

# **HINCKLEY CIVIC SOCIETY**

[www.hinckleycivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hinckleycivicsociety.org.uk)

*"striving for a better Hinckley"*

## **NEWSLETTER**

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**NO. 3 – OCTOBER 2007**

### **NEXT MEETINGS**

**MONDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2007**

**George Denny - 'The Good Old Days'**

**MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2007**

**Councillor David Bill, Leader Hinckley & Bosworth District**

**Council - 'The Changing Scene in Local Government'**

**Both at GREAT MEETING - 7.30pm**

A provisional programme of dates for the full 2007-8 season is enclosed with this letter.

Separate pdf file if receiving by e-mail

### **AGM AND TRUSTEES FOR 2007-8**

Five of the Trustees from 2006-7, Howard Wilkins, Yvonne Bates, Hugh Beavin, Greg Drozd and Bob Gibson were re-elected at the September AGM and we welcome one new Trustee, Geoff Denney, for the forthcoming year. Three trustees from 2006-7 had either already resigned or did not stand for re-election.

### **SUBSCRIPTIONS for 2007-8**

**Subscriptions for 2007-8 (Held at £5 per membership) are now due**

## HINCKLEY - THE REAL PROBLEM - A QUESTION OF AN INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE?

Society Vice Chair, **Bob Gibson**, follows his February talk on 'An outsider's view of Hinckley' with a look at the town's infrastructure

Infrastructure is a term having diverse meanings in different fields, but is generally widely understood to refer to roads, transport networks, and other essential utilities. A community unwilling or unable to renew or upgrade its basic infrastructure has little chance of economic growth. In the case of a town, such as Hinckley, that has suffered the loss of its staple industries, a sound and efficient infrastructure becomes a key criteria to any regeneration and the difficult, and competitive, business of attracting new industry and a new purpose and identity for the town and its workforce.

If my proposition regarding infrastructure is accepted, then how does Hinckley measure on this test? Sadly, it seems to me Hinckley rates very badly indeed. Its town centre, only two decades ago a thriving community, has been reshaped into a series of cul-de-sacs, a total nightmare for any visitor unfamiliar with the town. Even public transport has been forced on a nomadic tour of inadequate roads around its periphery to reach the abomination known as Hinckley bus station. Trying to cross Hinckley by road from the Rugby Road direction to Ashby Road or Leicester Road is worse than navigating many large city centres with a succession of uncoordinated traffic lights festooned along a woefully inadequate road system seemingly designed to ensure vehicles sit belching fumes across the town, rather than to facilitate a smooth and easy passage.

Try reaching Hinckley by rail. History has decreed we are stuck on a cul-de-sac of railway link from Birmingham to Leicester. However, in the last four years, an initially, much improved service has been decimated as the basic 30-minute interval service to Nottingham and direct services to Coventry have both been lost. Amazingly, this seemed to attract little protest from organisations in the town such as the Chamber of Commerce or the Council itself. Indeed, when I posed the question about the declining state of Hinckley's rail services to an apparently disinterested Council Official at our meeting last November, I was fobbed off with the answer that Central Trains were difficult to communicate with. Outside the town £5 million has just been 'invested' on the notorious A5 Stretton Bends. The result - a reduced speed limit on one of the nation's major trunk roads and guess what? - The bends are still there with narrower carriageways - what a total waste of time, effort and resources!

These are just four examples, yet there is a whole litany of other examples of which space precludes further mention. Thus, my submission is that if Hinckley, or any other town, does not ensure it has a developing infrastructure to meet the fast changing conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it will consign itself to the economic dustbin. The moribund thinking and apparent indifference of the last two decades from the town's leaders, both private and public, have undoubtedly contributed to the fact that Hinckley now resembles a stranded whale wallowing on its death beach simply unable to cope with the dramatically changed circumstances now surrounding it.

There needs to be a wake up call or Hinckley will continue its downward spiral; a graveyard of industrial decay, of little interest to anyone other than those who perhaps once strived hard for a meagre living in its more vibrant times. I see the role of a Civic Society as being to work to ENHANCE and IMPROVE the facilities of a town; to assist in looking to a better future whilst keeping that worthy of preservation from the past. However, without a sound and modern infrastructure, the chances of achieving this are slim. Hinckley needs some radical thinking; the fragmented approach of retail in-fill and the re-scrambling of a medieval road pattern are utterly outmoded and have no future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Station Road

Our presentation to the Heritage Protection Operations Department at English Heritage expressing concerns about the implications regarding possible future development to the area that the proposed relocation of the Post Office may precipitate has been acknowledged and the matter is now in the hands of English Heritage's regional office in Cambridge. Further developments will be announced at our monthly meetings

## The National Green Housing Plan

In July the Department of Communities and Local Government published a consultation document outlining its national housing plans for the next decade or more. It is likely to be the basis of a framework for many planning issues in years to come. The broad aims of the paper are to:

- Provide more homes to meet growing demand
- To provide more well designed and greener homes, linked to good schools, transport and healthcare
- Provide more affordable homes to buy or rent

Proposals include

- Delivering 3 million new homes by 2020, including 10 new "eco towns"
- Additional support and funding for 29 new "growth points"
- More affordable housing in small towns and villages
- To make better use of Brownfield land and empty properties
- An extra £14 billion to be spent on infrastructure improvements in the three growth areas of London, the South-East and South-West
- Measures to increase home ownership such as mortgage reforms, shared ownership and an increase in social housing.

- A planning gain supplement bill to draw down more infrastructure funding from developers.
- Reviews of regional plans to reflect the need for more housing
- Housing and Planning delivery grants to reward councils who are delivering high levels of new housing
- Action to permit applications for housing where councils have not identified enough land.

The full paper can be downloaded for the DCLG website at [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homesforfuture](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homesforfuture)

## Victorian Water Tower - A question of purpose and finance?

As most of you will be aware the Water Tower has not been deemed suitable for listing status by English Heritage, though newspaper reports do suggest that Severn Trent are prepared to keep the structure intact in the foreseeable future.

The issues surrounding this case are interesting when the two key questions are posed. Firstly, what is its future role or purpose of the building? Secondly, perhaps even more crucial, who will underwrite its future financial viability and upkeep? The answers to both these questions are often difficult when considering many potential preservation projects but they really do need to be thought about and some practical answers proposed, especially in view of the growing restraint on funds available for heritage projects – see next item.

### More Cuts on Heritage projects from Lottery Fund

More bad news on this front: late summer saw the 'leak' of the news that the budget from the National Lottery for major heritage projects is to withstand still further pruning to provide funding for the 2012 Olympics. In 2008-9 the Lottery Fund will have just £20million to allocate to large projects; in 2006-7 it had four times that amount. *Guardian Arts Correspondent Charlotte Higgins* suggests 'the post-millennium age of expansion and renewal of Britain's museums and other heritage organisations is now at an end'.

*Guardian 29<sup>th</sup> August 2007 p11*

### Blue Plaques

A proposition from Greg Drozd asking the Society to submit a plan to the Council for the erection of a series of Blue Plaques received strong support at the AGM and is now being actioned.

### Atkins Building

No further news to report

### Nostalgia Weekend

Saturday and Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> October are the dates for 'A Nostalgia Exhibition' at the St John's Ambulance Centre on Brunel Road. Several of the town's voluntary groups will be present. Do try to pop in – open Saturday (10am-5pm) and Sunday (2-4pm).

### Heritage Open Days 2008

Heritage Weekend in 2008 will take place from Thursday to Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> September. The Society has indicated it will take on responsibility for organising the event locally. Volunteers will be required at both planning and delivery stages. Anyone interested in helping with the project please contact as soon as possible

### New Rail Franchisee from November

Hinckley will soon say farewell to Central Trains. The new operator, from Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November will be Arriva Cross Country, though initially the service and times will remain essentially unchanged, thus continuing what many of us see the same unreliable service based around the very tight turnarounds, especially at Birmingham New Street, of the integrated W-formation timings of the Birmingham Stansted and Birmingham Leicester services – when it goes down, it goes like a pack of cards! Arriva is currently consulting regarding a revised timetable for its entire Cross-country network commencing late 2008: I wonder if we might arouse some interest from our Council and other key stakeholders in the town?

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