

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

June 2016

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

FIRSTLY I should like to extend a warm public welcome to Stephanie Hewat-Jaboor, who has come on to the Committee and is sharing her ideas with us. There is still room for others to join us, and a number of tasks that we could do better with more manpower – or should I say ‘person-power’? We have some ideas for excursions and visits but could do with a person who enjoys planning and coordinating them. Much of the publicity of our work in the Press is handled by John Charlesworth, and I know he would be grateful for some relief.

Meanwhile, our vital work to protect Spalding for the future and enhance its attractiveness continues, as you can see from elsewhere in this Newsletter.

At this point I should like to share with you a concern I have with my PEDALS hat on. At the same time as the planning application to build on the Severn Road Playing Field appeared, there was also one for building houses on a second piece of Council-owned land. That is, the site of some garages in Parkside Crescent, just to the west of the Steppingstone Lane footbridge. Not only will some of the houses (the ‘affordable’ ones, of course) lack

privacy, as everyone crossing the footbridge will be able to look down into their property from above, but also the new houses will almost certainly rule out any building of a ramped access to the footbridge. A ramped access would enable not only cyclists but also wheelchair-users and people with wheeled shopping bags and prams/pushchairs to use the bridge – the eastern end of which is nearer to Sainsbury’s and other shops than you would think.

Given the traffic congestion in Winsover Road, the ramped access that PEDALS proposes would potentially ease this congestion by encouraging people from the west side of the town to get to the shops in a healthier way. (There are good examples of such bridges as near as Peterborough, where the City Council has more forward-thinking ideas.) Meanwhile, our District Council seems content to be thought of in decades to come as the one that built on scarce public green spaces and neglected opportunities for healthy travel.

Any member of the Civic Society, and indeed any member of the public, is welcome to look at planning applications on the SHDC website; please share your thoughts with our planning team. **David Jones**



RIVERSIDE IMPROVEMENT

THE NEWLY FORMED Riverside Improvement Group, headed by Councillors Jack McLean and Gary Taylor, has not been letting grass grow under its feet. a) The graffiti blitz on 24 April attracted about 20 volunteers and got rid of most

of the defacings quite rapidly (porous surfaces are difficult), then finished off with a coat of anti-graffiti solution. (The materials and know-how were generously donated by Mike Thomas of PPM.) b) A trial has been started in the maintenance of the riverside shrubbery (north of The Chain Bridge Forge), to allow it to grow more naturally in place of the usual level crew-cut. c) The taking-care-of-the-riverside leaflet now includes a request not to feed the ducks. (Although kindly meant, the trouble is the white bread, which is harmful to ducks. Healthy food they enjoy includes: defrosted peas and sweet-corn, lettuce, birdseed and left-over cooked rice.)



The Group’s next meeting is on Friday, 17 June, 5.00 pm, at the Riverbank Studios. All are welcome.

MUCH APPRECIATED

- **SHDC** – for purchasing 23 acres of parkland at Moulton for use as public green recreational space.
- **The Lincolnshire Poacher** – for the smart new gable-end sign.
- **Developers of the Former Tax Office, Holland Road** – for simply getting on with the job promptly. (Contrast the Bull and Monkey, the former Sorting Office, etc.)
- **Broad Street Methodist Church** – for the flower-filled planters along the frontage.
- **Plumb Center, St.Thomas’s Road** – for at last clearing out a year’s unspeakable garbage from behind its wall (though it still needs a weekly scavenge) and moving the litterbin to the bus-stop, where it should always have been.
- **The Moorings, Commercial Road** – for the meticulous daily sweeping and polishing of its frontage.
- The two new in-fill houses in **Love Lane**.
- **The Market Traders** – for the colourful attractiveness of their stalls, whatever the weather.

THE SCULPTURE TRAIL



WITH ACCORDION MUSIC in the chilly air, it was more an inaugural walkabout than an unveiling on Friday, 22 April, when Joseph Hillier's delicate bronzes could at last be seen

installed, and there was a chance to hear from some of the subjects of the sculptures themselves.

Commissioning a work of public art is a major development for the Soc-

ety, and there were warm words of support later from Nick Jones (Transported), James Urquart (Arts Council) and Councillor Nick Worth (LCC). It was good to hear too from Joseph himself and from Laury Dizengremel, the sculptor engaged for our second commission. A small round-up of responses since then has been very positive :-

- "Something which brings visitors into the town and encourages them to spend time here in the centre has got to be a good thing." **Lord Porter, Leader SHDC.**
- "They are smaller than I expected, but exquisitely detailed. Petite. I found it very touching to see ordinary people immortalised in this way. The Adams girls are tickled pink." **Jane Hill.**
- "The trail connects up with our heritage. It's good for the town, as it adds to its interest." **Andrew Inkley, The Man's Shop.**
- "It was through Bookmark that Rex Sly was introduced to his publisher, so it's nice to have the bronze of Rex on Bookmark with one of his books. It would be good to have some larger art works." **Christine Hanson, Bookmark.**
- "It's a fabulous project. The sculptures really belong to the area. The quality of the artwork is fantastic – the artist was well chosen – and it's really original to have small-scale pieces on a number of buildings. Visitors often come in to the Tourist Information desk and ask what there is to do in the town. We can now tell them. It's fabulous that they can now walk round to find the figures and discover historic buildings in different parts of Spalding that they might not otherwise have seen." **Sally Harrison, Manager South Holland Centre.**
- "They remind me of the cat trail in York, where you come across sculptured cats snoozing on ledges or peering round drainpipes in the snickleways and narrow historic streets in the city centre." **Brita Green.**
- "An excellent asset for the town centre, which will benefit from anything which encourages visitors to come to the town and spend some time here." **Dennis Hannant, Town Centre Manager.**
- "Culture and art play an important part in our everyday lives and are well known to be a significant factor in the health and well-being of the local population. As the Executive Member for Culture and Art at Lincolnshire County Council I am delighted to lend my support to this innovative sculpture trail in Spalding, which will not only enhance the town but provide a unique insight into the history of the town. I am aware that this is just the start of an exciting project, with more commissions on the way, and would like to commend Spalding Civic Society for their foresight and innovative thinking. In times when budgets are being slashed due to greatly reduced government funding, it is comforting to see some great art coming to Spalding – long may it continue!" **Councillor Nick Worth, Lincolnshire County Council.**

Someone has suggested that the figures might become as well-known as the Lincoln Imp (the Spalding Imps?), but their size and the workaday activities depicted in them might make them more accurately compared with the misericord carvings often found under the choir stall seats of our cathedrals and major parish churches. (Tip up some of the choir stall seats next time you're in Boston Stump.)

It's been a pleasure to work with Joseph Hillier in his warm engagement with local people. Transported have been extraordinarily generous both in making available their know-how for our Market Art Project and in the funding of this first commission. **It's time now for us to make our own contribution, and we hope members will be equally generous in responding to the appeal, and will encourage their friends and neighbours to contribute too to what is an ambitious project for the town centre.**

It is gratifying to see already signs of just the sort of effect one might have hoped for: a group of primary school children being taken on *their* walkabout to see the sculptures. It would be interesting to know what follow-up activities the teacher had devised for the class.

John Charlesworth

SAFE IN THEIR HANDS ?



Setting an example: SHDC could be leading the way by building on brownfield sites (top, Holbeach Road) instead of taking our precious leisure spaces (above, Severn Road). There is £2.2 billion of government money available to help councils develop brownfield land.

Despite this, the Chiltern Drive proposal rightly bit the dust. It was thrown out unanimously by the Planning Committee (with one abstention) – because of “**the overall deficit of public recreational space within Spalding**”, and they cited Policies SG19 and LT2, as well as national policies.

Fast forward to May, and we find the Planning Committee now standing on their heads and approving the Severn Road take-over (11-3)! Nothing has changed, though – Spalding is still 44% short of public recreational space, the same policies are still in place. The approval flatly contradicts their decision of a year ago.

As if the undermining of the Council’s own policies from within were not bad enough, there are other disquieting features of this decision. First, it sets a dismaying precedent. The Council has now signalled to developers that it is happy to see greenfield land developed, whilst derelict brown-field sites can be left as eyesores to blight the town. It’s a sauce for the Council goose that won’t go unnoticed by developer ganders, one suspects.

Second, the Severn Road proposal was submitted by Welland Homes Ltd., the Council’s own housing company. Several of Welland Homes directors are also Planning Committee members. They took no part in the discussion or the voting, of course – indeed, did not attend the meeting – but it must have meant that some members (as directors) were now busily advocating what they (as Planning Committee members) had rejected a year ago. Is it wise, one wonders, to have such clashing responsibilities?

The Committee evidently accepted Welland

“LET IT NOT BE SAID that Spalding’s green spaces are not safe in the Council’s hands,” was the plea to the Council’s Planning Committee. So after a very brief discussion they voted 11-3 to cover half the Severn Road Playing Field with bricks and mortar.

It’s difficult to make sense of the Council’s attitude to Spalding’s green spaces.

Spalding is desperately short of such public space – by 44%. What there is is protected by Policies SG19 (‘Protection of Open Spaces’) and LT2 (‘Safeguarding Open Space for Sport, Recreation and Leisure’). Common sense would expect the Council to be seeking ways to find more open space for Spalding.

Not so. Twice in the last eighteen months the Council’s own departments have submitted plans that would make the shortage worse. First, most of Chiltern Drive Playing Field was to be turned into burial plots. Then, half of the Severn Road Field was to be commandeered for housing.

Rather than upholding the policies designed to protect them, however, the Planning Department inexplicably supported these two assaults on our precious green space.

Homes spurious argument that the residents of St. Paul’s Ward have more playing field space than they need – as if playing fields are used only by the residents of the ward they’re in! So what are the implications for Moulton, where the Council recently bought 23 acres of parkland to “provide residents with a first-class recreational facility for many years to come” (Councillor Anthony Casson)? On the spurious argument of acreage per ward-resident, the residents of Moulton are now grossly over-supplied with public green leisure space. Shall we see Welland Homes then, at some future date, putting in an application for housing development there too?

In short, **after the Severn Road decision, it is difficult to believe that any public green space owned by the District Council is any longer safe in their hands.**

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And the wider national picture? Encouragingly, under pressure, the government is introducing a statutory register of brownfield sites, and has undertaken to spend up to £2.2 billion to help develop them, with a target to have 90% developed by 2020.

Yet it still believes that to get more houses built it needs more greenfield land to be released. CPRE research, however, has show that the six biggest house builders alone are sitting on enough land with planning permission to build at least 600,000 new houses. The government is also proposing to alter the National Planning Policy Framework to weaken the protection of Green Belt land.

Public green space doesn’t seem to be safe in the government’s hands either



'New River Cycleway': plenty of room for the new short stretch that would be needed at the Little London end.

TWO-WHEELERS

DEEP IN THE VERBIAGE of the emerging new *Local Plan* can be found the following "priority": the creation of a cycling route "along the Coronation Channel, Spalding" (Policy 31). Splendid! "The route will make it safer and much more enjoyable to cycle to and from Springfields and the nearby factories and other businesses," says PEDALS Chairman David Jones. And indeed it may encourage more people onto their bikes who are reluctant at present to face the town centre traffic on two wheels. It will also of course open up the Coronation Channel to wheel-chair and motability users.

One only hopes that, when it does come to pass, the Highways Department will show some sensitivity and restraint, with the surfacing kept as simple and appropriate as possible. (Bound gravel perhaps?) As almost the only rural walk close to the town, this is no place for red and black tarmac stripes like a college scarf and white lines and proliferating signs on poles – i.e. the alien, urban and unnecessary.

□

Not in the emerging *Local Plan*, however, but being put forward for inclusion in it, is the PEDALS proposal for a 'New River Cycleway'. This would run southwards from Little London Bridge to the big new Gateway development on the A16, with its conference centre and proposed offices and [Continued across]

PLANNING MATTERS

ALTHOUGH there were more planning applications across South Holland in the first six months of 2016 than there were in the same period last year, there have been no major applications in Spalding itself. Single- and two-storey extensions, garage conversions and intrusive fences predominate – perhaps reflecting the current uncertain state of the economy, with the emphasis now on home improvements rather than on moving house.

Planning applications to change the conditions of already approved developments may seem odd, but they often seek to remove a requirement to include or contribute to affordable housing. We are constantly being told of the need for additional affordable housing, but

developers are now no longer required to meet the shortfall through planning obligations.

We continue to object to high fences on frontage boundaries, especially those that do damage to the original estate plan. Garden-grabbing continues, with even the smaller plots often being given approval for dwellings. The Planning Committee has granted permission for one on a site near the Cowbit Road/Balmoral Avenue junction, despite our repeated objections and previous refusals. A small garden site at the junction of London Road and Water Lane is another case in which approval would result in a cramped site, reduced parking space, and a detrimental visual impact on its end-of-terrace setting.

Robert West

FOLLOW-UP

The *Vinyl Blight* feature in the last Newsletter caused something of a stir. It was taken up by the local press and then by the BBC's *Look North*, with the Chairman interviewed in front of a few specimen blanked-out shop windows. Public opinion seems to be supportive of our case. The Town Centre Manager's 'Smart Shop Fronts' Award Scheme (see p.6) could help, if it is taken up.

Meanwhile, a walk round the town centre shows there certainly are shops which take trouble to make their windows – and hence the whole centre – attractive. Quite a number now set out to create what might be described as 'retail still-lives'. Even a dry-cleaner's – see Layton's, with its mini-mannequin in front of enormous ribbon-tied boxes. The always imaginative Hill's currently has variations on a seaside theme: not only the expected glass floats, etc., but also some most ingeniously devised jellyfish! The only national chain store that makes an effort is Wilkinson's. This seems to be corporate policy: background and structural elements supplied and the individual branches left to select and set out the appropriate goods. A bit like dressing a stage set. (Contrast the contempt for the high street shown by B&M.) Other things being equal, shops that make an effort surely are the ones that deserve our custom.

DIARY DATES

Sat./Sun. 9/10 July The Vista

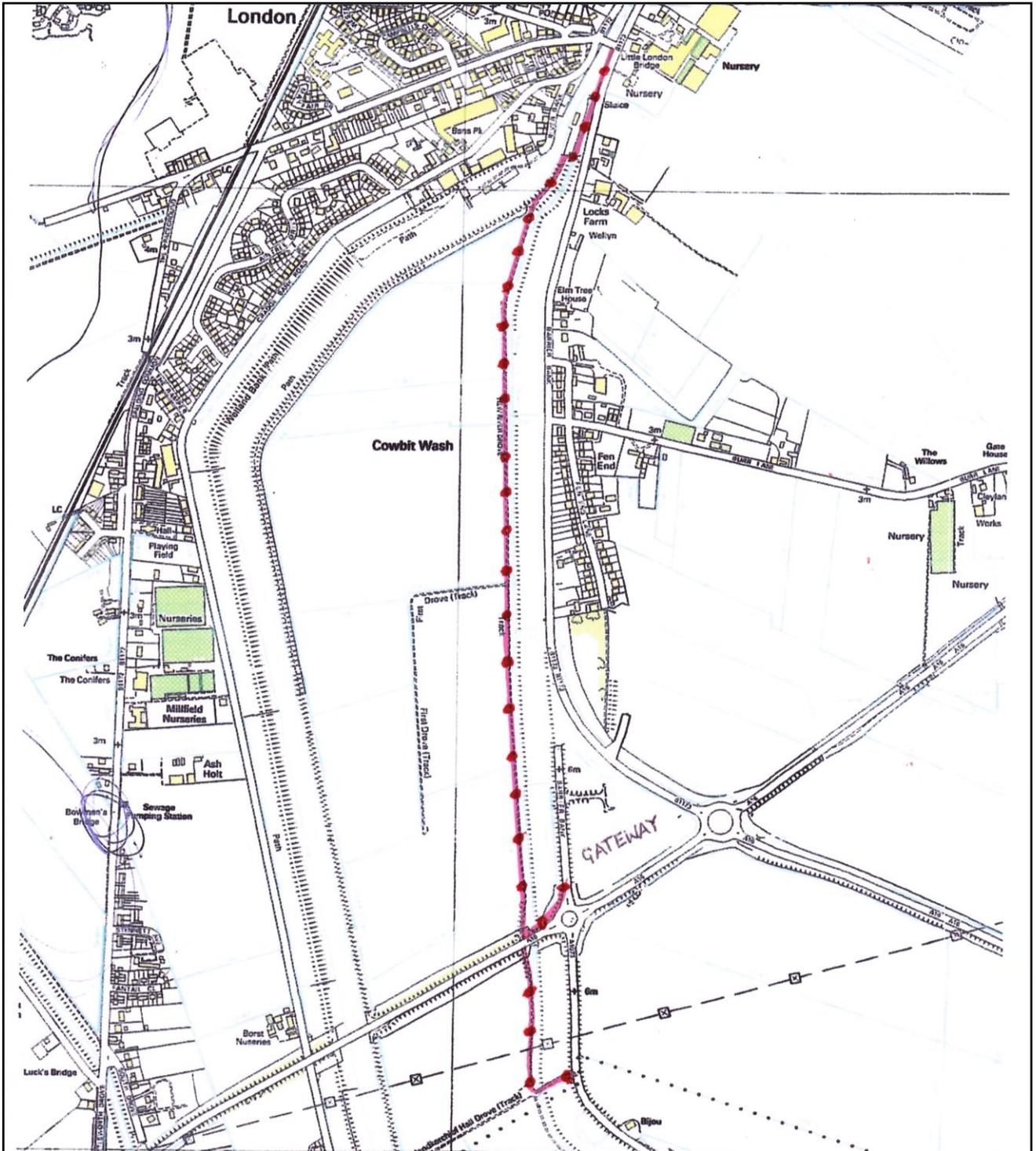
Food Festival

Sat./Sun. 13/14 Aug. Ayscoughfee Hall

1940s Weekend

Thurs./Sun. 8-11 September Various

Heritage Open Weekend



warehousing, and to Cowbit beyond. The route has been thoroughly surveyed by John and Lesley Honor. (*Blobbed line on map above.*) Except for 200 metres at the Little London end, it would use existing bridleways. Thus, in place of the busy, dangerous B1173, it would create a quiet, safe, pleasant, traffic-free ride, both for leisure cyclists to Cowbit and for workers at the Gateway development. (Cowbit is now cut off from Spalding for cyclists except via the extremely dangerous A16 roundabout.)

When the 'New River Cycleway' proposal was put to LCC Highways at Pote Hole, they said they

couldn't even contemplate a feasibility study for this potentially life-saving project, unless PEDALS liked to come up with £5000 to pay for it. "We have to stop saying 'no' to everything you suggest," said a previous Area Highways Manager once at one of our meetings. How times have changed! The claim in the recent *Lincolnshire Matters* news-sheet that "Investing in our roads, footpaths and cycle-ways remains a top priority for Conservatives at Lincolnshire County Council" rings rather hollow. Actions – or lack of them, we're afraid – always speak louder than words.

SOCIETY NOTES

THIS YEAR'S AGM was held on 22 March, when the following were elected officers for the coming year:- David Jones (Chairman), Robert West (Vice-Chairman), Marion Brassington (Secretary), Melvyn Price (Treasurer), and Committee members John Charlesworth, John Honnor and Paul Walls, later to be joined by Stephanie Hewat-Jaboor (co-opted).

Robert West is the voice of the Society on South Holland Heritage Forum, the Chamber of Commerce and Town Centre Manager Board; John Honnor, Annette Faulkner and John Charlesworth on the Riverside Improvement Group; John Honnor on the Town Centre Forum; and David Jones on PEDALS. Please contact them with any particular concerns.

We are very sorry to record the death of Dr. Michael Townsend, who was a long-standing member of the Society and a genuine 'yellow-belly', keenly interested in the town's heritage and its current developments.

A warm welcome to new members **Susan Richardson** and **Ray Lawton**; and a gentle reminder to existing members who pay by cheque but may not have got round yet to renewing their subscription. (*Form below.*)

To e- or not to e- We are up-dating our mailing list, and would like to hear from any members who wish to change the way they receive their Newsletter, etc. If you would like to start receiving a paper copy instead of electronically by e-mail, or vice-versa, please contact the Secretary on marion.brassington@btinternet.com or at the address below. (E-mails are cheaper for the Society and have the photographs in colour; paper copies can be passed on to friends or find a place in the waiting-rooms of dentists or hairdressers, spreading knowledge of the Society's work.)

TCM AT AGM

"WHAT A COMPLICATED THING a town is," began Dennis Hannant, the Town Centre Manager, in his talk at the AGM (22 March). "Especially if you want to get something done!" Some bits of public space belong to one authority, some to another; add in a multitude of separate businesses, remote property owners not very interested, a difficult one-way system

And it doesn't help that there is no blue-print for the town centre with a clear programme to work to.

Things he would like to see for early action would include:- more variety in the shops (fewer charity and betting); a rethink of the one-way system; a re-designed Market Place; and a general smartening up of shop frontages.

With several of our independent retailers hanging on by the skin of their teeth, it is vital to increase footfall – in particular from the annual 2.6m visitors to Springfields, which means providing somewhere for coaches to park and ensuring the centre in itself offers an attractive and enjoyable experience. The willingness of continental markets to come to a town also depends on the size of its footfall.

One way ahead being explored is for the town centre to become a Business Investment District (BID), and thus able to tap into sources of funding not available to local authorities. Another is a 'Smart Shop Fronts' awards scheme, which amongst other things might offer a way into tackling those shop windows blanked out by 'vinyl blight'.

Earlier the meeting received reports on the year's activities from the Chairman, from the Treasurer and the Planning Sub-Committee, and on the Society's on-going projects and campaigns.

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.

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Address.....

Post Code..... Telephone..... E-mail.....

Please send to: Melvyn Price (Hon.Treasurer), 34 Avebury Gardens, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2EN.

Gift Aid:- By signing the declaration below you will enable the Society to reclaim income tax on your subscription, so that it becomes worth almost a third more at no extra cost to yourself. **I wish Spalding and District Civic Society to treat all my subscriptions since 6 April 2000 and all from the date below as Gift Aid.**

Signature..... Print..... Date.....

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