

Wigstons' Voice

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WIGSTON CIVIC SOCIETY
REPRESENTING WIGSTON MAGNA, SOUTH WIGSTON & KILBY BRIDGE

SPRING 2020

EDITION 13



SPOUTEWELL COTTAGE, BULLHEAD STREET, WIGSTON
(SEE DETAILS INSIDE THE BACK PAGE THE NEWSLETTER)

www.wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk

Founded in 1978

*“we strive to make the
Wigstons a better place
in which to live work
and shop”*



WIGSTON CIVIC SOCIETY COMMITTEE AS ELECTED AT THE AGM MAY 2019

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| Chairman | Peter Cousins | chairman@wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk |
| Vice Chair | Maureen Waugh | vicechair@wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk |
| Secretary | Colin Towell | secretary@wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk 07813 782 899 |
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| Publicity/Events | Nicola Alexander | publicity@ wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk |
| Newsletter Editor | Peter Cousins | news@wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk |
| Other Committee Members: Roy Hughes, Peter Holmes, Colin Hames, Yvonne and John Woodward | | |

Committee meetings are now held every 3 months on the first Wednesday of the month.

The meeting dates for 2020 will be:

Thursday May 7 (AGM)

Wednesday 5 August

Wednesday 4 November

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

We would like interesting and informative articles for the Voice newsletter.

Have you any concerns about the Borough that you would like to bring to the attention of the Membership and the public?

**Articles for the newsletter can be sent directly to the Editor by e-mail at:
news@wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

WILL BE HELD ON

**THURSDAY 7 MAY 2020
AT 7.30PM**

**VENUE: THE MAPLE ROOM,
AGE UK PADDOCK STREET
(REAR ENTRANCE)
WIGSTON LE18 2AN**

**FOLLOWED BY:
A TALK BY:
ROSALIND WILLATTS**

THE SUBJECT WILL BE:

**CONSERVATION IN
THE URBAN AREA**

**ALL MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC ARE WELCOME
ADMISSION FREE (NO BOOKING NEEDED)
LIGHT REFRESHMENTS SERVED**

PLANNING BRIEFS

Newton Lane (*East Wigston Meadows*): This development continues at a great pace, perhaps the notable impact so far has been recent flooding on Newton Lane adjacent to the site. In addition, it is clear that work has commenced at the Kilby Bridge end of the site where the roundabout will be installed on the Wigston side of the railway bridge. Street names agreed by the council for this part of the site are: Waldens Way (suggested by the Society); Black Swan Road and Lime Delph Road.

A booklet to be given to all new purchasers on the scheme is currently awaiting approval by the developer. This has been written by Duncan Lucas and Colin Towell along the lines of a similar booklet given to owners on the Wigston Harcourt site at the time of its development. It emphasises the original name for the area which was East Wigston.

Land west of Welford Road, A5199 near Kilby Bridge (*Clarence Fields*): Members who occasionally travel along Welford Road will perhaps be surprised to see that the first houses are well on the way. This is since the last edition of 'the Voice' in September when there had been no start on site. The PWG has discovered that the report prepared by planning officers for applications that do not come to planning committee can be obtained on request. This has been found to be similar to a planning committee report but not quite so comprehensive.

The road name chosen for this site was Rawson Drive reflecting the name of the previous landowner. It is interesting to note that the developer, Redrow, has opened a sales office on Leicester Road where, on display, is a scale model of the site.

Other recent applications on which comments have been made are:

20/00017 Horse and Trumpet, new signs and lighting: Comments on light intrusion and poor sign design regarding light lettering on dark background is not as clear as dark lettering on a light background. Application not yet decided. **20/00001 Preapp 32 Bell Street**: This application is for the conversion of the first floor to flats and the construction of a new block of flats to the rear adjacent to the alleyway next to Sainsburys. Strong objections were raised to this pre application which appears to result from a new procedure for the Council to ask for comments on such an application. There is no information on the progress of this application.

19/00481 41,43 and 45 Long Street: This is an application to join numbers 41 and 43 to the dentists at 45. No work is proposed to the front elevations, but the comment was made that as many trees as possible should be retained as should the blue plaque to the front of number 41. Application not yet decided.

19/00454 124A Countesthorpe Road: This application is for the conversion of the first floor and attic into flats. A strong objection was submitted on the basis of small room sizes, lack of parking spaces and low light levels in attic flats. This application was withdrawn and resubmitted on 20/00030 which appears to be even worse, but no formal comments have been submitted yet.

19/00417 Domino's Pizza extended opening hours. A straight objection was submitted. Application granted. **19/00365 Ellis Farm Kilby Bridge**: demolition of stables and erect a new dwelling. The poor application was commented on which made it difficult to properly comment on this proposal which is within the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area. Application withdrawn.

19/00283 19 Arndale. This application appeared to be a repeat of an earlier very similar application which was refused. It was for the redevelopment of the house fronting Newton Lane into a care home. Application refused.

SHOPS AND THE TOWN CENTRES

Since the autumn edition of Wigstons' Voice there has been little change in the empty shops position in so far as one has been occupied but another double unit has closed. The former Post and Packing shop on Leicester Road opened as a taxi office but Thornton's card shop on Bell Street closed early in February 2020. Fortunately, the large and prominent Thomas Cook store was closed for only a few weeks after the company went into administration in the autumn of last year but quickly reopened as Hayes Travel. **STOP PRESS: Shoezone is closing down.**

There has been some activity in the small shop on Leicester Road formerly occupied by Harrison Murray, but it remains empty. Other long-term empty units are: Lords Electrical; Heard's Butchers; Nat West; Barclays; CR Kitchens and Fusion hair salon.

At a recent meeting between three Society members and the Town Centre Manager it was stated that in the Borough the vacancy rate is about 7% against a national average of 13%. The problem appears to be that owners are not prepared to reduce rents and the Council is unable to offer reductions on Business Rates. These schemes are usually funded from Business Improvement Districts but such a scheme in Wigston is not viable partly because of lack of interest from traders, despite the fact that some contributed to the Christmas lights display. There are traders' organisations in South Wigston and Oadby.

The recent Town Centre Survey results were discussed with the Town Centre Manager who was interested in the points raised. He would like to accompany members on their next patch walk in Wigston. There was special interest in the need for activities in the town centre for both the young and old and the need to retain historical and cultural aspects. The Record Office and Billy Cox's shop were highlighted. The Town Centre Manager is a member of the Council's Place Making Group and will forward his reports to that group when he can.

8th Annual Public Illustrated Lecture

Thursday 1 October @ 7.30pm

***Lawyer, Privateer and Explorer
500 Years of Genealogy Research***



**AN ILLUSTRATED PRESENTATION BY
Peter Cousins**

**VENUE: AGE UK, 51 PADDOCK STREET,
WIGSTON LE18 2AN**

**ADMISSION £4.00 PER PERSON
INCLUDING REFRESHMENTS**

**ONLY 80 SEATS AVAILABLE
BOOKING ADVISABLE**

Contact: Colin Towell

07813 782 899

WHAT CAN YOUR LOCAL HERITAGE CENTRE DO FOR YOU?

WHAT CAN YOUR LOCAL HERITAGE CENTRE DO FOR YOU?



If you are interested in finding out about your ancestors, then the Heritage Centre is a great place to start. The Heritage Centre was opened on 21st September 2019 and has two areas that can help you with your research.

The first is a family history section with access to global online ancestry platforms and a huge database of Birth, Death and Marriage records. On hand are experts who are very willing to help you start your research or to guide those who have hit a 'brick wall' in their research.



You can use the in-house computers which give you full global access to family history research resources which are free of charge.

The second area is local history covering Wigston Magna, South Wigston, Glen Parva, Kilby Bridge and Countesthorpe. You can browse the many local books and magazines containing the history of the areas or you can use the computer work stations to access over 10,000 photographs, documents, articles, transactions, local newspapers, scrap books

and research materials. On hand are local historians who will help and assist in finding the information you want.

Much of the historical archive has been digitised and allows us to use sophisticated search software to find the information you are looking for and guide you to the relevant place in the archive for you to complete your research.

Again, these services are free of charge although we would welcome a donation to support the ongoing running of the Heritage Centre.

Our thanks go to those dedicated volunteers with the skills and knowledge who are waiting to help you.

The Greater Wigston Heritage Centre is located on Station Road between the Swimming Baths and the School campus. For further information follow this link:

www.wigstonhistoricalsociety.co.uk/Heritage_Centre.html

Opening Hours: Fridays 10am to 4pm

**Article by Mike Forryan Chairman,
The Greater Wigston Historical Society**



EYESORES IN WIGSTON

A few years ago, the Committee considered giving a 'grot spot award' for persistent eyesores in the area. It was decided not to do so in case of implications but there is a monthly monitoring, with action where possible, of the various locations. These include:-

37 Newton Lane: this is a bungalow on the right-hand side going up the hill which has been left part way through alterations, with the building on a 'cliff edge'. It is understood that the property has recently been sold.

29 Ravensthorpe Drive: Here again this property and garden has been left in an uncared-for condition.

4 Canvey Close: This is similar with the garden overgrowing the footpath.

71 Central Avenue: There is a partly renovated detached house with a partly built new detached house in the garden. The new build is at the side of the footpath from Central Avenue to Willow Park. This work has been going on for several years.

Rear of Iceland store: A large concrete block clutters the car park at the rear of the shop on the boundary with Sainsbury's loading bay.

Passage between Boots and Poundshop: The pedestrian passageway which links Bell Street with the car park at the rear of the shops is constantly littered with rubbish and broken glass. If a complaint is made it is usually cleared up, but it returns to its usual littered state very quickly.

Hardware shop in Bell Street: The shop owner regularly parks cages, used to move his goods, against the barrier to the Pocket Park. This spoils the view down Bell Street. He has been repeatedly advised that he should not do this but to no avail.

There are others, but please let us know about grot spots that you know about in your area.

WIGSTON WINTER BIRDLIFE – FORTY YEARS ON.

From December 1979 to February 1980 our Society conducted a survey of garden birds. Birds observed during normal day activities, were recorded. Just the varieties not the numbers.

Survey forms were handed out, mainly to schools, with All Saints and Water Leys asking for more forms. From the whole of Wigston 120 forms were returned from which 33 variety of birds were recorded.

(Except for a light covering of snow for one day early in January the period was unusually mild.)

So how does this compare with birds in Wigston today, now 40 years later?

The most common birds were sparrow, blackbird and starling. The sparrow is now only seen in local pockets and the starling being confined to the outer edges of the Borough.

The blackbird is still with us, but the song thrush is less seen. Though the mistle thrush, has taken up residency. The blue tit was popular along with the coal tit and great tit but there was no mention of the long-tailed tit which today is common.

The greenfinch was common and over the years and became more common until it was nearly wiped out due to a virus, but is now, in small numbers, coming back.

So what birds are becoming more numerous and less popular today? Number one must be the woodpigeon, then perhaps the magpie in spite of its plumage. Though harmless enough the jackdaw masses in groups of 40 or more and clamour like a crowd of excited teenagers.

A great sight on a cloudless day is to see a buzzard circling high overhead. Residents of the Meadows may see kites which are spreading westward. Birds which have increased in numbers and bring colour to our bird tables are the goldfinches. To repeat a bird survey today would have to be online, rather than a paper exercise.

Colin Hames

To see a complete list of the birds in the 1980 survey go to the website: www.wigstoncivicsociety.org.uk/Bird-Survey.php

PUBLIC TOILETS

At a recent meeting of the Council's Service Delivery Committee on 28 January, it was decided to close the public toilets in the Junction Road car park. This was after they had repeatedly been vandalised over the years. The toilets on Willow Park will also be completely closed from April this year.

The Council points out that the public toilets on Peace Memorial Park and at Wigston Cemetery will remain open. It is interesting to note that there are no public toilets in Oadby or in South Wigston.

Officers had asked local shopkeepers if they would make their loos available to the public with an annual payment from the Council, however, there was no response apart from the one shop that already provided this facility. The shop was not named in the report but may be Sainsburys.

The full report can be seen online on the Council's website under Service Delivery Committee agenda and minutes for 28 January 2020. It will be interesting to see if the toilet blocks are demolished soon after closure. If they are not, then regrettably further vandalism and graffiti will undoubtedly follow. The block in the main car park in Oadby has not been demolished and takes up valuable parking space.

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE

The Localism Act of 2011 gave local groups the Right to nominate a building or piece of land as an Asset of Community Value. This means that should that asset come up for sale, there would be a period of six months in which the owner would not be able to dispose of the asset while the nominating organisation decided if it wanted to purchase it, raise the funds, develop a business plan and submit an offer at an open market valuation.

In order for the bid to be successful the asset must comply with certain criteria as laid down in the Act, these are:-

- I. Does its main use further the social wellbeing or cultural, recreational or sporting interests of the local community; and is it realistic to think that the main use will continue to further these uses.
- II. Where the main use does not currently have such a community benefit, in the recent past it did have, and the local authority considers it likely that it would be able to have such a use in the next five years.
- III. That the nomination is a community nomination made by a community or voluntary organisation or group which qualifies under the Act to make the nomination.

Wigston Civic Society considered that the shop at number 2 Leicester Road (Billy Cox's fruit and veg shop) fulfilled an important local, social, function and is an established part of the street scene. The way in which Mr Cox runs the shop has not changed over many years with the only nod to modernism being scales that weigh in kilograms. What is more, the stock is fresh and not prepacked, all things that many would like to see a return to in these environmentally aware times.

The Society had a vision of retaining the shop at number 2 as a fruit and veg shop selling produce grown on land at the rear of the shop and excess produce donated by local growers. It would be run by volunteers on a social enterprise basis. The upper floor would be converted to meeting rooms for use by the community

and as exhibition space. The former workshops lining the entrance alley between numbers 2 and 4 would be converted into artisan workshops and a café established (again run by volunteers) using the cobbled alleyway and the land at the rear, this would also be kept as a peaceful wildlife haven in the centre of the busy Wigston Magna.

After lengthy discussions with the local Council it was agreed that the nomination should be limited to the building only. However, the Council eventually decided that the nomination did not fit the criteria in so far as the current use does not 'further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community' in the sense that the greengrocers is a retail shop amongst many others nearby rather than a valued community meeting place.

This was a disappointing result after so many positive negotiations and a very enlightened vision for the property. A subsequent flurry of postings on the Wigston Remembering the Past website attracted a lot of interest and support which perhaps members involved did not appreciate was there. It should also be noted that although the building is not listed, both numbers 2 and 4 which, more or less mirror each other, are on the local list of significant buildings and that the shop front to number 2 is protected as an historic shop front in the Council's local plan. There are only two other Assets of Community Value on the Council's register, these are a piece of open ground at Wykeham Drive and the Cow and Plough pub, both in Oadby.

There was an interesting article on the 'nostalgia' page of the Leicester Mercury on 4 February about the application and the result as well as historic information about the shop and the business together with an interesting old photograph and painting.

THE HORSE AND TRUMPET

Readers will recall that the Society objected strongly to the proposed diversion of the public footpath running along the front wall of the Horse and Trumpet public house in Bull Head Street. The diversion was needed in order to accommodate a raised deck that had been constructed over part of the line of the footpath. It was reported in the previous edition of Wigstons' Voice that the footpath diversion was approved by the County Council with conditions. Here the matter seemed to have been left because two County Council committees were not able to agree whose responsibility it was to approve the boundary marking the edge of the new footpath.

After the County Councillor for the ward and the Civic Society reminded the County that there appeared to have been no action, a site meeting was held in January. Here it was agreed that the boundary would be marked with black bollards of sufficient height to be seen by a reversing driver. The Society, along with the Greater Wigston Historical Society will put forward the content for a plaque about the history of the former village green which was situated in front of the pub. This will be funded by Everards who will also fund the boundary markers.

There has been a recent planning application from Everards for new additional exterior lighting and new signage for the pub, the Society has made some suggestions for improvements to the proposals.

SPOUTEWELL COTTAGE, BULLHEAD STREET, WIGSTON (Shown on the front cover)

The property is a cottage built over 250 years ago originally as two separate homes but since converted into one. It is built of red brick under a pitched slate roof, with a white rendered façade and half painted side elevation. The current owner believes the right-hand side of the building dates to 1580.

HELP NEEDED

In the last edition of Wigstons' Voice an appeal was made for people to volunteer for the posts of: Chairman; Listing Officer; Minute Secretary and Facebook Administrator. Regrettably, no individuals have come forward. At the present time the Society may have to consider closing down if we cannot at least identify a person to take over as Chairman or at least to take on one of the existing officer posts so that existing officers can move round positions. We need new people to come on board to start this process off.

Enquiries have been made with the wider membership and with people who are not yet members but to no avail yet. Please consider if there is anyone in your family or circle of friends and acquaintances who may be interested in the local built environment and who may be able to help.

One more area in which the Society is looking for assistance is that of a Co-ordinator to the Planning Working Group. The Group members have taken this aspect on themselves during the previous twelve months since the group was formed but feel that the administrative part of the work needs to be separated out from the onsite and online part of the work.

So, to continue with the Society's valuable work in the Borough, we need to be proactive in identifying new officers. If you, yourself, do not feel able to help, for whatever the reason, please look around to see if there is anyone else that could be approached. If you consider joining us and keep the Society alive, please contact the Secretary Colin Towell:

07813 782 899

**Reports by Colin Towell unless otherwise stated.
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