the Great Northern application has been refused and hope that, following the appearance of yet more blanked out shop frontages (*above*), the Council takes action to ensure that a special control order under Schedule 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 is implemented without any further delay.

The increasing number of applications to turn redundant space over town centre shops into flats will strengthen the case for returning the Johnson Drinking Fountain to the town centre, as more people living there must surely reduce the risk of vandalism. This trend should also be seen as an opportunity to regenerate some of our historic buildings in the town centre – an opportunity not always being taken up. Take the application to turn the former Calthrop's offices into 12 flats. We urged that approval should contain a condition to ensure that the external brick- and stone-work be cleaned. Disappointingly, however, the planning officer's report only said that a "minimal cleaning approach is to be taken, to reduce impacts upon the external fabric of the building". How on earth is the appearance of our town centre going to be improved, if decades of grime from smoke and traffic pollution are not cleaned from our historic buildings when the opportunity arises?

We were also disappointed that the planning officer's report did not take up our comments that the continued use of fossil fuels to heat this building should be reviewed as part of the conversion. Historic England have a number of resources on energy efficiency. They recommend a whole-building approach for best results. Surely, the time to do this is when a building is undergoing a major internal refit, as Calthrop's is. Spiralling energy costs demand that any opportunity to enhance the sustainability of a building must be taken. We will continue to highlight this when responding to future applications. **John Bland**



FIVE STARS AGAIN

TO REPEAT last year's marvellous Pumpkin Festival was never going to be easy, but the challenge was met comfortably – sunshine included. The town centre was full of people again, especially families with youngsters.

Bridge Street, alias Pumpkin Street, had become a gallery, an exhibition of wit and inventiveness as well as skill. A pumpkin-head farmer with fork and pumpkin nesting box had seeds to sell, and small birds perched to snatch a snack. Another pumpkin-head was driving his ancient pick-up to market with a load of pumpkins and squashes, all shades and sizes. A pumpkin crossing-keeper said “STOP!” to ants and advancing pumpkin--snails.....

Music, from a bus. Balloons on strings: Mickey Mouse, dinosaurs, dalmations; smaller balloons massaged into pistols, sabres, flowers. A drum tapping. Morris dancers, green-faced and be-ribboned. Food, from pizzas to cookies, fudge to hot dogs, coffee, cans; fruit and veg. and fish from the weekly stalls to take home if you wanted. Tables and parasols at the Red Lion. There were more food stalls and trailers than last year, so no-one had to queue.

There *were* queues, though, of youngsters – for the popular face-painting, for candy floss and for tours inside a proper fire-engine. The really young children are often an entertainment in themselves, with their fierce concentration and pushing away of mum's helping hand, rolling and stamping clay (Transported) for ceramic flowers that will become part of a mural later; felt-penning and stickering small pumpkins (SHDC) into grinning or grimacing heads to take home proudly; brother and sister perching astride the huge Harley-Pumkinson at the flower stall; a five-year-old steering both his own and his younger brother's pedal-tractor simultane-

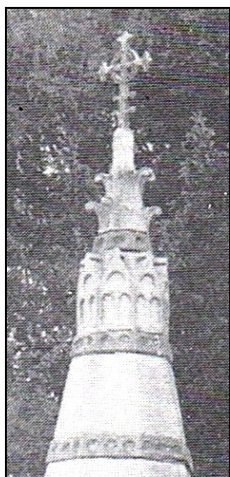
ously, hoping to prevent the three-year-old veering off into the straw-bales.

Local organisations with home-made cakes and charity stalls handing out sweets. Cinderella, Prince Charming and the Ugly Sisters handing out leaflets. A Council womble with mobile bin and picker, so the ground was kept free of squalid rubbish – they'd thought of everything. Music, on a stage. Three teenage girls teaching their boyfriends the latest dance-craze, not with much success. A trailer with rainbow heaps of knitted or crocheted flowers for next May's Flower Parade.

And those absolute essentials of any fair, whatever its size – rides, stalls or contraptions that challenge, let you compete or show off. Prizes don't matter. Most of all, something that offers a tingle of risk or daring. Even Hook-a-Duck challenges. Whack-a-Mole (home-made or electronic) – are your reaction times faster than your dad's? The Bungee-Trampoline at the Magistrates Court ticked all the boxes – ‘Can I get the hang of it before my mate?what if the harness breaks?.....or I miss the tramp when I'm coming down?.....doing OK now..... funny feeling in your stomach when you're flying up and bombing down.....can I make it go higher than that girl?.....she doesn't seem to make any effort.....turning somersaults as well..... showing off.....bet I could do itwhat if I get tangled up? blast, time's up p'raps as wellhope it's here next year’

Thank you, SHDC's community team, for another marvellous community occasion and all the hard work and organisation – and imagination – required to put on an event of this size and complexity. You did the town proud. And we look forward to the Christmas Fair.

John Charlesworth



FOUNTAIN MISCELLANY

THE LESSON

- The process has shown “poor planning”. **Councillor Paul Redgrave.**
- I’m disappointed “the plan did not explore all possible options for the fountain in more detail”. **Councillor Harry Bingham.**
- “It should be a drinking fountain.” **Councillor Chris Brewis.**
- “I want to be a voice for [the public]. The voices that I have heard say they do not want it [in Ayscoughfee Gardens]....There should have been a public consultation.” **Councillor Rob Gibson.**
- “What we should have done is engage with the public a bit more. A lot more.” **Councillor Andrew Woolf.**
- “I think it’s an example of how not to ingratiate yourself with the public.” **Councillor Jim Astill.**
- “The council should have engaged with the public a lot more and seen where the preference would have been, but we didn’t do that. ... It’s the lesson we should be learning.” **Councillor Andrew Woolf.**

(Planning Committee debate on the application to resite the Johnson Drinking Fountain in Ayscoughfee Gardens, September 2022.) The Society’s views exactly.

Eleanor Crosses

“The design [of the Johnson Fountain] appears to have been inspired by the octagonal tiered form of the medieval Eleanor Crosses erected by King Edward I [1272-1307] in honour of his wife Eleanor of Castile, three of which were erected in Lincolnshire at Lincoln, Grantham and Stamford, although none survive. The Fountain may also have been intended to reference the lost medieval cross that formerly stood in Spalding’s Market Place.” **Ian Marshman**, LCC Historic Environment Officer (*part of his response to the planning application*).

SECURITY

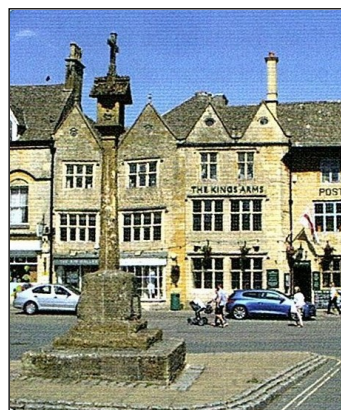
In rejecting a town centre site for the Fountain the application says: “Society has changed since 1874 and sadly the abuse of public property, including undesirable use, graffiti and general damage, is a common problem in the current era.” This seems, however, to be uninformed supposition. A Freedom of Information request revealed that no-one had made any attempt to gain information about the likelihood

of damage, etc., either from the Drinking Fountains Association, with its extensive knowledge of heritage fountains, or by contacting other local authorities with historic drinking fountains and market crosses in town

centres. Have these authorities felt the need to lock up their heritage monuments at night or cosset them with railings to keep people away? Photographs of such town centre monuments, from central London to Cotswolds market towns, show otherwise.

Stowe-in-the Wold’s ancient market cross (*above right*) has no keep-off railings, even though market stalls are set up alongside it each week.

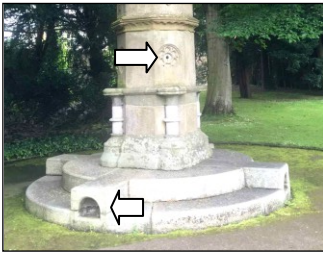
Wimbledon’s historic town centre drinking fountain (*right*), photographed before its restoration to full working order, will of course, by definition, invite people to come very close indeed. (Cost of connecting the fountain to the water supply? £2225)



SPOUTS AND RABBIT-HOLES

How did the Johnson Drinking Fountain actually work? No-one who was a youngster when the Fountain still stood in Hall Place seems to be able to remember how you got the water to flow from one of the spouts (*next page, top arrow*). Did it perhaps run all the time or was there some sort of tap or spigot? Or even a spring-loaded button?

If any member knows someone who was a youngster back in the 1950s, before the Fountain was dismantled in 1954, please ask them if they remember. We should love to know. (Contact details on the back page.) Re-erected in Ayscoughfee Gardens, the Fountain no longer had any purpose, being unconnected to a water supply. [Continued ►

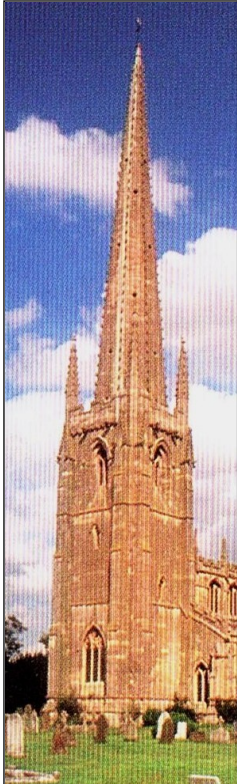


Fountain. The most likely explanation is that the Fountain supplied drinking water not only for

Another unknown is the purpose of the four 'rabbit-holes' (lower arrow) in the granite round the base of the

Spalding people visiting the town centre, but for their dogs as well. The Wimbledon fountain would seem to confirm this (see p.4). The Johnson Drinking Fountain was better thought out than Wimbledon's, however, as human and canine drinking-points are staggered, so the users don't get in each other's way.

GRAFFITI



There's always some risk of harm in spaces to which the public has free access – ask the Romans of Pompeii about their graffiti – but one wonders if human nature has changed all that much over the centuries. Closer to home in time and place, there are mediaeval graffiti in Stetchworth village church in Cambridgeshire. Scratched into a pillar near the pulpit is a woman's head in an enormous head-dress, like bulbous headphones – a mediaeval mickey-take, it seems, poking fun at the fashionable ladies up at The House, especially as there's an owl scratched nearby in the same sort of head-dress and, yes, a pussycat! (Inspiration for

Edward Lear?) Rubbings of the graffiti are pictured in the church leaflet, clearly now considered a visitor attraction. Again, on a pillar at the back of the church are the initials **TG** three times, close together and deeply cut, with **1677** underneath. Very definitely **TG** 'waz here', nearly 350 years ago, working quietly away perhaps during the vicar's interminable sermons, hidden by the pillar.

Even closer to home is Brant Broughton (above), where, in the church's south porch, a mediaeval stone mason left his subversive mark in carvings a contributor to the *Gentlemen's Magazine* in February 1809 regarded as "too indelicate to be permitted to occupy one of your plates" (*The Lincolnshire*

Village Book, 1990, compiled from contributions from local Women's Institutes). A North Kesteven District Council tourist leaflet promoting the area's beautiful churches is more explicit about these three-dimensional graffiti: one of the rude carvings is of "a man showing his bottom". Hundreds of years later, a young man climbed the church spire and then spent hours recording his exploit in the stones of the same south porch. He too 'waz here'.

More surprising are two of the names scratched in the window panes of Shakespeare's birthplace: **Charles Dickens** and **Walter Scott**.

Over time the outrageous become cherished assets. Not just as a visitor attraction either, but also as evidence for a social historian of aspects of life in the past unworthy of official records.

This is not in any way to condone the defacing of public buildings or structures; even less to invite would-be graffitiists to assist future historians. It is, rather, to question the planning application's simplistic notion that "abuse of public property" is much worse "in the current era" than in the past. It's more complex than that. One may doubt much change from Roman times in this side of human nature or from the years after the Civil War or from 1874. What *has* changed is the invention of the felt marker and the spray can, making it so much quicker and easier to leave a large-scale mark of your presence. It's the consequences that are different rather than the human impulse.

Given this and the importance of choosing the right place for the Fountain, one would have hoped for more than trite platitudes to bolster the choice of site. There should, surely, have been some investigation into whether other local authorities have found their heritage monuments particularly prone to graffiti or not. There was no such investigation.

Missing

The photograph is one of a sequence taken when the Fountain was being dismantled in 2018, before being stored. It shows the top two pinnacle stones. It is these that were discovered to be missing when the dismantled stones were independently inspected in January 2022. The metal cross from the very top had also gone missing at some point, but was later found. So far as we know, the stones are still missing.

Photo courtesy Ayscoughfee Hall Museum



MUCH APPRECIATED

● THE TOWN CENTRE SHOPS whose pumpkin-cum-Halloween displays brightened up the end of October. **Calthrop's** (*right*, competition winners) had an autumnal gardening theme, while **Hughes Electrical** (runner-up) went for Halloween spookiness, meticulously set out in the centre-window. **Coney's Department Store**, **Inkley's Man's Shop** and **Flowers'n' Things** were amongst others putting on attractive displays. Refreshingly unexpected were **K-Collective's** cool, elegant Halloween window in white, black and mushroom shades; and **Molsom's** optician's Hogwarts tribute, with Hedwig (the white owl) presiding over a stack of Harry Potter books amidst wizarding wands, spells and potions, Hogwarts house ties and scarves, and (yes, of course) Potter-style spectacles.

It's undoubtably encouraging to have town centre businesses enlivening the shopping or visitor experience in this way. And, as with the Platinum Jubilee displays, it's the local independents that

make the effort. When are the big nationals going to join in?

● All the sponsoring businesses for particularly fine **hanging baskets** this year. And, we understand, the two volunteers who have looked after their watering.

● **The Ayscoughfee Hall gardening team** for the garden's flower beds kept flourishing throughout the drought months.

● **No.62 St.Thomas's Road**, now cleared and smartened up after several years increasingly smothered in ivy.

● **Stephen Timewell** for his strenuous work to get the Flower Parade going again, which has fired up the support of so many people and businesses now.



MERKUR SLOTS

OR should that be **MURKY SLOTS** ? No-one wanted another gaming set-up in the town centre – there are six already at least – and the company seems to have done its best to alienate people still further.

“Looks like a funeral parlour” ... “Depressing colour” ... and (sarcastically) “Blends right in with our lovely market town” (Facebook comments).

Depressing – *and* unfinished. The dormer windows remain untouched and dilapidated. And why spend money on refurbishing the traditional

moulded pilasters and consoles of a traditional shop front and then leave the fascia incongruously without the traditional matching moulded border.

Equally difficult to understand is the black shroud, as black paint makes the refurbished detailing virtually invisible. (Planning authorities are not required to bow down to corporate images or colour schemes.) Dark blue, green or maroon would have been traditional colours for a traditional shop front. The small picture shows what could have been done (Curtis's in the Market Place about 2010). Even white window frames and glazing bars would be a win, with the stone sills restored to their natural colour.

If memory serves, a company spokesperson said they hoped to make themselves part of the community (or words to that effect). The quickest way Merkur Slots could do that would be to revise their frontage forthwith – in a way that respects the conservation area, unlike the Den-of-Doom image at present on display in Hall Place. We will try.





Thirteen beautiful photographs of Spalding and round about, some expected ones – Ayscoughfee Gardens, the river – but others unexpected. The village statue that takes you by surprise; a mid-summer winter. Interesting captions. **New format with bigger pictures and more space for appointments, birthdays and reminders.** On sale to the public at Bookmark, Spalding News and Birchgrove Garden Centre, 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.

Members' discount price

£5

includes envelope

Please send cheques to: Melvyn Price, 3 Morus Close, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2QL.

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

Name Address

Tel. Email

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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