

February 2023 – January 2024.

Introduction

This is the annual report of the Coventry Society for the year 2023 – 2024. The Society is a registered charity and this report sets out our achievements during the year for the benefit of our members and the wider Coventry community.

Listing and Celebrating

Our campaign last year to save The Firs on Kenilworth Road has at last come to fruition. Although Historic England declined to grant listed status to the building, we have learned that the building is to re-open as King Henry VIII Prep School in September, securing the building from inappropriate development.

We supported the listing of the Chace Hotel which was approved by Historic England in June. We have also intervened to ensure that the building is properly looked after whilst redevelopment is awaited.

Our proposal for the local listing of St. Columbas United Reformed Church was accepted by the Council in February, but the Council declined to locally list the former Paris Cinema, which is now to be demolished to make way for student accommodation.

We are concerned about the state of the roof of the recently restored Old Grammar School and have taken this up with both the City Council and the Culture Coventry Trust.

Campaigning

The Coventry Society, under its objective of seeking to improve the quality of new developments, has continued to campaign on City Centre South. It's now too late to prevent the wholesale destruction of our postwar architecture and its replacement with a tower block development. Last year we campaigned to secure some social housing for the city centre and this will now be provided, courtesy of funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority, which has funded 20% social housing. Our campaign to save the public artwork is also looking very positive with the architects providing locations for most of the affected artwork.



We continue to campaign to get as good a design as possible and we have met with the development team to discuss how to achieve this.

We continue to campaign to save the Coundon Wedge, although we had a set-back when the council decided to seek and obtain planning permission for 345 dwellings at Browns Lane and subsequently to sell the site for housing.

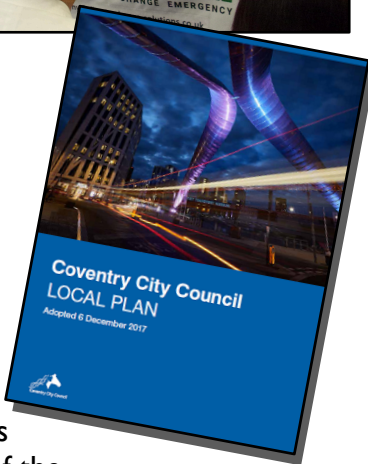
We continue to campaign to improve the River Sherbourne and we have engaged with this at both the strategic level, via the local plan and also by supporting the projects including the Sherbourne Valley Project and the Coventry River Cultural Programme.

Consultations

We have participated in a number of public consultations over the year. In May we attended the launch of the Council's draft Climate Change Strategy and joined forces with the Coventry Green New Deal team in supporting a public meeting and responding to the consultation.



We also got very closely involved with the Council's review of the



Local Plan and in particular the consultation on the Issues and Options paper. We set up a sub group to respond to this long and detailed document, which included 108 questions about policy amendments. Among our many comments was our request for a moratorium on the development of more purpose built student housing in the city. We were successful in getting the consultation period extended.

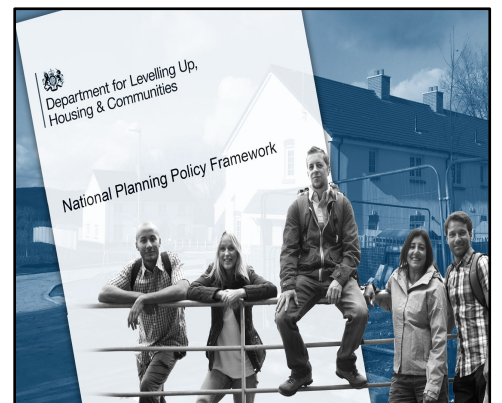
We supported Taiwo Owatemi MP with a public consultation event in Eastern Green on 1st September and we again joined forces with the Coventry Green New Deal team in organising a public consultation event on 5th September. This meeting was very well attended with over 50 people present.

We responded to council consultations on the draft Householder Design Guide and plans for the first stage of the Very Light Rail line, from the station to Ikea. We also responded to consultations on the welcome policy of introducing Article 4 Directions covering houses in multiple occupation (HMOs).



Very Light Rail

At Government level we responded to a consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and we also joined with other civic societies to object to Michael Gove's unjustified requirement of the twelve largest cities, including Coventry, to be required to provide a 35% uplift on housing targets.



Former Ikea store to become arts centre

Like many Coventry residents we attended the public exhibition about the Ikea Building, although this didn't amount to consultation.

We were consulted by Historic England about the role of civic societies in Heritage Action Zones. Unfortunately, we had little to report on our involvement in the Coventry HAZ.

Design

We have been pleased to have the support of architect John Prevc in our goal of improving the quality of design in the city. We have explored the use of design panels and had discussion with the Council's design team. We have also input into design discussion on City Centre South and redevelopment proposals for the site of the Royal Warwicks Club.



Blue Plaques

This year we haven't installed any new blue plaques, although we have been actively involved in developing our policy and approach to them. There have been developments in the wider world. Firstly, the Council has introduced its own blue plaque scheme. We have had meetings with the Council's Conservation Officers and discussed the way forward. Nationally, Historic England has decided to extend its blue plaque scheme, currently operating solely in London, to the rest of the country. This has annoyed the Civic movement, which was not consulted on this change, despite having a long history with blue plaques. Civic Voice has met with Historic England to jointly explore a way forward, which is now happening. The Coventry Society has decided to install one or two plaques each year and agreed a prioritisation and implementation process. The Society will continue to use plaques to conserve buildings with a relevant history and to commemorate Coventry's rich cultural heritage.

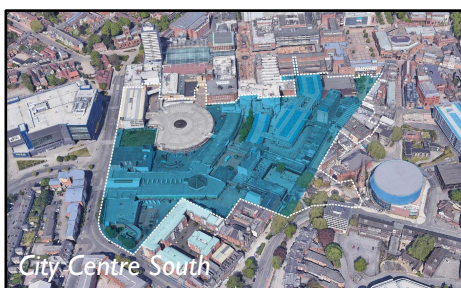
Heritage Network

Following agreement at our Heritage Conference in October, we set up the Coventry Heritage Network in November. As of the end of January 2024 we had 127 members and had published nine weekly updates. This email network is going well and we encourage more organisations to share their news on it.



Planning Applications

The Society re-lists all of the significant planning applications in the city on its website, so that members of the public have an easier way of seeing what is going on. We look at a long list of applications at each of our meetings and comment on the most important ones. Over the year the Society commented on approximately sixteen applications. The most notable ones were Abbott's Park, City Centre South, development in the Coundon Wedge and the Solar Farm in Alderman's Green.



We supported the Abbott's Park residential development, speaking both at Planning Committee and in the public enquiry after the application was refused. We are pleased that the Inspector supported the development, but are disappointed that the Planning Committee did not follow its officers' advice and as a result the Council is facing a huge claim for expenses.



We attended and spoke at Planning Committee for the determination of the planning application for housing in the Coundon Wedge, but despite the opposition of many local people, the Council decided to approve the application and has subsequently agreed to sell the site to developers.

Partnerships

The Coventry Society does not work in isolation, but seeks to work alongside other city-wide and neighbourhood organisations. We have held many meetings with council officers and we have also had regular meetings with senior staff at Coventry University. The University were kind enough to host our AGM in April and give us a tour of the Delia Derbyshire Building in September as well as sharing with us their plans for the former Ikea Building.

This year we worked with the Green New Deal team in relation to both the Council's draft Climate Change Strategy and the Issues and Options consultation on the review of the Local Plan. We found this collaboration very helpful.

One of our interests is the River Sherbourne, and we are formal partners in the Coventry River Cultural Consortium, which is led by Coventry University. We attend monthly meetings of the group, which is seeking to ensure that the regeneration of the river as it passes through the city is supported by a programme of cultural activity.

We participated in the Sherbourne River Festival in June, as our Civic Day activity for the year.



At national level, the Society is a member of Civic Voice, our national umbrella group. Civic Voice has been having problems of its own over the past year, following the theft of a large part of the charity's resources. We supported them with early payment of our subscriptions and a donation. We attended their AGM in Chester in December.

Visits, Meetings, Events and a Conference

We were peripatetic in the earlier part of the year, with meetings held at the United Reformed Church, Coventry University and the Litten Tree Building. From September we settled into meetings at St. John the Baptist Church, courtesy of Father Dexter Bracy. To make this work we had to change days and now meet on a Thursday instead of a Monday. We will be reviewing this shortly.

During the year we had the following talks:

- February - Sheila Wolfe - Sir Henry Parkes
- March - Historic Coventry Trust
- April – Our AGM and George Wagstaffe
- September - Roger Harrabin
- October - John Prevc - “the art of slow”
- November - David Fry – Why Coventry city centre should have been demolished
- December - Christmas quiz and talk by Tim Claye about recording family history
- January - Warwickshire Wildlife Trust - Sherbourne Valley Project

Over the summer we had a number of visits:

- May - Heritage Tour of Stoke, Coventry
- June - Segro Park, Baginton. 235 acre community park
- July - Charterhouse Heritage Park
- August - Cardinal Newman School (committee visit)
- August - Holy Family Church, Holbrooks, Coventry
- August - Canal warehouses, Coventry Canal Basin
- September - Delia Derbyshire Building, Coventry University.

For this year's **Civic Day** in June we participated in the Sherbourne River Festival. We arranged a stall at Millennium Place, an exhibition about the Sherbourne and tours of the Palmer Lane area. Unfortunately, we were not blessed with good weather.



Sherbourne River Festival, Millennium Place

For **Heritage Open Days** in September, we hosted community groups at Draper's Hall to showcase community engagement in heritage. Eight other organisations joined us for this event and 371 people visited the building.



Draper's Hall

The Society held its third **Heritage Conference** in October at the Litten Tree Building. “Our Heritage – Our Future” it was a very well attended day with presentations from a lot of Coventry's heritage organisations. We wrote a full report on the conference, which can be downloaded from our website.



Litten Tree Building

Communications

We published 151 stories on our News Blog during the year. Our thanks to everyone who contributed to this blog, either by writing a specific article or permitting us to use one that had been written for another publication.

We have continued to maintain our well loved website, and in addition, we maintained a social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Flickr.

Membership and Finance

At the end of the year we had 151 members, including five life members and one honorary member.

Coventry Society Committee 2023-4

Chair: Peter Walters
Vice Chair: Trevor Cornfoot
Treasurer: Jim Passmore
Secretary: John Payne

Members: David Fry, Aaron Law, John Goodman, Paul Maddocks, Tim Brown

Members retiring during the year:
Terry Kenny, Nicola Norman.

Contact Details

Registered Address:
Coventry Society,
c/o 3 Old Winnings Road,
Keresley End, Coventry, CV7 8JL

Website: www.coventrysociety.org.uk
Email: info@coventrysociety.org.uk
Twitter: [@CovSoc](https://twitter.com/CovSoc)
Facebook: www.facebook.com/CoventrySociety
Instagram: [https:// www.instagram.com/coventry_society/](https://www.instagram.com/coventry_society/)
Flickr: www.flickr.com/photos/coventrysociety

Registered Charity Number: 500229