

The Ipswich Society

Chairman's Annual Report 2019

Prior to the printing of the January Newsletter, your Executive debated for some time the stance the Society should take on the Northern Bypass, and it is fair to say that the position we finally opted for wasn't universally popular. There were, and still are, members of the Society who believe that building a new road from the A12 east of Ipswich to the A14 north of Claydon will help to solve Ipswich's traffic problems. Predicting the outcome of a complex proposal, when we don't know all of the contributory facts is difficult, which is why I chose to draw comparisons with what we believe is a similar road (the A120). As the paper

suggested a new road brings advantages but also comes with some unexpected consequences.

If the government are to finance a new road it needs a sound business case, political support, and the endorsement of the public - particularly those who will be affected. Unusually support for the Northern Bypass was divided, not along party political lines but geographically, with both Ipswich constituents and one of the Ipswich MPs supporting the proposal. The deciding factor persuading Suffolk County Council to abandon the project was the objection from each of the district councils. East Suffolk, Mid Suffolk and Babergh all came out against the scheme - supporting the majority view of their residents. Only Ipswich Borough Council, amongst the public bodies, supported the proposed road.

The desire to provide a solution to Ipswich's traffic problem is understandable but I was never convinced that the Northern Bypass would make any noticeable difference to Ipswich's rush hour town traffic. What is needed is a solution that is much more comprehensive, that really does make a difference to the quality of the air we breathe, that reduces the amount of carbon we produce and doesn't eat up acres of green fields to solve the housing crisis.

We are constantly reminded that there is no more space in Ipswich for new housing - the Northern Fringe will utilise the last remaining undeveloped site inside the Borough boundary. Wrong! There are numerous previously developed sites, brownfield sites and former industrial sites where the owner has a dream of retail, commercial or business use. On sites that have stood vacant for years these aspirations will never be fulfilled. If these town centre sites were to be used for housing then the need for a car to get to work, to go shopping or to go to the theatre would be close to zero, the number of occasions when the car carries a single

occupant would be reduced and in many cases children could again walk to school.

By way of a reminder, the finance for the Northern Bypass would come partially from housing development along the route - new estates of houses in Bealings, Grundisburgh or Wivesham: fifteen thousand new homes with a similar number of journeys to work, to Woodbridge for the evening out or to Portman Road for a home game.

What I'm proposing is some joined up thinking, we have a number of issues to solve, is it possible that we could go some way to reducing them all with a comprehensive solution? I'd love to know what you think.

Cornhill

The Borough Council would probably admit that they got one thing wrong with the Cornhill regeneration project; that is there was a lack of consultation with the public before they had committed to the scheme. In realisation of their mistake and in preparation for changes to

Arras Square they have gone out of their way to ensure that stakeholders have made contributions to the brief before an appointment of the architects.

Given the issues with the steps on the Cornhill it is perhaps as well that the very first scheme, with the new surface level through to the front doors of the Town Hall (and extensive steps down to Mannings on the west and Princes Street on the east) was abandoned.

The Society Year

Very many thanks to my colleagues on the Executive Committee for their help and efforts in keeping the diverse functions of the Society running. Those around me have organised this AGM, (with the difficulties brought about by the change of venue), the nationally recognised Heritage Open Days and last autumn's Awards Evening which was an outstanding success,

(except for the problem of room temperature). We are searching for a different venue for the 2020 event.

The Society continues to monitor and comment on planning applications, erect Blue Plaques*, stage a programme of winter talks and summer outings and we are represented on numerous external panels including making a significant contribution to the Borough's Conservation Panel.

The quarterly Newsletter continues to be well received, not least because of the diversity of views expressed by a variety of contributors, photographers and researchers and anything we do that is considered significant is submitted to the press by our Social media expert.

* Three new Blue Plaques this year: Peter Bruff at the railway station, Margaret Catchpole on the Manor House and Sophie Youngman on the Assembly Rooms (now the easyHotel).

It goes without saying that the Society couldn't function without the Minutes, Membership and Honorary Secretaries, nor without our Treasurer and I am additionally grateful to both the Trustees and Vice Presidents for their sound advice and regular contributions. During the past year we have lost Teresa Wiggin as Minute Secretary, to be replaced by Sandra Cage, and we have welcomed Adam Rae looking after the finances. The previous treasurer, Graham Smith is standing down as a committee member but will continue as a trustee. I remain indebted to Graham for his sound advice and level headed contributions to important Executive decisions. I was disappointed to lose Teresa who did an excellent job accurately

and succinctly reporting on the Executive meetings. I also welcome our new volunteers who do an excellent job making the tea and coffee after our Winter Talks. Collectively, both past and present post holders have kept the Society in good order.

Coronavirus

I wrote in my report this time last year of a winter talk delivered by Major Chris Green on Emergency Planning and how Chris reminded us that the most likely next major civil emergency would be, not a fire, tsunami or tempest but a flu epidemic. You should be aware by now just how well prepared we are in the County of Suffolk.

John Norman