



SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2021



ONE SATURDAY IN OCTOBER

THE 9TH. Early mist has thinned to perfect autumn sunshine. A buzz grows as one threads the Hole-in-the-Wall Passage or approaches from Longstaff's – the buzz of voices, people. Lots of people. Filling the town centre as one emerges into it. Balloons floating above heads – dragons, unicorns, Peppa Pig. Music. Stalls from end to end, 30 maybe, black and white awnings in the Sheepmarket, more varied in Hall Place and the Market Place. The usual traders there, fish, flowers, fruit-and-veg, bags-and-purses. But others too – trinkets, buttons (thousands of them, 20p a button), RSPCA. Mostly fun stalls. Pumpkin carving, face-painting, splat-a-rat (Rotary) and, surprisingly popular, creature-making from carrots and potatoes.

Then there's the scarecrow/pumpkin hunt: Bad Max in the Market Place, motoring goggles on his pumpkin face in an open-top junk-made car, and round the corner in Red Lion Street the cheeky take-over of a Banksy mural

The Council Chairman and Vice-Chairman in their

chains of office somewhere in the middle of it all, not to be mistaken for the Polka Dot principals circulating in Dick Whittington costumes. A queue at the snack-bar. Unselfconsciously a mum is dancing to the music. Others thinking of joining in.

The Hall Place circle comes into its own with a huge autumn bubble in the middle, where the youngsters inside it, four or five at a time, jump, dance and throw armfuls of leaves into the air, and try to catch the reds and golds floating down. (One hopes some of them will get a chance to do the real thing in a week or two's time.)

At the flower stall passing children pat or stroke the huge pumpkin. One small boy and his even smaller brother brace themselves to lift it and fail, and a young girl polishes it with a woolly hat she's taken off.

Near the stage others wait patiently for the singer to finish, so the scarecrow judging can start. Who'd be a judge, faced with such variety? A mini-pumpkin-people tea-party, a hoodie tall [Page 2 ►



enough to look you in the face, another with its waist squeezed in like an egg-timer and a Boris Johnson straw-cut, and Fairy Pumpkin herself, all tulle, wings and a silver crown. Some of the children are in costume too.

And shops and businesses have made an effort, some of them for the first time, their windows full of brown and orange variations on an autumn theme.

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In short, the Pumpkin Celebration was an enormous success. A friendly, happy, family event that Spalding could be proud of. Notable for the many ways in which children could be actively involved rather than just watching. The running wasn't being made by Springfields or



Baytree this time, either. So warmest congratulations and thanks to the Council's Communities Team and everybody who had a hand in the event.

Thoughts may already be turning to next year and how to build on this year's success, for surely this Saturday event must stay. And Christmas? And the biggest challenge: how to get our lost market traders back and ensure that new ones stay, so there's an abundance of stalls and lots of people. It was that that was so heart-warming about Saturday the 9th.



PLANNING MATTERS

IT WAS GOOD to see the way in which the community came together to send a clear signal to the company wanting to set up an **adult gaming centre** in the heart of the town, that their type of business is not wanted here. I hope that is the last we hear of Merkur Slots.

Less appreciated was **Poundland's** refusal to improve the appearance of Winsover Road, by opening up their shop frontage as it was originally designed to do. With no goods on display, what incentive is there for a passer-by to walk round to the back of the shop in order to get in? How much passing trade will Poundland lose? So, instead of B&M vinyl, we now have Poundland vinyl. A missed opportunity to right a wrong and a guarantee that Poundland will now enter our vinyl wall of shame (*page 5*).

I note there is a promise of a planning application for the old **Royal Mail sorting office** in The Crescent. I haven't seen anything yet. I hope the new owner was not offering false hope.

To end on a positive note, I was very pleased to receive a letter from Sir John Hayes about **neglected buildings** such as the Bull and Monkey and the Johnson Hospital. He offered complete support for my suggestion that the names of the ultimate owners of properties owned by offshore trusts be recorded in land registry records, so that communities such as ours who are faced with prominent buildings being left to fall into rack and ruin, can make direct appeals to the owners.

The ownership may be extremely opaque due to a complex web of offshore trusts, with different international jurisdictions, but I hope that when my proposal is raised with the Treasury, as Sir John has promised, that they in turn might discuss this matter internationally? It cannot be just British buildings that are being blighted through neglect from these hidden landlords, can it?

John Bland

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

OVER THE LAST YEAR, I have been keeping a close eye on the Government's proposals to change the planning system, as have Civic Voice and numerous other parties. The idea that in so-called „areas of growth“ developments should be presumed to have consent was one that caused considerable alarm. It is therefore pleasing to see the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (as the department is now called) indicating that the Government will look again at the proposed changes, with the Government “allowing communities to take back control of their futures and creating greener and more beautiful places to live”. Hopefully, that means that people will continue being able to have a say on planning applications in their local neighbourhood.

I also note that the autumn budget allocated funding to test “digital initiatives” to make the planning process more open and accessible. The nearest authorities to us for the try-out are North Lincolnshire and Greater Cambridge. As these areas are very different from each other, it will be interesting to see what they come up with. For me, it is crucial that *people can find out easily about any application in their area*. The current street notice system is of course tried and tested. No doubt there will be some kind of digital equivalent eventually, but are we ready to scrap the street-lamp notices? I suspect not. How many people are going to visit the council's website week after week just on the off-chance there has been a planning application for their street? And how else will someone who's not online find out about an application?

Locally, South Holland District Council has some way to go before it will be in a position to go for digital initiatives. It first needs to get some basics in place. I discovered this when Civic Voice asked member societies to check the

current status of their local authority's *Statement of Community Involvement* in the planning process (SCI). When I checked the SHDC website, I could not find one. All I could find was an SCI in the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan. I was advised by the Reading University researcher that a *shared* statement was not acceptable.

The legal requirement for a *Statement of Community Involvement* in the planning process first appeared in 2004 and was modified in 2017. The guidance states that „*Local planning authorities must set out in their Statement of Community Involvement how they will engage communities on the preliminary stages of planmaking*“ (§35). Furthermore, the statement should be reviewed every 5 years (§71) and kept up-to-date.

. As Ian Harvey, Chief Executive of Civic Voice, says:- *‘We need a system that champions community engagement, a system that ensures communities are involved in an early, continuous and transparent process. We need more planners who understand community engagement. We need a system that says that collaboration with communities is not a 21-day ‘tick box’ exercise but is a meaningful conversation.’*

In South Holland we don't even know what the local authority classes as “meaningful consultation”, as there is no published *Statement of Community Involvement*. This needs to change as a matter of urgency. How many consultations have we had that leave people with the perception that the local authority has not listened? The markets consultation seems to be the latest example. I urge the powers that be at SHDC to read the excellent report produced by Reading University* and consider the ways in which a *Statement of Community Involvement* could be transformational in the ways in which things are done.

John Bland

* http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/uploads/files/SCI_Research_Final_Report_Oct21.pdf

MUCH APPRECIATED

- **The White Hart** for its handsome repaint. An exemplar for presenting yourself to the High Street. It's disappointing, therefore, that it is still without its name, despite the black band on the portico ready waiting for it..
- **The Lincoln Arms** for its tasteful repainting and signs.
- **K-Collective** (formerly Steffen's) in the Sheepmarket for its elegant window displays, always a challenge for hairdresser's, optician's and other service providers.

- **Card Factory** for its long-needed repaint. However, it and Ladbroke's next door are both part of a single historic building, and their fascias and shop fronts need bringing into line with each other and the frontage as a whole.
- **SHDC** for the reopening of the South Holland Centre, along with the new restaurants.
- **Facebook and contributors** for the succession of fine photographs of Spalding and surrounding area.



FIVE YEARS AGO we pictured the 27 shops in the town centre that had their windows blanked out by vinyl film or blinds. Thus began a campaign to try to reduce this wretched modern practice.

VINYL BLIGHT: UPDATE

The case against is clear. Visually, commercially, socially, they are a blight at the heart of our towns. Garish, down-at-heel, they are windows that say, "Keep out," unlike attractive displays of goods that say, "Come in and see more." They are boring: the same unchanging giant parsnips and pastries, beer cans and bread rolls. Or as blank as a brick wall. Footfall killers all and a real visitor turn-off.

The basic function of a shop window seems to have been forgotten.

"A shop front projects the best possible image of the business. It needs to display goods effectively and attract customers. It is in the shop owner's interest to make sure that the shop front is well designed and makes a positive contribution to the street. Attractive shopping streets that provide a pleasing shopping experience will lead to higher custom." (§ 5.1) Even more basically: "encouraging [shoppers] to stay and spend." (Peterborough's *Shop Front Design Guidance*, § 1.2)

Accordingly, vinyls are specifically curtailed in Peterborough: "Window stickers should be restrained and cover no more than 20% of the total window area." In Wisbech: "Consideration should be given to window display without blocking the entire frontage with vinyl graphics." (§ 7.0)

South Holland has no such guidance.

So what has been achieved to date? Not a lot.

The Real Pharm Shop in Station Street now shows what it sells. Hughes Electrical contacted the

Society and, although not presently able to open up its Victoria Street windows, compromised with large historic photographs of the Sheepmarket (with text by member John Honnor). We objected to Aldi's proposal to use an expanse of wall to add yet more monster fruit-and-veg to Winsover Road and the application was withdrawn.

We thought we'd secured a major victory when we persuaded the Planning Inspectorate and the officers drawing up the new *South East Lincolnshire Local Plan* that blanking-out shop windows with vinyl film should be prohibited. We'd proposed the following: **'The blanking-out of shop windows by opaque or semi-opaque vinyl film, blinds, or the rear of cabinets, display shelves or panels will not be permitted.'** In the *Local Plan* this appears as: **'The blanking out of shop windows by externally-positioned opaque or semi-opaque blinds or vinyl film or by other means will not be permitted.'**

Note the weasel phrase "externally-positioned"! Take the film off the outside of the window and stick it on the inside and you're O.K. – even though the visual impact is identical. And the policy applies only to „Primary Shopping Frontages“ anyway (i.e. The Market Place, two sides of Hall Place and one side of Bridge Street. It is therefore virtually useless to achieve what appears to be its aim.

Meanwhile, most of the original 27 windows are unchanged and have been joined by over 10 more.



Top row:
Winsover Road.
Bottom row:
New Road.



• **Top right** (New Road): the shop's other window is vinyl-free with real pizzas and pastries on display. Always there are people looking. Removing the vinyl to display bread and some enticing cakes too would surely mean even more people looking – and entering. • **Middle left:** Poundland's dead, peopleless frontage. • **Above:** Abbey Passage is notorious for its misuse as a urinal. By preventing informal surveillance from within the shop, the recent blanking-out is only too likely to make the situation worse. • **Bottom left** (New Road): not a pharmacist's but an estate agent's! Well may the „scientist“ of this vinyl half-sticker look surprised. She's actually been positioned to hide several of the properties the agent is supposedly trying to sell.

On the north side of Winsover Road there are ten shop frontages between Glenn Avenue and Station Approach. Just one has goods in its window. The rest are blanked out or offices. It's high time South Holland had a shop front design guide. One based on the Peterborough guide would not be a bad start.

PIGEON PROBLEM

IT'S AN INTERESTING IDEA: to establish a pair of peregrines in the town centre to prey on the pigeons, as successfully tried out in Stamford and Louth.

Meanwhile, there was a device I came across in Norway three years ago. The town was on the edge of a very large lake, and the seagulls' idea of an easy meal was to try to snatch the food from the plates of the open-air customers at the two lakeside restaurants.

The device consisted of a length of whippy metal like an old-fashioned car radio aerial, only much longer, mounted on a high point of the building. Attached to the „aerial“ was a length of invisible nylon fishing line, on the end of which was the image of a bird of prey in flight, printed on plastic film, with the wings supported outstretched in some way. The lightest current of air had the predator hovering in the air or swooping and climbing and changing direction according to the varying air currents. It was very realistic. I was completely

taken in at first. Much more effective than the static model of a bird of prey that you sometimes see fixed to buildings. Are such devices available in this country? It might be worth a try if they are.



John Charlesworth

REGENERATION

IT'S WELL OVER A YEAR since the Council's £500,000 Holbeach and Spalding Town Improvement Works initiative was announced, and members may well be wondering what progress has been made. Well, Beth Stinson was appointed co-ordinator, and then the Covid-19 virus struck.

Inevitably this slowed things down, and, although meetings continued via Zoom, the urgency of persuasion that occurs in face-to-face discussion and results in action is difficult to mobilize. Nor does it help to have had three changes of councillor as head of the operation. A few months ago, it was felt the Steering Group would work more effectively if it was divided in five sub-groups. The Society is represented on three of them.

Markets and Independent Traders

The terms of reference have been revisited, with discussion centred on how we can engage with other stakeholders and traders. Group members were asked to use individual contacts to establish the needs for the market. Also to contact other groups within the town which could offer valuable input. Do we need a town centre manager? Meanwhile we await the results of the public Markets Consultation.

I visited Louth on its market day and as an outsider was very impressed. There was a busy, vibrant mix of traders, bunting, local street food and drink. Overall, the town looked good. There were a few vacant shops, but they did not detract from the overall appearance.

Graham Boor

Events, Culture, Promotion and Awareness-Raising

Gradually we are seeing the seeds of regeneration in the town. The Pumpkin Festival showed clearly that, if there is something happening in the town, people will come. The town was buzzing. I would like to put on record my thanks to the SHDC Communities Team for organising the event. I hope that our traders benefitted from it. Hughes Electrical, managed by Society member Graham Boor, won the window display competition.

The next significant event will be a Christmas Festival on 3 and 4 December. Christmas lights on the promised 35 foot Christmas tree will be turned on at 7.30pm on Friday, 3 December, with a festive market on the Saturday. For more details, watch out for announcements in the local press, or see the Facebook events page at <https://www.facebook.com/events/559739438422831>

In addition, the Council are running a Shop Local Prize Draw. All you need to do is spend a minimum of £5 in a participating business during November or December and collect a stamp to place in the booklet you'll be given. Once you have collected three stamps, you can enter your name into a draw to win £500. There will be two draws. One each in November and December. This initiative is being funded directly from the Town Centre Improvement Plan. Participating businesses will have a Shop Local graphic in their window or can be found listed at <https://www.sholland.gov.uk/shoplocalprizedraw>

Two of them, Spalding News and Bookmark, are selling our calendar. If you are not eligible for the members' discounted price, buying one of our calendars from either outlet will get you a stamp for the Shop Local Prize Draw, be benefitting the Society and also be buying an ideal Christmas present! What have you got to lose?

John Bland

Environment, Public Realm and Heritage

The purpose of the sub-group is to develop specific projects and activities to enhance the town's public environment. Its first (Zoom) meeting elected Ian Marshman (LCC Historic Environment Officer) as chairman, and received his excellent report on way-finding within the town (finger posts, etc.) with various suggestions for improvement.

More recently there have been two walkabouts. The town centre walk, led by Ian, identified strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, ranging from neglected shop fronts to the opportunities offered by Hall Place and the river. Ian's subsequent report was well received at the second meeting and some fine-tuning agreed.

The Boston walkabout, led by Nick Jones (Transported Art), was focused on the transformative effect of art works in the public realm. From short-term murals to a memorial to Boston fishermen lost at sea (*left below*) to the recently completed Boston Buoys Trail (*below*). Several things became increasingly clear:- a) that the input



of serious money from a council produces much larger grants in return from various national bodies; b) that professional artists will find inventive ways to involve local people in projects; and c) anti-social behaviour in the centre is generally felt to have declined.

John Bland and John Charlesworth

SOCIETY NOTES

IT IS with particular sadness that we record the death of founder-member **Roy Aitken**. Dr. Aitken was the last surviving member of the group of friends that resolved in 1960 to set up the Spalding and District Civic Society, one of the earliest in the civic society movement, outraged by the demolition of historic Holyrood House, to the left of Ayscoughfee Hall (where the social services offices now are). “Never again,” they said. The fifteenth-century mansion had been acquired, then deliberately neglected and finally demolished by the then Spalding Urban District Council, who wanted the site for a town hall for themselves. The widespread concern by local and national bodies, including at one point John Betjeman, had been of no avail.

An early project of the new Society was to turn the overgrown towpath on the west bank of the Welland into a riverside walk; and it was Roy who undertook to contact the various riparian owners for their permission.

But a major challenge was soon to appear: the County Surveyor’s 1966 plan to deal with Spalding’s A16 traffic congestion by bull-doing a multi-lane John-Adams-type Way through the town centre from High Bridge to the top end of Pinchbeck Road. SUDC supported it – on the casting vote of the chairman. The town rejected it – as demonstrated by the Society’s house-to-house petition, with Roy in the thick of the signature collection. But it took another 15 years or so of

campaigning against further destructive and insupportable proposals from County Highways before the Ministry of Transport finally accepted the need for the bypass the Society had been arguing for from the start.

One or two of our older members will have been young patients of Dr. Aitken’s in the days when people had doctors rather than medical centres, and will recall his ready sympathy for their anxieties, his firm but kind understanding, and the twinkle in his eye and soft Scottish brogue. A friend almost as much as a GP. He was a valued member both of the community throughout his many years here and of the wider medical community, in which he held a number of distinguished positions.

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Early October saw our first non-Zoom committee meeting for nearly two years – duly distanced of course, in a big airy room. Though good to be back in person, it felt a bit strange, remote, rather like being in a cinema audience of six at a midweek matinee.

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It was encouraging to see the number of entries in the Pumpkin Festival shop window competition, some of them, such as Calthrop’s, for the first time. Congratulations therefore to Hughes Electrical and member Graham Boor for winning the first prize – an added reason for celebration in the firm’s 100th anniversary year.

THREE MILLION WHEELBARROWS

MEMBERS interested in the mammoth business of draining the fens may like to obtain a copy of *Three Million Wheelbarrows: The Story of the Eau Brink Cut* by Kathleen Saunders, published earlier this year to coincide with the bicentenary of the Cut and the first bridge over the Great Ouse at King’s Lynn. [What follows is not a review, but the author’s description. *Editor*]

Three Million Wheelbarrows describes events from 1775 to 1821 leading up to the Eau Brink Cut. Landowners wanted to straighten the Great Ouse to improve drainage and protect their crops from flood.

The merchants of King’s Lynn Corporation feared this would create such violent currents that the harbour and barge transport network would be destroyed. A massive feat of negotiation by élite local characters and Britain’s legendary engineers was required to satisfy both factions, while the river itself tells of its resistance to human control and the impacts of our activities on the environment. The story will interest local and family historians because Lincolnshire engineers and workmen were closely involved in the work, and their descendents are still in the area.

[Kathleen Saunders: *Three Million Wheelbarrows: The Story of the Eau Brink Cut* – Mousehold Press, £9.95 + p&p. Available from bookshops or www.bitternbooks.co.uk or Tel. 01603 739635.]



Thirteen beautiful photographs of Spalding and round about, some expected ones – Ayscoughfee Hall, Springfields – but others surprises. The Coronation Channel as you’ve never seen it before; and how many of us knew that Pinchbeck has a nationally important dovecote? 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.

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

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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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