

May 2013

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Notice board

We will visit Berwick Civic Society on Sat 13th July. Reserve your place by contacting a member of the committee.

Don't forget to submit your nominations for the annual awards to a committee member by the middle of June.



The big green box on Bondgate

In April we constructed a big green box beside Bondgate Tower, and challenged BT to do better. The Gazette covered the story on April 18th and May 2nd, and the BBC filmed members of the society for "Rip Off Britain" on May 13th.



We applaud efforts to deliver the best possible broadband to Alnwick. It will boost business. The community will benefit from new forms of entertainment, education and employment opportunities, but they may also have to live with intrusive equipment that creates hazards for pedestrians, harms the quality of the town and spoils the visitor experience.

Planning law has been changed to speed broadband rollout, and cabinets can now be installed without council approval. We think this was a mistake. The effects on the neighbourhood ought to be considered.

The large box on Bondgate is one example where we think a better balance could have been found.

For many visitors this is their first view of our town centre. It is the entrance to our main shopping street. The proposed box is 1.41 metres tall, and will add to the general clutter at this junction, which gives a poor impression of the town.

Even more importantly, this crossing is already difficult for

drivers to negotiate, and one of the busiest unprotected pedestrian routes into the town. The proposed cabinet could prevent a driver from seeing a child who is about to step into the road, and make it difficult for children to appreciate the risk from traffic.

It was easy for us to take our cardboard box away again, but the real cabinet will last for decades.

Telecommunications companies are not responsible for the quality of our town. It is the people of Alnwick who must live with the effects of ill-considered installations; and face the disruption, and pick up the cost of fixing any problems. Their voice should have been heard.

Sadly, as we go to print, installation work has started. It seems BT will not rise to our challenge to find a better location, or a more appropriate design. The opportunity has been lost to make this important junction safer, easier for drivers to negotiate, and more attractive.

Housing in Alnwick: a long-term perspective

There are a number of pressures to accelerate house building. It is a priority for government. In this area there is a shortage of affordable housing and concerns about the quality of some of the stock. The Civic Society responds to individual applications. We are also involved in policy development through work on the Neighbourhood plan, and responses to policy development at county level.

The key evidence for the long-term is the "Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment" updated by the county last year. This aims to identify potential housing sites; assess the capacity; and judge when they are likely to be developed. It does not determine whether a site will be developed, but it provides an opportunity to look ahead, identify developments that may arise, and air our concerns.

Over the next five years the assessment identifies land for 226 units. Most of these are well-known. Work has started on some, and has been suspended on others.

Assessed as deliverable over the next 5 years	Units
Willoughby's Bank	76
West of Lagny Street	51
The Maltings & Bolam Mill	33
St Johns Roman Catholic School, Lisburn Terrace	26
Thomas Percy RC Middle School, Blakelaw Road	15
Walkergate	15
Other	10
Total	226

This development rate (40-50 new units a year) is higher than the national growth rate, but in line with past trends locally, and perhaps reasonable for one of the best places to live in the UK.

Looking further out, land for only around 50 units has been identified for the following five year period. If demand really is for 40-50 extra units a year then there will be a shortfall in housing land towards the end of the decade. Members may have

concerns about the possible impact on heritage, or townscape, of some of these sites.

Assessed as deliverable over next 6-10 years	Units
Allerburn House, Denwick Lane	20
Tennis Courts, Prudhoe Street	11
Bus Depot, Lisburn Terrace	8
The Old Vicarage	6
Other	7
Total	52

If there is a shortfall there may be pressure to identify further potential sites, build on less suitable land, or bring forward sites with greater potential. The following table shows the sites which the Assessment views as deliverable more than ten years into the future. With greater capacity, these will inevitably have greater impact on landscape, heritage, transport infrastructure, and services.

Assessed as deliverable over next 11-15 years	Units
Land South of Rugby Ground	206
Land East of Allerburn Lea	150
Greensfield Farm, S of Fairfield	100
Dukes Middle School	72
Land SE of St John's First School	70
South of Ravensmount	68
Willis Garage, South Road	31
Land NW of St Michael's Church	20
Other	21
Total	738

In summary: several potential housing sites are likely to concern members. It may be difficult to find enough space for new houses within a decade. Unless more suitable sites can be identified there could be pressure to build on unsuitable land. To protect sites we value we must watch the proposed levels of new house building, detailed land allocations and site specific proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan, Core Strategy, County Development Plan, etc.

See <http://tinyurl.com/c79dyjq> for details of the county housing land assessment.

Housing in Alnwick: one member's view

I have been a member for 15 years, so I am ashamed to admit that I have only recently become aware of the "Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment". I appreciate the need for housing, particularly affordable housing, in Alnwick and the effect that such development can have on the economy and services of the town. In some areas of the town one would welcome development. However, other sites listed in the document provide cause for concern. Alnwick is a growing town and if proposed developments such as those at Greensfield materialise then it is going to need open spaces within the town. Certain sites in the town deserve to remain as they are because they have simply become part of Alnwick. No one would think of developing the Column Field!

I believe the Duke's School field should certainly

not be developed for housing. This beautiful field surrounded by imposing lime trees has brought pleasure to users and passers by for over a century, yet it is on the list for potential development of 72 units. I presume the owner has consented to it being classed as a potential housing development but do the people of Alnwick have a say in this? When does consultation take place? This magnificent area would neatly join the present 'play area' to make a very attractive open space. If it was to be considered by the people of Alnwick to be too important to be developed, why is it already on the list for potential development?

The Duke's School field is my particular worry but surely all such concerns should be expressed at the beginning of proceedings, not when development has become inevitable and it is too late.

Viewpoint: Councillor Gordon Castle

Gordon Castle (recently re-elected as one of our representatives on Northumberland County Council), responds to the views expressed by Peter Ennor in our last edition.

I am pleased to have the opportunity of replying to Peter Ennor's personal views upon Alnwick Town Centre, which chiefly concern the Marketplace and the car / pedestrian balance, the more so since I chaired the Marketplace Working Group (WG) that came up with the proposals.

To remind people what they are, it is intended to re-designate the Marketplace from a highway to a restricted car-park. There are to be 12 high- turnover spaces (30 minutes, including 3 for disabled) in a line close to and parallel with The Northumberland Hall, together with some motorcycle parking (almost impossible on the other cobbled parks), and 4 loading bays outside retail premises. Loading bays are normally limited to 20 minutes maximum for loading / unloading and are essential because many shops have no rear access. Unlike now, Traffic Wardens will be able to deal with transgressors because it will be a car park, not a highway. During special events and Market Days, car parking (though not necessarily vehicle access) will be suspended.

The WG comprised representatives from most relevant bodies, including The Civic Society, Chamber of Trade and Police, and its recommendations were unanimous. Everyone agreed that the present chaos could not continue. As a highway, not a car park, enforcement lies with police officers who have failed to manage it because of the burden of proof required to show that a vehicle is not loading or unloading. Peter's central thesis appears to require that vehicles be banned entirely from the Marketplace, except for loading and unloading, but this is the situation we have now, and it is clearly unenforceable, whether or not the public want it (an untested matter).

Peter may favour the possibility of permitting vehicle access only during early and late hours to maintain a pedestrianised space most of the day. This too was investigated, but Alnwick is not York, and delivery vehicles from Newcastle and beyond could not conform to such a narrow range of access times – it is not worth their while. The council would never impose an impractical solution on traders in the face of opposition, because trade is the primary purpose of the Marketplace, and not just on market days.

Peter asks why we can't just accept the Marketplace as a peaceful space for the elderly, children etc. The answer is that, though this was the intention in 1997 and despite the best efforts of many, including me (which he kindly acknowledges), it has been a lamentable and obvious failure. The Marketplace was emptied not just of cars but of people too. Alnwick is not a Mediterranean village, though some of the café

culture lifestyle has begun to take root (weather permitting!). This is a fine if somewhat austere Northern market town with its own special blend of historical interest, fine architecture and "character". Those who want peace and quiet should live in Whittingham, not a bustling trade and visitor orientated tourist attraction like Alnwick.

This does not mean that I am hostile to improved traffic management. I am not. I agree that we need to manage the public space much better and get the balance back in favour of people on foot. But let us not forget how pedestrians get here – they are mostly car borne too; we are not discussing two different classes of people.

I do favour an attempt at pedestrian priority zones, particularly in Bondgate Within between Iceland and the junction with Fenkle Street, and I am on record as having tried very hard to secure such an experiment, and it is not dead yet. A successful scheme here would do much to remove doubts and suspicions about imposing them elsewhere, but a traffic free centre is simply not feasible in a town of this configuration, at least not for a long time yet, as was well illustrated by the recent diversions in place to take traffic round town whilst major road surfacing was underway. We do need to improve paved and road surfaces and furniture, and insist on better standards of maintenance and design, and I do my modest bit to direct scarce resources to this purpose, very much valuing the Civic Society's input. I was, and still would be a member, were it not for the conflict that arises with my role on the NCC planning committee.

Finally, on the question of public support, when the WG reported in June 2012, the neighbourhood plan was no more than a series of exploratory questions to gauge the public's assessment of priorities, of which the marketplace was one item. Though many people wanted the parking anarchy sorted out, there was no weight of opinion in favour of pedestrianisation. More recently, formal responses to the subsequent ADNP issues and options question on this topic were analysed on 16 April 2013. They show nearly 60% supporting the proposed (or higher) levels of parking, with 37% in favour of no cars at all. The remainder were undecided or unclear.

Ultimately, elected members and representative bodies have to reach a view upon what is best. This outcome is a compromise that will not please any faction entirely, but it should be given time to settle down before judgment is passed. Remember that it is attempting to rectify a failed policy, not reverse a success story.



News in Brief

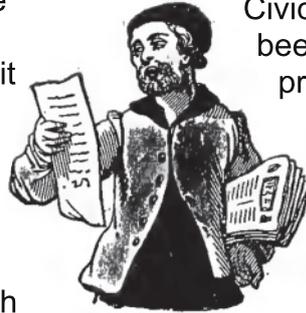
The Civic Society Streetscape study was first produced in 2007. Since then much has changed, but the issues behind the study are still hotly debated, as evidenced in this newsletter. The original report has now been recreated as a contribution to the continuing debate. We remain optimistic that a better balance can be achieved between the needs of drivers and pedestrians, and confident that implementing more of the recommendations in the report could improve the quality of the townscape, and benefit those who visit live and work in Alnwick.

The report can be downloaded from <http://tinyurl.com/cru8y6r>

Last year the executive committee were able to consider a wide range of different projects for the 2012 Civic Society Awards. This

year there has been less development activity and fewer nominations (so far). Judging will be carried out at the end of June so if there is a project which you believe needs be considered, then it is important to let the executive committee know by the middle of June.

In conjunction with the Chamber of Trade the Society has published a map of the Pants of Alnwick, with the purpose of helping visitors to explore and enjoy these distinctive features of the town. Copies are available in the Tourist Information Centre. We hope to provide a more detailed trail later in the year, so suggestions and feedback are welcome.



Survey responses are being analysed for the Neighbourhood Plan, and we hope to have more information for our next newsletter.

Civic groups nationally have been concerned about proposed extensions to householder permitted development rights in the Growth and Infrastructure Bill. In response the government has introduced a new light-touch neighbours' consultation scheme. There are still questions about the detail, and doubts whether large conservatories really are the route to economic recovery, but the concession has been welcomed, because at least now neighbours will be consulted on plans which affect them.

Picture quiz: Town Centre details

Alnwick town centre appeals on several different levels.

We particularly enjoy the perennial interest of the triangular centre; the dominance of warm sandstone as a building material, and the legacy of centuries of different building styles.

Beyond that, there are intriguing details scattered throughout the town - some of which form the subject of this picture quiz.

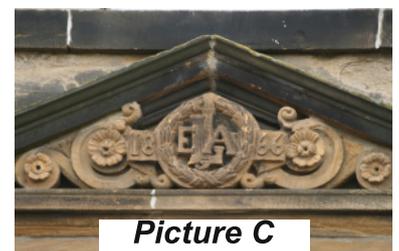
Members who recognise (or can find) all six features deserve prizes that far exceed our budget.



Picture B



Picture A



Picture C



Picture D



Picture E



Picture F



Picture G



Picture H

Walks that show the best of Alnwick

Thanks to all who suggested walks that show off the best of Alnwick. We are holding several back for the next edition, but we start with three of the most familiar - through the landscaped parkland around Alnwick Castle:

- **Hulne Park** was originally part of the Forest of Alnwick. In the middle ages 4,000 acres were enclosed by 13 miles of wall, and stocked with 1,000 fallow deer. In 1750 the first duke and his wife began to re-develop the deer park as a picturesque pleasure ground – work continued by their successors. The park was extended with the purchase of Hulne Priory, and Alnwick Abbey. The Eglington road was re-routed; natural and historic features were embellished; plantations and driveways laid, and bridges installed. Landmarks include Brizlee Tower, the Iron Bridge, and Hulne Priory. The park is accessed from Ratten Row, and a map is published by Northumberland Estates: <http://tinyurl.com/c9upkvx>. There are some access restrictions; and no dogs are allowed.

- The **Pastures** are more open land, further down the Aln valley. Major work was carried out in the early 1770's on the landscape in the area extending north, up the bank, and across the North Demesne to the Long Plantation. A new lake was considered, but never constructed, though the river was widened. The full extent of

his contribution at Alnwick is uncertain, but based on the style, Capability Brown is thought to have played an important role in the design of this particular landscape. The footpath is accessible from the bridge on Denwick Lane, or the Lion Bridge on The Peth. Highlights include views of the castle and Lion Bridge. Natural England describe the area here: <http://tinyurl.com/d6fmhk2>

- Further downstream, in 1848 Peter Eadington converted a 17th century fulling mill to grind corn, and gave his name to **Peter's Mill**. The mill fell into disuse at the start of the 20th century, and was demolished in 1926. The path between Peter's Mill footbridge and Denwick Lane runs along the river, through more landscaped parkland which extended north to Denwick, and east beyond the A1 to a line of woods. The path is accessible from the car park on Denwick Lane, or via Fisher's Lane (south of Allerburn Lea). Landmarks include Denwick Bridge, and remains of wartime defences around Lough House. The route is published as the "Waterside Trail" by Northumberland Estates:

<http://tinyurl.com/bmfy743> and Natural England: <http://tinyurl.com/d9hv3tp>

The landscape around Alnwick Castle is listed by English Heritage in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens: <http://tinyurl.com/bpdxmwo>



Programme

2013 sees the eighth year of the Marjorie Deakin Memorial Essay Competition. Each year we invite middle schools to write on a topic which requires both some research and an appreciation of our town. This

year, the subject will be "If the pants could see". Prizewinners will be chosen and recognised at the end of the summer term. See back page for details of the planned visit to Berwick on July 13th, and return visit by

Berwick Civic Society to Alnwick in September.

We are working on further activities for the 2013 programme and will publish details shortly.

Core Strategy Response

The Core Strategy sets out the strategic policies which will guide new development in Northumberland. As previously reported, the society responded to the first stage of consultation, and we were gratified to see that most of our comments were recognised. Consultation on the next stage ended in March, and we took advantage of this opportunity to reinforce our position. The full document and all comments can be found on the county web site: <http://tinyurl.com/cbkj86b>

Considerations when assessing development proposals:

Alnwick Civic Society supports in particular criteria d) *Contributes to the conservation and enhancement of Northumberland's natural, historic and built environment*; and f) *Demonstrates high quality design which respects and enhances local distinctiveness and helps promote a sense of place*. The Society considers it most important that new development conserves and enhances the historic and built environment and that all new development is well designed, takes into account local distinctiveness and promotes a strong sense of place.

Core strategic planning principles:

Policy 3 should be amended to recognise the role of historic towns in North Northumberland as tourist destinations in their own right, the importance of this role to the local economy and the need to protect the special qualities and character of historic settlements.

Further centralisation of public services away from the North Northumberland Delivery Area should be resisted. Decentralisation should be encouraged wherever possible.

Tourism

The recognition given in the text to the contribution of the County's historic towns to tourism is supported. Policy 15 should be strengthened by the addition of a reference to the need to protect the character of historic townscapes (i.e. in addition to landscapes).

The roles of Town and District Centres

The recognition given at 7.1 to the historic nature of many town centres and their contribution to the tourism economy is supported. This role should also be recognised in the body of Policy 17. Furthermore, the need to enhance the quality of the visitor experience and the need to

secure comprehensive and co-ordinated environmental improvements should also be written into policy. Alnwick Civic Society has for many years sought co-ordinated streetscape improvements in Alnwick. It proposes the establishment of a Historic Core Zone within which the balance between the convenience of pedestrians and that of vehicle drivers is improved in favour of pedestrians.

The meaning of the last sentence of paragraph 7.13 (relating to settlements such as Alnwick where there is a need for more retail floorspace but a lack of suitable opportunities) is not very clear. The more incremental approach to new floorspace in such places should be explained further. The issue should also be addressed in the policy itself.

Natural and historic environment

Criterion d. (*Development proposals should seek to conserve, protect and enhance Northumberland's distinctive and valued natural and historic environment...*) should be extended to refer to the protection and enhancement of townscape as well as landscape.

Policy 53: Historic environment and heritage assets

The reference at criterion c) (*protecting the local character of historic villages and townscapes*) is supported. Protection should be based on a thorough understanding of the defining characteristics of historic townscapes in particular areas. The Core Strategy should include a commitment to undertake comprehensive townscape assessments.

The use of Article 4 Directions to safeguard Conservation Areas is very much supported. The reference at paragraph 16.31 could, however be construed to refer to their use only in the case of the designation of additional Conservation Areas. The wording needs to be adjusted to refer to their use in existing as well as new areas.

Planning matters

There were fewer Alnwick planning applications in 2012 than in 2011, but things have already picked up in 2013, with something of a flurry in February. On average we continue to review about ten applications a month, and comment on the most significant.

We objected to an application for a mast on the listed former Territorial Drill Hall in Fenkle Street on the basis that it would disfigure a listed building, and this has since been withdrawn. We objected to installation of a green cabinet on the pavement north of the Fleece Inn, on the basis of visual impact, and risk to pedestrians (see page 1). Our objections were taken into consideration, but unfortunately it looks as though this will go ahead, as will several other similar installations. We are waiting to hear the results of our objections to plastic signage on various public buildings.

There have been a number of applications relating to advertising and illumination of the banks along Bondgate. These have



varied: some are highly unsympathetic to the character of prominent historic buildings, detrimental to the townscape, and contrary to policies in the Alnwick Core Strategy and Alnwick Design Guide for Shop Fronts. Others have been more sympathetic; some have been adapted and resubmitted. We are continuing to try and encourage a more considered approach, less damaging to the character of an award-winning street. However, we must admit to limited progress (so far).

By contrast, opposite the banks, the application by Rook Matthews Sayer for reconstruction of 3-5 Market Street was well-considered, and makes good use of an opportunity to improve the character of a prominent shopfront. We were pleased to see this application approved.

General Lambert's / Narrowgate House at 31-33 Narrowgate has been a long-standing concern. Plans to convert to residential use seemed viable, and sympathetic, but have since been withdrawn. Our hope is that a sustainable use can be found for this building - and the sooner the better.

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM on 19th March was well attended, with a high level of participation by members.

Peter Ennor's chairman's report recalled a year when the society continued to make an important contribution. Highlights included a successful Inspired Alnwick Trail, Children's Essay Competition prizes presented by the Duchess of Northumberland; Chris Mullin presenting the Civic Society Awards; Marjorie Brown's talk on F R Wilson; and a lively Any Questions debate. However, few events are now well attended, so there has been a shift in emphasis to the newsletter and digital media. The Neighbourhood Plan and consultations on the Northumberland Core Strategy had also been a major area of activity.

Gill Parker presented the Financial Statement. Once again, expenditure (at £593.18) had exceeded income (of £309.00).

Peter Ennor, Gill Parker and Sue Smith were unanimously re-elected as Chairman, Treasurer and Honorary Secretary respectively. Other Committee members were also re-elected, and members interested in joining the

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Committee were invited to get in touch with Peter Ennor.

Subscriptions had not been increased for 20 years, and with expenditure rising the meeting agreed that the committee should seek to claim Gift Aid, and raise subscriptions from 1 Jan 2014 with a review in two years time. Individual subscriptions will rise from £5.00 to £8.00; Joint: from £7.50 to £12.00; Business: from £15.00 to £20.00. Other means of increasing income were suggested, such as sponsorship; grants for discrete projects; guided walks and a membership drive.

A new constitution would be required to claim Gift Aid. The one proposed was similar to that used by other societies and involved no significant changes in how the Society operated. It was agreed subject to one change. The meeting also supported the idea of trying some afternoon meetings to see if these attracted more people.

The formal business of the AGM was followed by less formal activities themed around the Panto of Alnwick.

Diary dates

Civic Society...

We will be visiting Berwick Civic Society on Sat July 13th for a social meeting, and tour of the town. Transport arrangements will depend on the level of interest, so reserve your place now by contacting any member of the committee.

There will be a return visit by Berwick Civic Society to Alnwick on 28th Sept.

We are working on further events for the Autumn programme, and will publish details shortly.



About Alnwick Civic Society

Alnwick Civic Society was formed in 1974, following the defeat of proposals to re-develop the town centre with a modern shopping area. Since then it has sought to influence development proposals, especially in the town centre and conservation area, to ensure they protect and enhance our heritage.

The society has been involved in a number of successful high profile campaigns. It continues to pursue its objectives by providing a voice for members; through dialogue with planning and conservation professionals, and like-minded organisations; by offering advice, scrutinising and commenting on development proposals; and by recognising excellence, organising public meetings, developing guided trails, and a variety of other activities.

In response to recent changes to the planning system the society is heavily involved in development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and works with local partners to influence policy at a county level. It seeks to influence national policy in co-operation with other bodies within the civic movement, and was a founding member of Civic Voice.

All who share our aims can support the work of the society: by joining as an individual, family or business member; by participating in activities, sharing ideas, raising areas of concern and pointing out examples of good practice. Or simply by demonstrating pride in our town, and spreading the word about the value of our work.



Quiz answers

A) Window arch at Costa Coffee
69-71 Bondgate Within

B) Shop sign (mortar) above
shopfront at Boots, 10 Paikes
Street

C) Window lintel at Chocolate
Spa, 1 Fenkle Street

D) Window frame, at
Northumbria Pets 41 Bondgate
Within

E) Shop sign (Milk Churn) at 8
Narrowgate

F) Rainwater hopper on Town
Hall, in Market Place

G) Copper dome above Bailey's
Cafe, 49-51 Bondgate Within

H) Gothick Savings Bank now
Gordon Caris clocks, at 11
Narrowgate

Who's who?

President: Philip Deakin

Chair: Peter Ennor (peter.ennor@gmail.com)

Treasurer and Membership: Gill Parker

Honorary Secretary: Sue Smith

Other Executive Committee members:

Michael Apted

Elizabeth Jones

Trish Jones

Brian Lamb

David Lovie (davidlovie307@btinternet.com)

Peter Reed / Newsletter (peter.reed@aligre.co.uk)

Caroline Stewart

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