

HINCKLEY CIVIC SOCIETY

www.hinckleycivicsociety.org.uk

"striving for a better Hinckley"

NEWSLETTER

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TOWN CENTRES OF 2020 – WHAT WILL THEY LOOK LIKE?

2009 has arrived with probably few of us unscathed either directly or indirectly from the present financial crisis. Financial predictions for the New Year are hardly optimistic and the High Street is bearing perhaps more than its share of the present difficulties. Experian's retail consultancy section forecasts one in seven of the UK's retail premises will be empty by the end of 2009*. It does beg the question, if this continues, what will our typical high street look like perhaps in only two or three years from now, let alone a decade away?

History shows how market towns evolve and adapt to their immediate local needs and circumstances. Many towns both enjoy periods of prosperity and weather more difficult times. Some find they may even have to re-invent themselves in order to regain viability, but, whilst some general parameters may often be common, there is no simple template or solution to fit all cases. Some of the present difficulties may be short-term, but it is perhaps time for our planners and decision-makers to recognise that many of the certainties of the last half-century are being swept away. No longer do we pay many utility bills in town centre offices, banking is increasingly automated and remote, whilst the role of the post office is also much diminished – all once compelling reasons for us to visit our local town centres and create a bustling atmosphere. Furthermore, it is strongly arguable that an increasingly negative aspect Local Government culture is frequently compounding the problem with often poorly planned and draconian restrictions on access backed with rigid enforcement that sometimes borders on insanity. Add to this the impact of online shopping (estimates vary on the percentage of sales now transacted through internet but all agree it is rising rapidly) of which the UK is at the forefront and it is not surprising many traditional retailers, both large and small, view 2009-10 with some anxiety.

- Source - press release issued by Reuters – Tuesday 6th Jan 2009 – quoting Experian forecast

Could it be that the traditional solution for struggling towns of the last several decades in the guise of creating additional retail capacity is perhaps no longer a viable or sensible one? It is beginning to look very outdated and questionable and certainly needs to be reassessed in the light of current trends. Maybe more thought and resources, both human and financial, should go into bringing gainful and productive employment to our inner urban areas of a non-retail variety? Viable town centres depend on people with spending power, but in the new 21st century order, people are much less dependent on town centres!

It will be a brave person who will forecast how things will evolve in the next decade, but it is clear that all our towns will have to adapt to this rapidly changing environment. The town centre of the 21st century may have a quite different character and appearance from its traditional 20th century predecessor and there is an increasing likelihood that some towns may simply not survive this transition.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Monday 26th January 2009

'Health Evening'

Rupert Herd will update on the George Eliot Hospital Foundation Trust

&

**Hugh Beavin will lead a discussion on the history and future of the Hinckley Cottage
Hospital**

Monday 23 February 2009

Geoff Pursglove

"The Ashby Canal – Past, Present and Future"

Monday 23rd March 2009

To be advised

All meetings commence 7.30pm at The Great Meeting, Baines Lane

A reminder for any outstanding subscriptions

£10 per household please remit to Greg Drozd (Treasurer)

Heritage Protection Bill dropped

Some of you may have noticed the long-trailed Heritage Protection Bill was not included in the measures to be considered by Parliament in the current session announced in the Queen's Speech in November.

According to information issued from the Civic Trust it now seems likely that much of proposed Bill can be implemented without primary legislation, and Government have apparently already indicated their commitment to progressing this, and that the Bill may well appear in a future programme.

However, a major concern is the loss of proposals for a single integrated register of heritage assets, and the new arrangements for Listing and it appears there is Government pressure to reduce the amount of Listing, particularly spot-listing, and DCMS are requiring a review of Listing applications if they receive any objections.

The Civic Trust points out that every area has many buildings that are not statutorily Listed, but merit being identified on a List of Buildings of Local Interest which make a positive contribution and should preferably be retained. The Trust is therefore keen to persuade all Local Authorities to set up Local Lists and is concerned that many authorities do not have such lists.

The Trust advises that under a proposed Circular to correct a past judgment, unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas will have protection once again and that English Heritage will be urging expansion of Article 4 Directions and Local Orders restricting permitted development rights. The Trust suggests that whilst Local Authorities will have powers to do this, public pressure on them to do so is essential – and that this is a way in which local Civic Societies can be active in pressing for improved heritage protection. *(This may have some immediate relevance in Hinckley – see item regarding Post Office below).*

The Civic Trust also advises the “Heritage Champions” system will be a vital element in getting LPAs to adopt Local Lists.

New guidelines in the form of PPS15/16, the new PPS to replace PPG15 (Historic Environment) and PPG16 (Archaeology), are expected to appear as consultation drafts before Easter.

Hinckley Post Office Building

At the height of the debate on its closure way back in the summer of 2007, the Society made a formal bid to list the Post Office Building on Station Road. This formal process has now been completed and, at the end of November, the Society was officially advised by English Heritage that Hinckley Post Office building was not considered worthy of listed status as

significant alterations have been made to the exterior of the original structure.

Heritage Weekend

2009 Heritage Weekend will span the four days from Thursday 10th – Sunday 13th September. Sad to report, as last year, no positive contact has been received from the appropriate Council source, even though the subject was raised with the Council six months ago. However, the Society will be participating through its own resources and on its own terms – see later paragraph on literary event.

Blue Plaques

As you may have seen the local press just before Christmas, the three Blue Plaques are now in Hinckley and plans are now in hand for 'official' unveilings of the new plaques; more news at our January meeting.

Literary Event

Progress on this project has been disappointing on a number of fronts. Despite welcome supportive copy from the *Leicester Mercury*, no interest has arisen from local sources. Furthermore, hopes of both gaining a grant from sources purporting to back arts projects have thus far met with little success and the earlier promise of a leading role in Hinckley & Bosworth 2009 Arts Week in October is looking fanciful as the 2009 events calendar recently distributed in the Borough has no mention of Arts Week at

all. It has therefore been decided that the Society will offer independently a series of literary lectures at various venues during the four days of Heritage weekend in September – full details will be announced in the next few weeks.

Once again it is stressed this is a huge opportunity to promote Hinckley & Bosworth's little known literary heritage to a wider audience, both inside and outside the Borough. Some towns make an industry out of their literary heritage, on present form Hinckley seems to choose to wallow in blissful ignorance of its literary connections. It may also prove to be a test of real interest in the work of the Society.

Final thought.....

"Clever towns live not *in* the past, but *from* the past"

Dr Amir Muzur, Mayor of Opatija (Croatia), from broadcast on Radio 3 (Vienna New Year's Day Concert) on New Year's Day 2009.

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