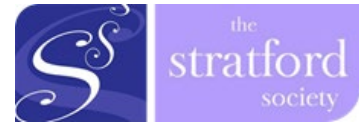


The Editor
Stratford Herald
Rother Street
Stratford-upon-Avon



1 June 2021

Dear Sir,

Please forgive the length of this letter. The issues addressed are among the most important one can raise in the constantly changing climate we are living through.

The Stratford Society is the Civic Society for the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. The Society is not only involved in protecting the past but also believes that development is vital to maintain the health and prosperity of our Town and those who live in and around it.

We believe that we, residents and visitors alike, are at a turning point. The three main councils responsible for our town have all declared a Climate Emergency. They have all published plenty of words and have committees looking into impact and response. What we now ask for is Action and not just words.

The nightmare of the marina development is another legacy of the horrible 1970's planning regime, and the impact of habitat destruction is apparent to all who view the site. No mitigation plan appears to exist. The Environment Agency, in its consideration of a previous amendment to the original planning decision, states that there will be greater flooding to surrounding lands due to this development on the flood plain. The influx of 250 canal and river boats will increase the emissions from mainly diesel engines with little in the way of emissions control. There will be significant pollution risks from spillage of oils and fuels and disturbance to fisheries and river bank erosion.

These boats are likely to be queued at the intersection of the river and canal, right in the middle of our town, causing both noise and emissions pollution. How is this going to improve the visitor attraction? So what about our climate emergency?

Of course, the developer, having begun construction of the marina, is already seeking changes to the planning permission for re-siting of buildings and, we understand, shortly to ask for a roundabout on Seven Meadows Road. Well, we say NO to the planners! There should be no changes agreed until or unless significant mitigation to the development is promised and a full wildlife and environmental case is made. Further, the Avon Navigation Trust should introduce regulations to control emissions from boats. Engines should be turned off while boats are waiting and limits placed on transfer times through the locks between the canal and river. There should be no free passes to causing pollution and degrading our natural and personal environment.

Recently two other significant planning decisions have come to Stratford District Council. The first is the Big Wheel and the second is the extension of the Waterside market place. In both cases local people objected, as has the Stratford Society in both cases, because the current District Council's policies for the locations categorise them as areas of heritage importance. The Neighbourhood Plan also includes them as important for enjoyment of the open spaces. Due to their frequency, it is increasingly clear that markets are no longer temporary but becoming permanent. There has been no change of policy by District or Town Councils. Local traders are unhappy that they have to pay business rates whilst the market does not. So we have our councils saying again that they will follow policies but ignoring them when new developments come along. What was the use of voting on the Neighbourhood Plan to have local views ignored?

Even worse is that whilst the District Council has a publicly stated enforcement policy for those who fail to adhere to planning decisions, it appears to have chosen not to apply this policy to itself. The market which sells food and has been held, unlawfully, opposite the Encore pub for several years, is without planning consent. As a solution, the District Council is seeking retrospective consent to its

ongoing breach of its own rules. Yet others in the town who do not follow the Council rules can find themselves facing the enforcement policy. Once again, state one thing but do another!

Of course, a market has been held in the town since medieval times but the Waterside Market is mainly for visitors, which means more cars and more pollution. Where in the decision by the Cabinet of our District Council is the consideration of mitigation of the increased pollution — where is the discussion with residents? Nowhere to be found.

So, we have words about climate and environment but, please, actions speak louder than words. On the basis of the ongoing breach of their own rules on enforcement we see that the District Council is seriously compromised, because it is attempting to judge the legitimacy of its own policies. Decisions such as these should be given to an independent outside Inspector.

Finally, the proposed Riverside development from Fisherman's Car Park to Seven Meadows Road is a critical test for all involved. On the northern area, the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust is talking about a Local Nature Reserve and the need to 'minimally' manage the land, with only necessary enhancement. Most of the land of current importance for wildlife is under the control of the Town Trust. So far nothing of significance has been said about how the proper protection of wildlife and management of the site will be undertaken. All we have seen are artistic designer plans.

We must see a proper environmental assessment of the real costs and benefits and not the simplistic economic costs and benefits. Why is there a proposal to place some sort of mobile catering concession at Fisherman's car park and to develop toilet facilities, when the Leisure Centre is already developed and requires little in addition to cater for changes. What about ensuring an absence of artificial light around the local nature reserve — wildlife responds to night and day — whilst the semi-urbanisation plan is likely to result in demands for ever increasing car parking and pathway lighting. In this case, we the residents of the town must hold both the District Council and Town Trust to account as co-developers to ensure that the correct balance between income generation, enjoyment and environment is maintained.

To help our town to recover we must look beyond short term income generation: get the environment right; get the traffic management right; encourage alternatives to individual cars. Each and every planning application and/or application for variation should be assessed not just by design of buildings but by its environmental impact. We must demand environmental mitigation measures. Each bag of cement consumes energy and resources, each panel of wood reduces CO₂ absorption. The marina roundabout request requires a resounding 'NO' and a simple direction to turn left only i.e. any form of crossing of traffic to or from the site or roundabout will increase traffic queuing and generate more pollution (as well as consuming more resources).

The Stratford Society will ask these questions to all planning applications going forward. We urge readers of The Herald also to ask these questions. Hold the decision makers to account!

If we do not get change from our local planning officers and elected members to put people and our environment first, then we ask residents to consider what future their children and grandchildren are being asked to endure. To our children we say, please police the decisions of the planners and elected members — remember they are someone's father, mother, grandparents, and an inappropriate decision made now will impact generations going forward. If we change and get this right our town will prosper.

Finally, we are running out of time to make changes. We are unlikely to hit the targets defined in the Paris Accords. Climate is changing fast. We face problems in the coming decades for which we do not currently have answers. Our town's heritage is dependent on making the correct planning decisions today. Actions, not Words please!

Dr Kevin Bond
Chairman
The Stratford-upon-Avon Society