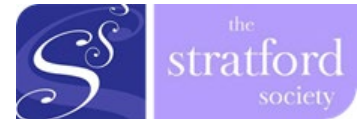


Chairman's Report

Kevin Bond, Chairman



This year's annual meeting will take place as our Town is recovering from a series of shocks occasioned by the Covid Pandemic. We were unable to hold an AGM last year and we have progressively changed our speakers programme into virtual zoom meetings which have been increasingly popular. A great thanks you to our Programme Secretary Lindsay and Society Secretary Olga for managing this process.

Whilst zoom has enabled us to continue with a reduced level of activity during 2020, as we emerge into 2021 we see changes to the use of High Street and Bridge Street to make greater space for people and a reduction/control of traffic. Of course, The Society has been supporting greater pedestrian space for some years and already we can see a change of street environment in High street emerging.

We are also seeing a loss of national names in the shops in the central streets. We have increasing numbers of restaurants, cafes and hotels planned. Not all will survive due to market competition and the continued development of online shopping. What is likely to continue is the increasing change of use of many properties to retail/accommodation. The Town Centre is slowly being repopulated by residents.

The District Council is looking at new leisure developments; the improvement of the children's play area on The Recreation Ground and the development of The Riverside Project between Fisherman's Carpark and Seven Meadows Road. The Society has contributed to the consultations and, whilst supportive, has expressed concerns about enlargement of car parking when a perfectly good facility already exists at The Leisure Centre.

There must be concern about how new patterns of tourism will develop post-pandemic, and how long such changes will take to work themselves through with the implications for employment and prosperity. It is unlikely that international tourism will recover until the middle of the decade.

The Stratford Town Council has established a working group to look at how The Neighbourhood Plan is delivered and what changes might be necessary in the light of changing circumstances. We have a member of The Society involved in this work.

The General Committee believes that, in the light of the above, it is correct for us as a Society to look at how we relaunch this year in order to contribute to the debate on what our Town should become as we move forward. We have championed the Historic Spine and now through the work led by John Scampion have laid a number of plaques outside many of the most significant buildings with more to come. We are engaged on the consultative groups planning changes and we do, of course, contribute to consultations on most significant planned developments.

We would like to encourage members to participate in the leadership of The Society. We have a number of resignations from the General Committee this year. I would like to thank John Deegan, Jon Craig and Ian Andrews who are standing down. We have able replacements for these committee members. I would also like to thank our General Committee and membership for all they have done to keep the Society running throughout this awful pandemic. We have rapidly become proficient in the use of new technological communications.

Finally, I am standing down as Chairman following three terms in the chair. I am happy to continue to support our Society but this year we need a new Chairman.