

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT JANUARY – DECEMBER 2021

January

Planning applications were again a matter for concern as it is becoming more and more of concern that there doesn't seem to be any plans for improving infrastructure in the area, traffic on the A58 being a prime example.

A letter was sent to the council planning department highlighting our concerns.

The Flood Resilience Group sub-committee raised concerns regarding a recent planning application (now passed) to the council for the capping of an "Artesian Well" at a large housing development, which raised a number of questions.

With the potential demise of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework document in its current form, attention has turned to the proposed Rochdale Rail Corridor Strategy, being championed by one councillor. This strategy would involve all stations within Rochdale Borough and include the two within Littleborough's boundary.

The Trust felt that a structured response to this document be made, highlighting what we, the people of Littleborough and surrounding area would like to see.

We then asked for the opinions/suggestions of the membership also looked to social media to gain the views of the general public of Littleborough and the surrounding area to gather their hopes and aspirations for the future.

This subject gathered pace later in the year.

The A.G.M was postponed until Covid restrictions were lifted and members/trustees could meet in person.

February

A trustee spoke with Homes England who promised to send a copy of the Planning Design Framework for the brownfield Akzo site when it is available. A new planning application is needed and also an Environment Impact Assessment screening opinion could be requested.

The Canalside Development sub-committee discussed the boat which is now for sale and details were sent to various organizations. A member commented on an article that appeared in a recent issue of "Waterways World" which was not very complimentary of the area. The author took the trip along the canal in November/December so obviously would not see the area at its best. In a recent Rochdale Development Agency webinar on the Rochdale Rail Corridor Strategy, no mention was made of the canal. The general feeling is that the council could do much more to promote the potential of the canal for leisure activities as can be seen in nearby places like Sowerby Bridge, Hebden Bridge and Todmorden; all West Yorkshire.

The Flood Resilience Group sub-committee again raised concerns, following recent heavy rainfall. Groundwork Greater Manchester invited members of the flood group to take part in a "River Roch Catchment Environment Improvements" – Action Plan Workshop in March.

A general feeling was that the Trust needs to do more to connect with local people, particularly the younger end of the population. More emphasis will be placed on social media, something the Greenbelt Group are very good at.

March

Concern was expressed by members of the increase in fly tipping in the area, in particular Blackstone Edge Road. It was pointed out that this is the first thing anybody crossing from West Yorkshire will see and thus not giving a good impression of the area. A letter was sent to the council expressing our concerns.

The Trust began to slowly expand its presence via social media and which resulted in increased responses and interaction with the public.

April

It was noted that the Hollingworth Lake Country Park Visitor Centre has been taken over by the RSPCA, these include a dog friendly café, children access to the animals and a sleepover pod for the wardens should the need arise.

A company called Vistry (formally Bovis) were appointed as developers for the former Akzo site. They need to submit a further planning application. The Trust asked Rochdale Council for an Environmental Impact Statement but they have deemed this is not necessary.

The Flood Resilience Group took part in a Zoom meeting with the Environment Agency who showed plans for the flood defence work currently taking place in Littleborough. Numerous comments were made on social media concerning the felling of trees on Todmorden Road, The Trust informed the public. This is to provide access for the heavy plant machinery that will be used to carry out the flood defence work. The felled trees will be recycled and used in other flood defence work such as "Leaky Dams"

The Trust were contacted by a representative of Friends of Barkers Wood with the proposal of becoming a sub group of the Trust for the purpose of renewal of the Community Asset Status of Barkers Wood which was due to expire. This was agreed and a local councillor was nominated as Friends of Barkers Wood representative to the Trust. Relevant documentation was submitted to the council for renewal of Community Asset Status of Barkers Wood.

A decision was taken to remove the Minutes from the Trust's website, due to suspicious activity by persons unknown. It was also noted that most other Civic Trusts/Societies do not publish their minutes publicly.

May

Vistry; developers for the former Akzo site asked the Trust for access to the Littleborough Town Design Statement, which was duly provided to them. It was also made freely available to view on the Trust's website

It was pointed out that the proposed design of buildings on the Akzo site do not meet the recommendations of the original Littleborough Design Statement (2004), examples being building materials and location of utility boxes.

Rochdale Council were understood to have stated that the Littleborough Town Design Statement was only advisory and not a binding document.

Given the lockdown restriction easing date of Monday June 21st. it was proposed (subject to lifting of restrictions going ahead) to hold the next Trust meeting on Tuesday, June 22nd. and not Tuesday the 8th. as would be normal. The later date allowed us to meet face to face for the first time since March 2020.

June

The monthly meeting included the delayed A.G.M.

In line with the Constitution, three Trustees stood down. Having no other nominations, all three Trustees stood for re-election. This was proposed and seconded accordingly. Another member offered his services as Membership Secretary; was proposed by the Secretary and unanimously seconded.

Changes to the constitution were proposed; as follows.

- a. A clause stating that the Trust is a non-political organisation.
- b. Local councillors are welcome as members, their local government knowledge often proving invaluable.
- c. Members with political connections should not use their connections to try and influence other members.
- d. There will always be a minimum of two administrators for the Trust social media accounts.
- e. Any communications to outside agencies, other than routine notifications, will be circulated to the membership for approval twenty-four hours beforehand.

The Flood Group hoped to resume responsibility for collecting moorland data logger readings once final Covid restrictions are lifted. It was felt that refresher training with the Liverpool University team would be beneficial.

With the ongoing uncertainty of access to the Trust's normal meeting venue due to Covid and restoration work it was decided to relocate the flood refuge centre. A Zoom meeting was held with the Rev. Ian Bullock who kindly offered the use of one of his churches for this purpose.

Official confirmation was received from Rochdale Council that the Trust has been granted Community Asset status for Barkers Wood.

July

Due to disruption to monthly meeting dates, for various reasons, no monthly meeting was held in July.

August

Planning concerns by local residents regarding proposals to build 20 dwellings on a particular area prompted The Revd. Ian Bullock to make Land Registry enquiries to the Manchester Diocese who confirmed that there is no church involvement in this land, contrary to local rumours. The Trust reimbursed the Land Registry costs. The land is currently owned by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.

The Revd Ian Bullock indicated that he would like to arrange a public meeting at St. James Church to discuss the planned building of houses on these playing fields and a date of 16th October was agreed.

Regarding the Akzo site, the Trust will continue to contact Vistry to ask what “green” features will be included in the buildings, e.g. what type of heating systems will be installed, will the roofs have solar panels fitted and will there be electrical charging points installed for charging electric vehicle batteries?

‘Places for Everyone’ having replaced the old Greater Manchester Spatial Framework plan went out to consultation and the Trust formulated a response in addition to supporting any response from the local Greenbelt Group.

The Trust registered with “Lancashire in the Know” which is a police-driven forum where members of the public can register their concerns on various subjects. We highlighted anti-social behaviour, car crime, drug dealing and fly tipping as our main areas of concern.

The proposed changes to the Constitution at June’s meeting were agreed and it was updated accordingly.

September

Before the monthly meeting started, members had the opportunity to engage in a question/answer session with representatives of Greater Manchester Police to express their concerns of the increasing anti-social activity in the area.

A local resident showed video footage of a number of incidents involving motor vehicles.

Questions were asked why there never seemed to be a visible presence of police officers on the streets, especially a Traffic Car to monitor the reckless driving which is taking place regularly around the area. Other suggestions included installation of a “Speed Camera” at a suitable location.

PC Archer explained that they were Community Officers and not always able to respond to the kind of events that were being described and suggested that it would be best to make these reports to the police station who could then pass the information to a “Response Team” if one was available.

October

As reported in Rochdale Online, Rochdale Observer and Manchester Evening News, the Council's Pennine Township meeting, attended by the Trust turned out to be rather a heated affair. Members of the Trust and local business owners were present at the meeting with some of the business owners expressing anger that the council were proposing demolishing their premises without even bothering to consult with them beforehand. The Trust would wait for the official minutes of the meeting to be published before making any further comment.

Following the Council's Pennine Township meeting (as above), interest in the Trust's activities and actions grew at quite a pace with new members joining and also a Council document named Littleborough Supplementary Planning Document, proposing radical changes to the village centre.

Business owners especially, found it controversial and not supportive of sustaining their businesses. One specific resident who is also a relatively local councillor began to spread rumour and blatant lies around the project which would have worked in his favour.

Challenges have been made on many fronts and the Trust advised that public consultation meetings were to be held by the Council.

Previously proposed, a meeting was held at St. James's church with local residents concerning the proposed development on the play area, RBH were invited but declined to attend; even suggesting that the Trust cancel the meeting. A "Straw Poll" taken at the end of the meeting showed that residents were 100% opposed to the plans.

November

More documents have recently come to light concerning the Akzo site and levels of contamination there.

A "Call In" letter has been sent to the relevant government department outlining the concerns over contamination. This "call in" means the government may intervene in any planning application if it thinks there are reasonable grounds for doing so. Receipt of our letter has been acknowledged.

Regarding the Littleborough Supplementary Planning Document, Rochdale Council held three consultation sessions; all attended by members of the Trust.

Angie member expressed concern over a number of complaints from some specific Rochdale councillors who have accused the Trust of not acting as a charitable organization, with particular reference to the Trust's criticism and objections to planning matters. One councillor in particular became quite abusive and it was suggested that representations be made to the Standards Committee.

The "Objectives" section of the Trust's constitution, as registered with the Charity Commission, were read out to the meeting to allay the member's fears. As below:

- To promote high standards of planning and architecture in or affecting the area of benefit
- To educate the public in the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area of benefit
- To secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest in the area of benefit.

December

Over the last few weeks there has been a number of instances of flooding in Smithy Bridge at the bottom of the hill where the road crosses the river.

The council drainage engineer has been to access the situation and arrived at the conclusion that we have been stating for a number of years. In addition to blocked gullies there is also blockages in the connecting pipework. The engineer stated to a member of the Trust that funding would need to be applied for to fix the problem! A local councillor stated that this is not acceptable and repairs should be given priority.

A visit to the flood defence work taking place at Gale is hoped to be arranged in the New Year.

A grant application was made to the Pennine Township for funding to purchase a small laptop computer for use when collecting weather data from the various dataloggers in the area for uploading to the Liverpool University website.

After much delay by the manufacturers the flags arrived, one with the 50th Anniversary logo and one with the ordinary Trust logo. The 50th anniversary flag has been flown from the flagpole in the Memorial Garden and the banners are on display at a number of locations.

Emails were sent to Rochdale MP Sir Tony Lloyd and Lisa Nandy MP, Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, asking for their support to our “Call In” request to Secretary of State Michael Gove outlining our concerns over contamination on the Akzo site. So far, no replies have been received.

A suggestion was made to attend our MP’s surgery to pass on our various concerns. Enquiries were made to ascertain when his surgeries take place and make an appointment for any interested members to attend. It transpired that he does not hold surgeries. The Trust will explore other official routes.

As many residential developments are proposed and also add on the Littleborough Supplementary Planning Document it is anticipated that 2022 will again be a busy year for the Trust.

Ian Jackson
Chairman

Financial statement for year ending December 31st. 2021

Littleborough Civic Trust Financial Statement for year ending 1

Starting balance brought forward from 2020

£3,345.55

Income

Subscriptions

£200

£6.00

£8.38

£30.00

£187.07

£414.00

Total Income

£200.00

£645.45

Balance at year end

£2,900.10

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December 31st, 2021

Expenditure

Land registry search

Domain name

Civic Voice membership

Zoom fees

Banners

Total expenditure