

# Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

epsomcivicsociety.org.uk

NEWSLETTER No -149 - AUTUMN 2016

## CHAIR'S COMMENTARY

### Twitter Launch

The Society's Twitter account opened on 6<sup>th</sup> June. We can be found @EpsomCivicSoc and at time of writing, we have put out 132 tweets and have 64 followers! For Society members with Twitter accounts already, if you wish to avoid your Twitter feed being clogged up with ECS related tweets, you can create a separate 'Epsom Civic Society' list and add members to it as appropriate.

Members of the Society who may wish to join Twitter will find that there is currently no charge for a Twitter account, and it is easy to set one up: Googling 'Twitter' takes you to the following link: <https://twitter.com/?lang=en-gb> where you can sign up (email or telephone details needed, and a password). There is no need to open an account in your own name, you can be quite anonymous, and there is no need to tweet, you can just follow others. If you do tweet, tweets can be read by anyone. If you would like more information before committing to a Twitter account, here is a link to the Twitter Help Center (sic): <https://support.twitter.com/>

What have we been tweeting about so far?

First up, *the operation of the planning system*. On 7th June, on behalf of the Society, I attended the joint Civic Societies' and Local Democracy All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) event, 'Is the Planning System Working?', organised by Civic Voice and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) at Portcullis House. In addition to tweeting details in advance, I was able to do some live-tweeting from the event itself, to enable followers of @EpsomCivicSoc and Twitter users generally to keep up with proceedings. Some key points tweeted from the debate: communities need to be more greatly heard and have more input into the planning system; Scott Mann MP's planning 'wish list', namely allocating planning officers to specific towns and villages, allocation of individual planning inspectors to each local authority area, and extending powers to parish and town councils to request call-in of planning applications. Other tweets covered the call from Baroness Kate Parminter (Lib Dem Deputy Leader in the House of Lords) for a limited third party right of appeal, and the comment from Clive Betts MP, (Chair of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee in the House of Commons), who said, "Planning should not be seen as an obstacle to anything." Addressing the audience, Lord Porter, Chair of the Local Government Association, queried why local authorities without a local plan had not seen an increase in neighbourhood planning, while Baroness Parminter told delegates that there is more housebuilding in areas with neighbourhood planning. Additionally I re-tweeted (ie forwarded other people's tweets) with photos of the event, and a few days later tweeted a YouTube link to a 5 minute video overview of the meeting, also available here: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/uvP1ME0o3FE>

In terms of *arts and heritage*, the MGSO4 Epsom and Ewell Arts Festival at the end of June provided a fruitful source for tweeting, including details about schoolchildren's artwork and the schools' poetry competition, which the Society sponsored. We've tweeted updates on progress from the Horton Chapel Trust, and links to new heritage publications and guidance from Historic England (formerly English Heritage). The Society is also a sponsor of the Woodland Trust's Centenary Wood in Langley Vale, and in early July we tweeted details of the winning design from Mark Wray Architects for the visitors' centre. The Borough's international choral event, 'Europe in Harmony', was another notable event which the Society was happy to publicise via Twitter.

The sun shone for the *Society's visit to Smallhythe Place and Great Dixter* in June, so it was an easy decision to tweet photos.

In terms of *local development proposals*, and especially where they have generated considerable local interest and /or concern, we have taken the opportunity to tweet links to our letters of representation to the Council (already available on our website): cases include the Derby Square makeover, the development of the Comrades' Club by Premier Inn, and the proposed development in Links Road.

As for *parks and green spaces*, we took the opportunity to tweet our congratulations on hearing that four Epsom and Ewell green spaces retained their Green Flag award, and tweeted details of the Government Inquiry into the Future of Public Parks and a link to the survey that you can complete online – Parliament would like to hear your views about your local park. You also have until 30<sup>th</sup> September to submit evidence, if you wish, to the House of Commons Select Committee, and we tweeted the information link for that as well.

Insofar as they will impact on Epsom, we have tweeted links and information on wider *transport* issues including the proposals for Crossrail 2, where Epsom is a proposed terminus, and the pros and cons of the Gatwick / Heathrow airport expansion options. We've also tweeted details of the consultation on the proposed Epsom / Banstead sustainable transport improvements package, about which Reigate and Banstead DC would like to hear from you.

Finally – for now – we've taken the opportunity to tweet details about *sources of funding and grants* for parks and green spaces, and about *resources for neighbourhood planning*. We've also tweeted about news, events and developments that interest us, the Society's committee and which we think will be of interest to our members.

We think that Twitter can be a useful updating and awareness-raising mechanism for the Society, having the benefit of speed and ease of use. In addition to enabling us to communicate with our members quickly and effectively (should you choose to join Twitter and follow us), opportunities exist for us to make new links (eg with other Civic Societies) and to engage with a wide range of information sources. According to Civic Voice, the national charity for the civic movement, about 70 Civic Societies are on Twitter. Twitter will not be a substitute for our use of email which is a well-established, key communication mechanism for the Society and its members. Twitter's easily accessible platform does, however, provide an opportunity for everyone to engage immediately with the Society's activities and areas of interest. We hope you will try it.

**Margaret Hollins**

## **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

*5 Alexandra Road:* Last time I mentioned the interesting situation with this Edwardian house, which Malcolm illustrated with one of his photographs, adjoining a site being redeveloped to a permitted contemporary design. We wrote suggesting that this was an opportunity for something with more architectural character than proposed in the current application. We were very pleased that the architect and his client asked for a meeting with us. They explained that they wanted a good traditional design to suit the market they were building for, which is entirely reasonable. The design was discussed in some detail and they offered a number of amendments which we found helpful. We are encouraged that developers seek meetings with us and that the planning department welcome these approaches. A decision is awaited.

*Berridale, 15 College Road:* This is another case in point and we discussed the contemporary design with the planning consultant and architect. In commenting on the application we had been far from convinced that the design was suitable for this location. At the meeting we were very impressed by the quality of the design and the materials, although excellence in execution would be important. The question of suitability remained. Differences of opinion, ranging from "another flat roofed box" to "an outstanding contemporary design" were expressed in our own Committee and in the Planning Committee. At the

latter Mark Berry thought the design was of high quality and said it was important to consider whether it was compatible with other architecture in the area; he advised against reaching a decision purely on personal taste. In Committee it was recommended for approval; a proposal to refuse failed to find a seconder and the application was narrowly permitted on a vote of 5 for, 3 against and 4 abstentions.

*25 Alexandra Road:* My file on the redevelopment of this site started in 2002, so it's an old friend. This is a locally listed late Victorian house and is the last surviving one of its kind in this part of Alexandra Road, which is otherwise well known for a long series of undistinguished blocks of flats. A number of Planning Inspectors have said that demolition of the house and erection of further flats would not harm the environment but we have always disagreed. The latest application last year was refused on the grounds that it would result in the total loss of a heritage asset; the Inspector once again took the view that this would not cause harm to the historic environment but dismissed the appeal solely on affordable housing grounds. Over the years, permissions have failed to be implemented. We now have three more applications. Two are for demolition and redevelopment, one with 10 flats the other with 14, and the third, for conversion of the house to three apartments together with six apartments to the rear of the site, built to match the style of the house. I have taken a straight-faced line supporting the conversion and objecting to demolition. It is possible that more than one permission will be granted. Unfortunately the house is continuing to deteriorate.

*Wilsons Automobiles, 101B East Street:* Permission was granted for the new garage at the corner of East Street and Kiln Lane subject to a condition that all display vehicles shall be displayed within the showroom and the forecourt shall not be used for the display of vehicles or for any storage purposes in connection with the use of the showroom. A further application sought the amendment of this condition to remove the restriction on vehicle display on the forecourt. We strongly opposed this and considered display on this corner as most undesirable and offensive to the amenities of the area. The application has now been refused.

*Land rear of 23A-33 Links Road:* This a large open area behind the houses in Links Road and extending to the rear gardens of houses in Higher Green. It is grassed over with a number of protected trees. In 2014 we objected to an application for redevelopment but it was later withdrawn. A further application was made earlier this year for the erection of four large five-bedroom houses in a contemporary design. We again objected for a number of reasons and the application has been refused on the grounds that it would not maintain or respect the character of the area, would have a materially harmful effect, would have unsatisfactory access and would threaten the sylvan character of the setting.

*145 Grosvenor Road:* The application described in the last Newsletter to extend this bungalow into two houses was refused as having an incongruous appearance, being overly dominant, having a harmful effect and being unduly overbearing. An appeal has been made and I have confirmed our objection to the Inspectorate using for the first time their efficient online service.

**Alan Baker**

## CONSERVATION

Things have continued to be quiet on the conservation front. Although I have looked at 25 applications since the AGM, mostly relatively modest domestic proposals, none have necessitated a letter.

In May I wrote on behalf of the committee in connection with an application concerning Derby Square. The application was for the "Erection of a canopy structure, feature seating and landscaping in Derby Square together with High Street entrance feature." If you would like to see more detail – and there is a lot of it – the application references are: 15/01851/FUL and 15/01582/ADV. We discussed the proposals at some length and there was a wide spread of views. The letter included the following paragraph:

'The Society's committee considered this application at their meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> May. The committee was unanimously of the view that proposals to enliven this important part of the town centre were very welcome and greatly to be encouraged. Views differed quite widely regarding the style and design of the

various elements of the rebranding proposals, but unanimous concern was voiced about two matters.'

I should add that the application was approved at the end of July. Happily, the conditions included that the 'Evocation of Speed' is not to be removed before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 'to ensure a new location is prepared and agreed in advance in the interests of protecting this important piece of public art'. A photograph of the piece is used on the front of our brochure and application form.

Our differing views about Derby Square underlines the question 'What is good design?' and even more 'What is good Taste?'. You may remember that I brought this matter up at the end of last year when I reported the winner of the 'Carbuncle Cup' for 2015 was the 'Walkie Talkie', 20 Fenchurch Street. That was an easy one – just look at it: overbearing, top heavy, threatening, out of place and so on. Incidentally, this year's winner of the Cup is expected to be announced in September – I will keep you posted.

I am still wrestling with just what is 'good taste'? So I turned to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* – that's the two volume edition of 3,743 pages. It devotes 21 ½ column inches to the word and its derivatives. The third noun definition includes the following:

- Mental perception of quality, judgement, discriminative faculty
- The fact or condition of liking or preferring something; an inclination, liking or predilection
- The sense of what is appropriate, harmonious or beautiful; aesthetic discrimination in art literature, fashion etc.

No real help there then, although the third meaning is a little useful. So I turned to the *Oxford Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* by James Stevens Curl, a Professor Emeritus and a leading architectural historian. I found no help there either, although the list of sources he mentions in his introduction going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century shows that people have been asking this sort of question for a long time. Incidentally, if you are interested, Professor Curl has written a number of interesting books including the fascinating *The Victorian Celebration of Death*. Despite its gloomy title, a gripping read if you have that sort of mind.

I turned next to *Surrey*, part of the *Buildings of England* series by Nikolaus Pevsner, who I have quoted before. He makes some interesting comments about the county which are worth quoting: 'Surrey is one of those English counties that will not fit into the traditional pattern. It was so remote in the Middle Ages that it does not possess a large medieval parish church; yet today there is hardly anywhere in the county where one can feel free of London. It has been in the forefront of English Architecture only once, in 1900, and has since seen the endless debased multiplication of the type of building it pioneered. A history of English medieval architecture could be written without once mentioning a surviving Surrey building; a history of the suburb or the folly could be almost written without going outside the county. All through the county there are these paradoxes and somehow Surrey always seems to get the worst of the bargain.'

Later on, mentioning that Surrey is the eighth smallest county, he adds: 'Within that space there is remarkable variety in both scenery and geology. What is spoilt is utterly spoilt, what is left alone, or more often vigorously preserved, is enchanting.'

None of this was very helpful to my search, but it is a powerful reminder of the value of, and the need for, ECS's work.

Lastly, I turned to Matthew Price's *Architectural Primer*, a charming and very useful book derived from a series of architectural cribs commissioned by and published in *Country Life*. If you want an introduction to architecture, this is as good as any. But it still didn't tell me anything about taste or good design.

So we will have to go on, trusting in our own judgement and that our own views aren't too far astray and that the members of your committee will continue to argue their views fearlessly and to write about them to our local planners whenever the needs arises.

**Rob Austen.**

## OUTING to SMALLHYTHE PLACE and GREAT DIXTER

We had a quirky welcoming talk on arrival at Ellen Terry's home, Smallhythe Place. The atmosphere is very homely with all her theatrical memorabilia including some amazing stage dresses and a rose-filled cottage garden. Lunch in the hamlet of Newenden was slightly haphazard but members managed to visit the local church and the field opposite claimed that cricket had been played there since the 1300s.



Smallhythe Place

Great Dixter lived up to its fame with the gardens looking superb and members wandered at will around exploring its intricacies. However everyone found the rustic cafe and many enjoyed the local ice cream.



Great Dixter

The next Newsletter will have details of a future outing. I had planned to go to Chichester Festival Theatre but they have no performances at the end of November, however I shall hope to go to The Mill at Sonning again next year since many members ask to return there .

**Sheila Wadsworth**

## SCHOOLS POETRY COMPETITION

The **MGSO4** recent Arts Festival included a children's poetry competition that was sponsored by the Society. The winning entries for the 6-7 age (left) and 8-11 age (right) groups are shown below and are published here by permission.

### **BUSTLING EPSOM ROADS** by Hana Shaw

Chessington Road, funfairs, roller coasters, candyfloss.  
Pine Close, pine needles, pine trees, pine seeds  
Elm Road, elm trees, elm seeds, elm leaves.  
Holly Close, holly trees, holly berries, holly leaves.  
Victoria Place, Victoria, queens, royalty.  
Windmill Lane, windmills, turning, wind.  
Bridge Road, bridges, rivers, water.  
Bridle Close, ponies, bridles, stables  
Chestnut Avenue, chestnuts, avenues, nuts  
Church Street, churches, Christianity, praying.  
London Road, London, Big Ben, the London Eye.  
Chalk Lane, chalk, whiteness, crumbliness  
Cherry Tree Lane, cherry trees, cherries, sweetness.  
Bramble Walk, brambles, thorns, blackberries!

### **SECRETS** by Isaac Collins

I know a place where the ground has opened  
A gaping mouth swallowing trees  
I know a place where trees can whistle  
Their wooden lips create a transfixing harmony  
I know a place where the heavens have opened  
Like a gap in the sky where birds can keep watch  
I know a place where the flowers bloom  
A sea of colours just waiting to be swum  
I know a place where vines are climbing  
A beautiful green of clambering strings  
I know a place where the twigs are snapping  
Like a mouse and a trap, crack, crack, crack  
I know a place like no other  
The wonderful Epsom Common- that's all



The prize-winners with the Mayor, the organisers and Malcolm Boyd

## NATIONAL TRUST FREE PASSES

Through the Society's membership of Civic Voice we again have Free National Trust Single Use Passes for our members - one per member. They are valid until 31st May 2017. English Heritage Passes are not available this year but Civic Voice are hoping they will be next year. If you would like to make use of this offer please contact me.

**Ishbel Kenward**, Membership Secretary. 01372 728570 email [info@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk)

## **E-MAILS**

I mentioned emails in the last Newsletter and I would point out that those members whose email addresses I have, received the information about free NT passes in the second week of July. This gave them more of the summer to take advantage of the offer. Please let me know if you'd like your email address added to the list.

**Ishbel Kenward** - Membership Secretary

## **ROAD REPS**

Our Road Reps and Distributors are essential to the Society and we are grateful to all 65 of them. I am especially grateful to Sue Doughty who agreed to take over as Distribution Organiser which she has been doing very efficiently for nearly 3 years.

At the moment there is one area not covered. It is 13 households around Lower Court Road. For various good reasons none of the members in that area are able to do this. Therefore I am looking for someone, perhaps living nearby but doesn't have to be, who would be prepared to take on this task for the Society. This entails delivering 4 Newsletters a year and collecting annual subscriptions. If you think that you might be able to help in this way please give me a ring on 01372 728570 for more information.

**Ishbel Kenward** - Membership Secretary

## **ASHLEY CENTRE EXHIBITION** Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October

Do come along to see what we are trying to achieve for Epsom. Committee members will be manning the Exhibition and will be happy to see members as well as hopefully gain new recruits. This is our main recruiting event of the year so if you have family, friends, neighbours or colleagues you think might be interested in joining please tell them about the Exhibition and / or bring them along

## PLANNING for a MORE COMPETITIVE TOWN CENTRE

Surveys will be going out to all town centre businesses over the next month to see if they want to create a Business Improvement District (BID) in Epsom. A BID is a business-led, business-funded organisation that pools money (usually about 1.4% on top of business rates) to pay for things they think are important in the town. Typically this will including: branding and marketing of the town centre; ways of making the town centre cleaner, greener, safer and more attractive; events and specialist markets (such as craft markets and German Christmas markets); and working with businesses to help them grow. All Epsom's main competitors or near neighbours (including Sutton, Kingston, Guildford and Croydon) have BIDs and many businesses are worried Epsom is missing out.

**Alanna Coombes**, Towns Manager, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

## THE SCHOOLS GARDEN PROJECT

At this point, eight schools have received grants to support the development of students' gardens and we have received encouraging feedback with some photographs. We have recently been successful in finding someone who will act as liaison between the schools and the committee. **Malcolm Boyd**

## ANNUAL BUFFET SUPPER

Below there is a repeat application form for the Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October event. The committee really enjoy welcoming members and their friends to this occasion and we are usually graced by the Mayor and Mayoress of Epsom. The entertainment is from The Downsmen, a highly talented local men's choir who always provide a varied, lighthearted and interesting performance. The occasion begins at 7.30 p.m. in St. Joseph's Church Hall, St. Margaret's Drive, off Dorking Road, Epsom, with a welcoming drink. Then we have a generous buffet provided by Studio Food brought to your table and about 9.0 p.m. the singers will start and the evening ends about 10.15 p.m. There is a car park beside the Hall. Cost is £22 per person. If you have any queries on the event, please telephone me on 01372-273517.

### APPLICATION FOR THE ANNUAL BUFFET SUPPER - Friday 28<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER

Name/s .....

Address .....

Tel. No. . . . .

No. of tickets @ £22 pp ..... Total Cost £ .....

Any dietary or allergy requirements? Yes/No. Please list .....

Please return this application slip with your cheque made out to "Epsom Civic Society" and a stamped addressed envelope to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashted, KT21 1LJ. (01372-273517)

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