



**Important Diary
Date Wednesday
18th February**



Just a reminder that the next members' meeting is not on a Monday, as usual, but on Wednesday 18th February when Vikki Heywood, RSC Executive Director, will talk about the transformation of the theatres and their contribution to the whole of the West Midlands.

The venue is as usual at the Falcon Hotel, Chapel Street, and the meeting begins at 7.45pm.

April Meeting

The final meeting of the season will be on Monday 27th April at 6.15pm at the Falcon Hotel.

Dr Paul Davidson, director of the Sustainable Energy Group in the Government's Building Research Establishment, will ask whether buyers and tenants are doing their bit to combat climate change by choosing 'A' rated properties.

News Update is edited for the Stratford Society by Beryl Downing.
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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual general meeting will be held on Monday 9th March at 7.45pm at the Falcon Hotel, Church Street. Please come along to have your say and to hear what your Civic Society has achieved during the year.

The agenda and Treasurer's report and last year's AGM minutes are attached. A full set of the group reports will be available at the meeting and these can also be seen on the Society's website www.stratfordsociety.co.uk. Those members who cannot attend on 9th March will receive their copies by post after the meeting. This *News Update* includes a précis of the major items to be raised.

Whatever Happened to Consultation?

District Council Stops Our Monthly Meetings

The Society is dismayed that one of its major contributions to the community has been diminished by the refusal of the District Council to continue our regular monthly meeting with planners. In his report to the AGM, Leon Tanner, Planning Group chairman, explains what is happening.

"Until the beginning of this year," he writes, "the District Council sent us selected planning applications for our comments and members have visited their offices monthly to check for other applications of interest and to meet planning officers. Our full Group then convened to agree our responses.

"The Council has now discontinued our meetings with them, along with other cost-saving exercises which include not having applications available for the public at their offices.

"They will continue to inform us of applications that they think would interest us, but all information about these and other applications will be found from the internet. We are now adapting the pattern of our meetings to the new circumstances."

This lack of communication has also been evident, says Leon Tanner, in the World Class Stratford handling of the regeneration of the town.

"Some of the delay has admittedly been due to unforeseen events, but there is little sympathy in the town for such excuses. This attitude is attributable to the evident determination of the authorities to consult or inform in only the most minimal way about the project.

"More worrying are the shabbiness of the town centre, the poor design which

has become the accepted standard for new housing and retail, and the lack of any sign that the authorities have remedies, or even that they are aware of any problem."

"When the Urban Design Framework was created, shopping was seen as the answer to all our needs and it proposed additional retail both out-of-town and in the centre. Now we see more empty premises than ever in the centre yet the consultation asks for comments on the sections of the document as it was written before anyone dreamt that the economy was about to change so dramatically.

"In a crisis, first responses are always cautious and defensive, as they should be. But as we get the measure of our problems the next step is to be positive about solutions - to see the opportunities that may help us out of trouble and enhance our town as well. Some elements of future planning will be unclear for quite a while yet but others are unchanged - Stratford is blessed with a history that gives us both a culture and a fabric that will remain at the core of our well-being. We must nurture them and find in them inspiration so that in the mundane matters of day-to-day life - providing houses, shops, workplaces - we do not smother what is special with hasty solutions that we will regret in the future."

Keeping in Touch

The Communications Group has re-formed under the chairmanship of Ian Heggie and now embodies the Web Advisory Group, represented by Ian Fradgley. Brian Wright has joined the group as deputy editor of *Talk of the Town*, which has been well received in its new eight-page format by both membership and local organisations in the town and beyond. There have also been four *News Updates* which have kept members informed on developments in the town from the Historic Spine and plans for the Town Hall to the proposals for the Eco Town.

A booklet focussing on Stratford buildings and traditions, combined with today's need to save energy, has been developed by Beryl Downing with the cooperation of Bridgetown Primary School and Stratford High School. The booklet won an award from the West Midlands Amenity Societies Association (WestMASA) and has been commended by the Civic Trust.

Because of family commitments, Jayne Pantazievits has had to retire as press officer. However, professional public relations consultant Richard Kemp has offered to help the Society by issuing press releases on its behalf for the next twelve months and without charge. The Society has been pleased to accept his generous offer and Ian Heggie will be responsible, with the Society's chairman, for all press communications issued on behalf of the Society.

Ian Heggie and Peter Burgess also joined Jack Crimp in developing a DVD based on Robert Bearman's 'Historic Spine' concept. With a voice over by Jeffery Dench and music by Guy Wolfenden it has been a great success and has been widely circulated in the town. A revised version is currently being prepared for use as a walking guide for visitors.

THINK AGAIN ABOUT 21st CENTURY STRATFORD

The Strategy Group's plea to the District Council

In response to the District Council's draft Core Development Strategy, published in October, the Strategy Group, led by Brian Wright, has asked the Council to think again about the quality of design in new housing and the public realm, look again at the changing nature of retail, prepare a new strategy for the town centre and to lead a discussion within the community about what kind of town Stratford should be in the first half of the century.

In the annual report the group also recommends that the District Council should:

1 Make the future of Stratford town centre a key priority for several years.

Like some other market towns we need to look at creating a centre full of vitality but, possibly, with fewer shops. This could mean more flats and houses as well as an extension of the work of bodies such as the RSC and the Birthplace Trust. The two main contributors to the UK's recovery will be tourism and culture.

2 Press ahead with transport initiatives,

including pedestrianisation, despite the cost implications. It is still vital to provide facilities to move both residents and visitors in and out of the town centre. This can be done by preserving the Park & Ride, coupled with moves such as the reintroduction of the electric trams and reform of the taxis to provide better connections within the town. The group, says Brian Wright, does have a serious worry that Stratford is starting to fragment as a tight-knit community, with an increasing number of residents working and shopping outside the town.

3 Place much more emphasis on design

of both the public realm and housing developments. In the current economic circumstances tourism will become even more of a key industry and Stratford needs to present itself in a far

stronger way. Some of the approach roads to the town are notable for their use of trees and grass verges and this needs to be revived. If necessary we must oppose density targets imposed by central Government to allow for new housing to be accompanied by green spaces. New housing could also be more adventurous so that we can avoid the "sea of red boxes" that national house builders are imposing throughout the country.

4 Reconsider the planning briefs for the three potential regeneration projects outlined for the town. The brief for the Bridgeway/Bridgefoot project, with its call for additional retail units, could become almost a rival to the town centre rather than complementing it.

5 Give more thought to the relationship between the town and the new theatre, including its traffic management.

The RSC is one of the town's main economic motors and the opening of the new RST in 2010-11 will be a major event. Yet there is painfully little in the Corporate Strategy devoted to the future relationship between the town and the new building. For instance, the proposed roof-top café/restaurant area should become one of the focal points of the town for both theatregoers and non-theatregoers and should increase the importance of the area within the town.

Committee Nominations

Members of the General Committee retire by rotation every three years. Those standing down this year and offering themselves for re-election are Roger Pringle, Leon Tanner (chairman, planning group) and Brian Wright (chairman, strategy group).

Jack Crimp and Neville Usher are retiring at the AGM and Joan Burgess is retiring as Programme Secretary but will continue to serve a further year as a committee member.

Beryl Downing is also retiring as Hon. Secretary.

Members who wish to nominate a Programme Secretary and Hon. Secretary can obtain forms from Beryl Downing, 5 College Street, Stratford-upon-Avon (01789 292847) or by email from bldowning32@waitrose.com and, according to the constitution, must return them, seconded and with the signed agreement of the nominee, not later than February 23rd.