

Update on Town Planning Matters – October 2023

All Saints Church Hall

Recent refusals by TC related to bin stores and parking. We raised biodiversity issues and noted the dismay expressed by a Civic member and member of the congregation about the discontinuation of use of the hall and its intended sale by the church. The hall grounds had become an eyesore but has recently been tidied, instantly improving the look of the area – a key entrance into town. The most recent planning application is for 3 dwellings which should satisfy the concerns of immediate neighbours.

26-28 The Broadway

Redevelopment application is for 8 units. TC have concerns about the permeability of the parking area, issues of run-off when there is no soak-away. The recent East St sewerage work should have resolved that issue. Civic Society is pleased to see the site being developed.

Corn Exchange

Following their application for solar panels, asbestos was found in the Corn X roof and the building has partially closed to the public while an investigation is undertaken.

The Dolphin

The Dolphin's current status as an immigration- holding hotel prevents its use by the public and the townspeople. It ceased being part of the Best Western franchise in 2020. It is mentioned in HDCs Local Plan as a potential site for development. We understand that the owner has plans for development but no application has yet been submitted. We maintain a watching brief due to our concern about its future.

East/West St sewerage works – see 26 -28 The Broadway.

Electronic Information Boards/Town Website

HDC has recently been approached by a private investor to install two electronic information boards in the town centre (and in 3 other towns). HDC are branding these and we have been approached by a Regeneration Officer to help plan the content. We have suggested siting one on The Waits and the other on the pavement by the two telephone boxes.

In parallel, the Town Council is developing a centralised town website to signpost visitors and residents to events taking place, and through which organisations can share information about their own events. It is hoped the two information systems will be coordinated to mirror each other.

Envar biomass digester

Applications have so far been rejected on the grounds of unacceptably high levels of toxins discharging from the incinerator chimneys, potential for flood risk and high levels of lorry traffic in the area. Further applications or appeals are expected.

The Grange: We are holding a watching brief on this relative to the continued erosion of 'the gap' agreed between The Grange developers and Houghton & Wyton village.

Giffords Farm

Giffords Farm was included in HDCs current Local Plan as an industrial site, expanding to the Compass Point area. Developers are currently exploring a mixed use licence (industrial and housing). We have concerns about its potential traffic volume and consequent pollution along Harrison Way/Somersham Road.

The How

Concerns have been raised about the illegal mooring and fencing put in place along the Thicket Path and the illegal destructions of trees to facilitate these. Recently, remedial action has been taken to remove them and to replace the trees.

The Lattenburys (A1307 South) developments. We understand Godmanchester Parish Council will receive a presentation this month by the developers, to learn the extent of the proposed development. The Hemingfords are likely to resist. We are concerned that this development will add to a range of other housing developments, creating a horseshoe effect which will be detrimental to all and will approach other Parish Councils for comments.

HDCs Local Plan

HDCs Local Plan has been revised and is out for consultation to local parish councils, in parallel with the St Ives Neighbourhood Plan consultation. This is causing confusion to residents who are being invited to comment on both. The Local Plan, otherwise known as The Master Plan and The Market Towns Plan has been renamed The Vision and has been updated in recognition of the unpopularity of some of the proposals suggested by the consultants for the town centre. Its proposals include a lido pontoon of 240 sq m decking (a slimmed down version to accommodate existing boating traffic), a pedestrianised new public square (Market Hill), incubator hubs for new businesses, cycle paths through town, the weekly markets relocated to the car park, and a transport interchange with facilities for bus drivers. In the revised version the Octagon will be repurposed as an information centre or a leisure venue.

The laudable aim is to create more impressive entrances to town from Harrison Way and from The Waits but there is no vision for revitalising the town, centre rather the opportunity has been taken to use it for housing infill. We are not currently in favour of the development aim, seeking instead to attract more employment businesses and leisure attractions such as a theatre an arts/exhibition space, a tourist information centre to draw visitors in from outlying villages and towns.

The Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan consultation takes place through October and November. – and I urge all Civic members to participate, to suggest ways of increasing footfall and boosting the economy of the town now that so many shops have closed. Suggestions so far include extending our market days to thrice weekly, creating a significant indoor market, expanding the business start up hubs to more than the one/two proposed, developing a theatre for the town.

Copies of the full report are available from the Town Hall and the Library and copies have been made available to the churches and mosques to enable internal discussions to take place with responses being sent to the NP email address provided. A digital copy is viewable on the TC website. An explanatory 2-page explanatory flyer has been delivered to every house (?), press releases in local

magazines and various Q&A sessions will take place in the farmers' markets and at the Civic talk held on 20th October. A questionnaire has been devised to collate residents' answers. The consultation closes on December 1st.

Unnecessary confusion has arisen due to the Local Plan's consultation happening in parallel with the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly as they reference each other but are without facility to signpost relevant comments appropriately. I have written to the Leader of HDC asking for urgent action to be taken. We have posted our own flyer to residents and businesses in the town centre alerting them to the consultation and encouraging them to comment, and are distributing the Plan, its poster and the questionnaire to the churches and mosques.

Market Hill

Several things are in process. The vacant Barclays Bank is being redeveloped as flats, there are plans to install an electronic information board on The Pavement, and another on The Waits.

The Quay is still targeted (in the Local Plan) to become a lido with a floating decking pontoon and for the area to be pedestrianised.

The shop next to the old Barclays Bank is being decorated. It remains as retail on the ground floor with accommodation above.

Market Hill cycle racks

In furtherance of HDC's cycling and walking policy, the cycle path down Ramsay Road will be extended along the Waits/Broadway into town, and bicycle racks have been installed for Commute Cate on The Broadway, in Market Hill, in Bridge Street and in Waitrose car park. Existing bike racks around the Cromwell statue in Market Hill and in Crown St have been extended.

The Lounge

The Lounge bar now occupying the old(YMCA/Poundstretcher space is a local franchise (with premises in Huntingdon and Peterborough) which will extend the night time/takeaway economy into the town centre. It has applied for a pavement licence. We are glad to see such a large and imposing space being used again.

Rheola

We have no objections to the redevelopment of this care home by adding an extra floor, particularly since it will retain its architectural style.

Robin Hood

It is planned that this old public house will re-open in 2024 as a high-end restaurant with outdoor facilities. Its closure has been partly due to planning matters and partly to archaeological work being undertaken due to its proximity to the foundation of the Priory walls.

Wetherspoons' Copleys

We understand that Wetherspoons' have withdrawn their application to purchase The Red House.