

August 2013

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## Notice board

Berwick Civic Society will visit Alnwick on Sat 28 September 2013.

"Rip Off Britain" returns to BBC One in September - watch out for coverage of Alnwick Civic Society.

Any Questions?, Oct 15th, Bailiffgate Museum, 7:30pm

**A warm welcome to several new Business Members who have recently joined the Society.**



## Visit to Berwick Civic Society

*In the best tradition of Civic Society trips the weather was perfect for our visit to Berwick Civic Society on 13th July. We began by meeting socially with members of their committee, hosted by Marion Mead. Then we were guided on a tour of the town by Alison Cowe.*

As two historic towns, only 30 miles apart, with similar populations our towns face some common challenges, but there are also areas of difference. This was an excellent opportunity for us to explore the ways that two civic societies are responding to the different challenges, and to compare how these approaches are working out in practice.

Our tour began at the heart of Berwick, and worked along the river, round the walls, and back to the Main Guard, where the Civic Society are responsible for a permanent display on the history of the town. On the way we had plenty of opportunity to admire fine examples of Berwick's historic townscape, as well as being introduced to some less obvious, but equally interesting aspects of the town's rich past. We saw the impressive results of



recent conservation and improvement work, as well as some of the areas which are currently of concern to the Civic Society.

We came away with a great deal to think about - not least, deciding on the aspects of Alnwick that we want to highlight when Berwick pay us a return visit in September. We are preparing a tour of Alnwick for our guests and welcome suggestions of the sights that would interest visitors from another Civic Society, the successes we should brag about, and the challenges that we face.

Meanwhile, our thanks go to Alison Cowe (our guide), Marion Mead (treasurer), Zoreen Hill (vice chair), Julia Butler (honorary secretary), Georgie Hill, and other members of Berwick Civic



Society for a warm welcome, a thought-provoking discussion and a fascinating tour of their fine town.

# What impression does Alnwick leave on visitors?

*The photographs we take tell a story about where we have been, what caught our eye, and the memories we want to keep and share. So can visitors' photographs tell us anything about what they make of Alnwick? When they share their pictures with friends and family, do they convey a fair impression of our town?*

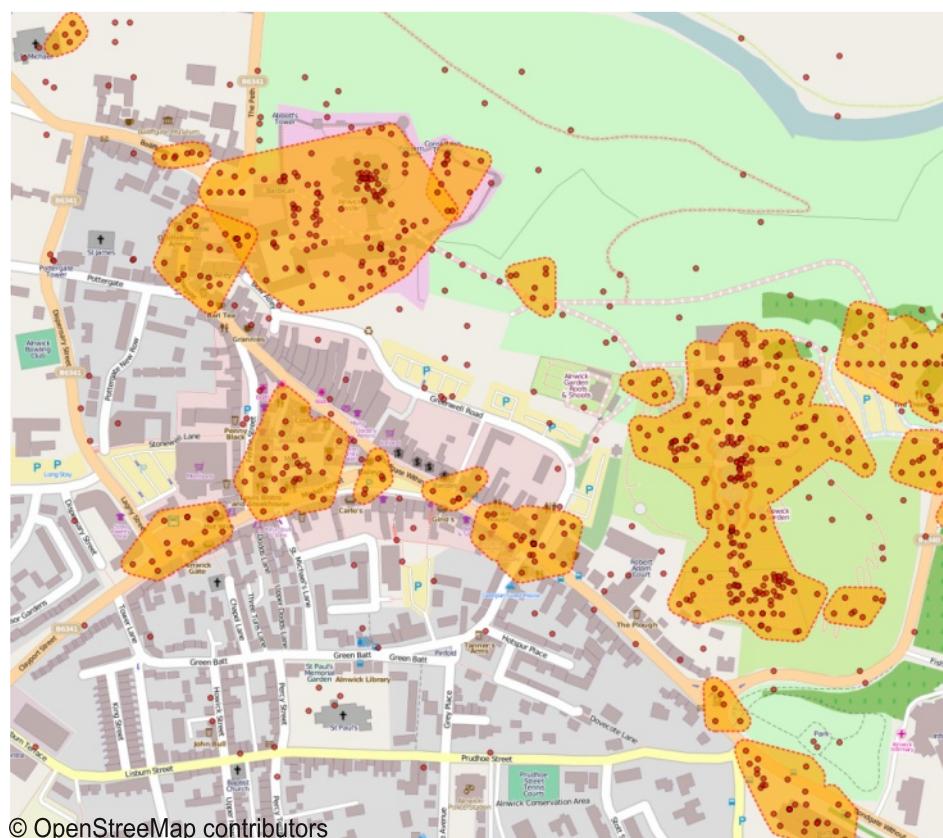


Visitors seem most impressed by Alnwick Garden – particularly the water features.

Almost half their pictures are taken inside the garden. Elsewhere there are as many pictures taken of the town as there are in the castle.

Landscaped parkland accounts for most of the remaining photographs, and as the castle often features in these wider views, it should probably be ranked as the second most interesting feature for visitors. Perhaps it is in the nature of our other attractions that they only account for a small proportion of the images that visitors choose to share.

These figures are based on a sample of thousands of photographs taken in Alnwick, loaded onto a popular photo sharing web site, and marked with the location. Nobody will be surprised that visitors photograph the best-known attractions. It's the other places they choose to record that may be more interesting.



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- Of places that visitors notice inside the town, the market place makes the biggest impression, with twice as many pictures as in the rest of the centre.
- It would be easy to underestimate the impact made by Bondgate Tower: there are more pictures here than any part of town outside the market place.
- Opportunities to visit Aln Valley Railway are recent, but since the beginning of 2013 it has accounted for 3% of all of the pictures in our sample.
- If visitors reach Pottergate and Narrowgate they take few pictures. Most in Bailiffgate are near the castle.
- St Michael's Church and the War Memorial attract interest, but we might have expected Pottergate Tower, the Tenantry Column, and some parts to feature more often.

This is not a flawless way to understand how visitors see Alnwick. The sample isn't representative; big events skew the results; photographs do not tell the whole story; contributors do not always provide accurate location information. So we shouldn't read too much into this, but it may suggest some insights into features that locals appreciate while visitors miss; and others which we take for granted, but which catch a fresh eye.

- Alongside the gardens and castle, the town does seem important to visitors: it leaves an impression, at least in terms of the number of images recorded
- The parts of town attracting most attention are the Market Place and Bondgate Tower. If visitors are to see the town at its best, then this is where we need to ensure that high standards are maintained.
- "Undiscovered Alnwick" includes even more of the town than we might think. Visitors are not venturing far from the town centre. Exploring a little more widely may help them to get more out of their visit.

# News in Brief

Earl Percy first declared Robertson's fountain open on 8th June 1891, attended by the Northumberland Fusiliers band and a large group of freemasons. Things were more low-key when the fountain was re-started on 29th June. This time the event was marked by representatives of the Town Council, Civic Society and Chamber of Trade. The Gazette covered the opening on 4th July. The Town Council

has agreed that the fountain can be operated over the summer, in support of activities by Alnwick Civic Society and Alnwick Chamber of Trade. Restarting the fountain has involved clearing debris, flushing the system, and making safety checks. We hope it will be enjoyed by visitors, and that it will encourage interest in other features of our historic townscape.

## Marjorie Deakin Essay Competition

*For this year's Essay Competition middle schools were invited to write on the subject "If pants had eyes". The winners were recognised on 8th July, with prizes donated by Barter Books and presented by Mary Manley.*

First prize was awarded to Joe Bennett of The Duke's Middle School for a moving description of events as seen by the pants. Second prize was awarded to Catherine Jackson of Lindisfarne Middle School, for a beautifully imagined piece with an Alice in Wonderland feeling. Third prize was awarded to Callie Martin of St Paul's Middle School for a thoughtful piece on a modern girl, oblivious to the important place that pants have played in everyday life. Essays by Abby Wilson (Duke's), Oscar Wilson (Lindisfarne) and Lauren Vickers (St Paul's) were highly commended. The high standard of the entries is well illustrated by an extract from the winning essay by Joe Bennett:

*"The cockerel had crowed. The people of Alnwick will soon be up and going about their daily business. The same people walk by each day, doing the same thing. Sometimes I wish I could join them in laughing, crying, and everything in between. But yet I am stuck on this street, providing the public with clean water. But that one time, where it was not clean. I remember it well, but with sorrow. It was just a normal day, people drinking from me, young maids gossiping, heading to the market to buy their local fruit and vegetables. But people started collapsing in the street. People who had, coincidentally drunk from my spout or one of the other pants. Well I thought it was coincidental. It turned out there was Cholera, a deadly water borne disease, flowing from me into the mouths of the public. I was horrified. I wished every day I could apologise to the families of the 123 who died".*

Our congratulations to the winners, and thanks to all involved.

Following the Portas Review on the future of High Streets Alnwick Town Team was allocated £10,000 government support. This will be spent on "dressing the town" including improved finger posts and badging different quarters of the town.



The Civic Society has applied to HM Revenue and Customs to reclaim tax already paid on contributions through the Gift Aid scheme. If all goes to plan the next issue of the newsletter will include more information on how members can help the society to reap maximum benefit from the scheme.

In 1994, Alnwick District Council invited the Civic Society to produce a Design Guide for shop-fronts. The guide was adopted as an aid in judging planning applications. After nearly 20 years the same standards are still relevant today - so we have recreated the guide, and published it on the Society web site.

In preparation for the 2015 General Election Civic Voice intends to develop a "Civic Manifesto". Over the next twelve months they will be looking for suggestions to decide what should go into a document which will be shared with all political candidates. We would welcome the thoughts of members on how we should approach this locally.

As we go to press, the Society is preparing to be represented at the 2013 Flower Festival at St Michael's Church. Our thanks to Michelle Duff for organising our display.

# Walks that show off the best of Alnwick: Camp Hill

The last issue covered walks in the landscaped parkland north of the town. This time we combine various suggestions that illustrate the very different way the town has developed to the south.

The walk offers views up and down the Aln valley, an iron-age hill fort, and a 19<sup>th</sup> century memorial column. Views over the town are particularly fine in the evening sun.

From Northumberland Hall (1), via Dodd's Lane (2) - between burgage plots - to Green Batt (3) the route lies within the boundaries of the medieval town. The area around Howick Street (4) represents planned development beyond the original town boundary in the early 19th century, when growth also brought new institutions, such as the Baptist Church, built in the 1830s as a Presbyterian chapel (5) and Victoria Infants School - formerly the Ragged School (6).

The footpath to Swansfield Park at the top of Lisburn Street runs behind the former grounds of Belle Vue (7) one of the country houses built in the 19th century. The climb to Summer Seats (8) brings fine views over the town, and to the coast.

At the end of the lane the path to the right, along an old river bed follows the back entrance to Swansfield house (9), the first Georgian country seat on the southern fringes of Alnwick. Designed by John Dobson, and built in 1813 for Henry Collingwood Selby, but demolished in 1975, it was replaced by the house which stands in the same position on the hill to the right.

Just before the lane reaches Clayport bank {the Corn Road connecting Alnmouth and Hexham} (10), a track leads to the Battlements and Rugley Road. Views extend over Alnwick Moor, the Aln valley, and Hulne Park. On a distant hill a large golf ball protects a radar head scanning for intruders into UK airspace.

Henry Collingwood Selby erected various structures in his parkland, including an "Eyecatcher" (11) which can be seen left of the road. Much of the sandstone that built Alnwick was quarried to the west of this road and there was a racecourse here until 1793. Just before the bungalow on the left, a path turns left beside a reservoir of 1913 (12), built to supply water for an expanding town.

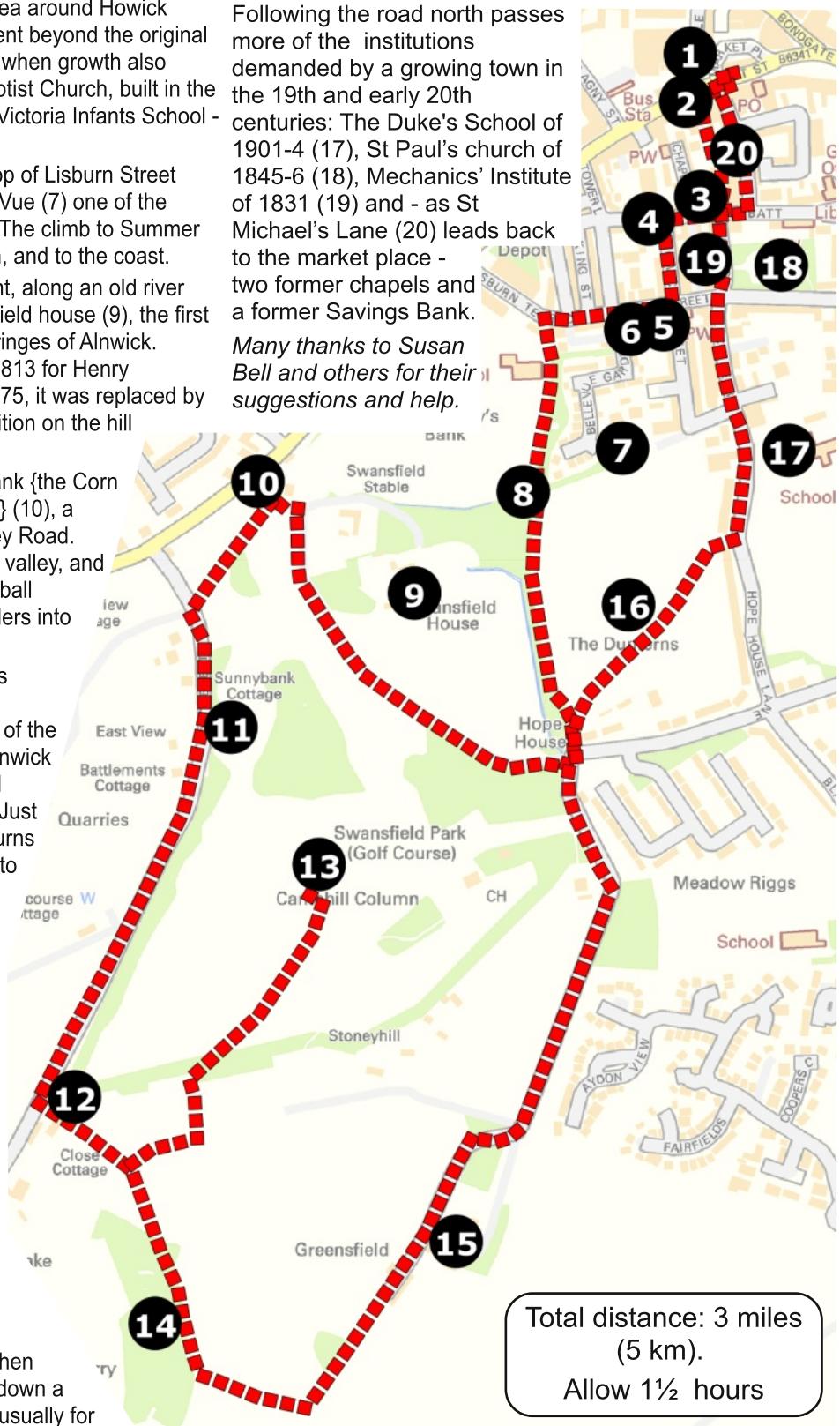
Alnwick Golf Club was created in 1907 (and extended to 18 holes in 1995). To the left, Camp Hill Column, or the Peace Column (13) was erected by Selby in 1814 on the site of an Iron Age hill fort. Inscriptions mention Nelson, Wellington, William Pitt (and Selby himself). Selby was a prominent establishment figure, and wanted to commemorate the Treaty of Paris (which he expected to bring lasting peace in Europe); and perhaps also to make a point to locals (who he suspected of being sympathetic to the French Revolution).

The public footpath continues past Greensfield Quarry (14) which provided whinstone, mainly for road chippings. It then crosses the fairway, through a gate and down a rough road to Greensfield Farm (15). Unusually for

Alnwick, whinstone, rather than sandstone, has been used extensively in the construction of the farm outbuildings. Between here and Shilbottle the regular field patterns, separated by hedgerows, originate from the enclosures in the early 19th century. Housing beyond the farm dates from 2002. At the point where we regain the outward route, a footpath crosses behind Hope House farm, through a true hay meadow (16) with an abundance of wild flowers. The field gave its name to The Dunterns: pre-war semi-detached housing. The route next passes through a kissing gate, and down a narrow path between allotments to the road.

Following the road north passes more of the institutions demanded by a growing town in the 19th and early 20th centuries: The Duke's School of 1901-4 (17), St Paul's church of 1845-6 (18), Mechanics' Institute of 1831 (19) and - as St Michael's Lane (20) leads back to the market place - two former chapels and a former Savings Bank.

Many thanks to Susan Bell and others for their suggestions and help.



# Neighbourhood plan questionnaire (heritage)

The plan should encourage the better management and maintenance of Alnwick Conservation area's public spaces and floorscapes



The plan should include design policies and promote design guides to protect the character of our historic buildings and areas



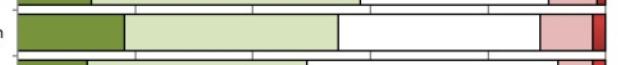
The plan should encourage the removal of unnecessary signs and other street furniture in the town centre



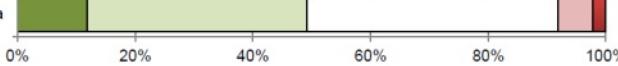
The plan should explore the need for additional planning controls to prevent small scale damage to the character of our historic buildings and townscape



The plan should propose a locally determined list of lesser heritage buildings



The boundaries of Alnwick Conservation Area should be reviewed with a view to its extension



Denwick village should be considered for designation as a conservation area



Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

## Picture quiz

This time we have four old photographs of a very familiar part of Alnwick. No prizes for

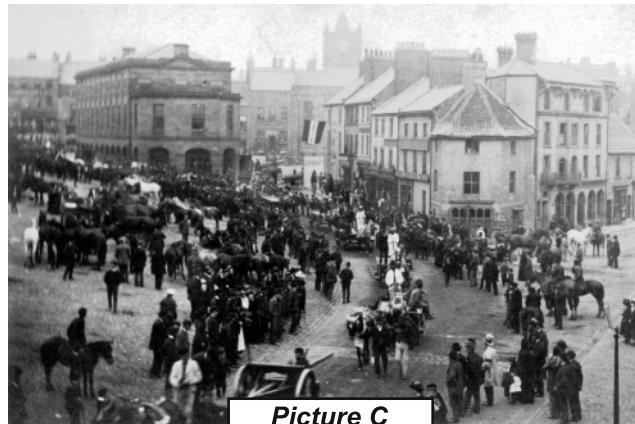


Picture A

identifying the location, but can you arrange the pictures in chronological order?



Picture B



Picture C



Picture D

## A correction

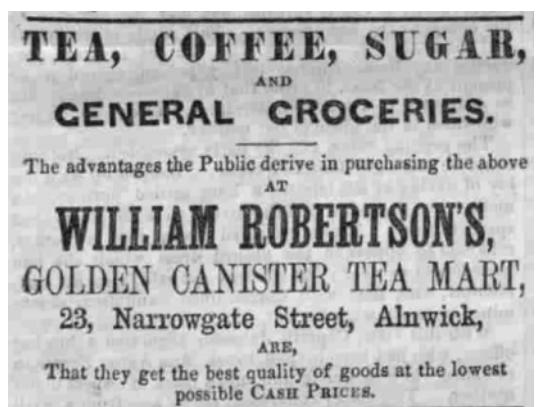
The picture in the last quiz, which was described as a "milk churn", is really a Tea Canister, which originates from the Golden Canister Tea Mart.



Mr William Robertson, having gained experience of the grocery trade in London, returned home to Alnwick and opened his shop in 1860 at 23 Narrowgate Street (numbers have changed).

He quickly established a reputation for 'fine teas and coffees' and advertised in the Alnwick Mercury (right).

Apologies to all for the mistake, and thanks to Vera Mallon for the information.



# Neighbourhood plan update

*Further meetings have been held and there is growing interest and ownership of the Plan. The next stage moves into developing policies and projects for all Topics including our own Heritage and Culture Topic.*

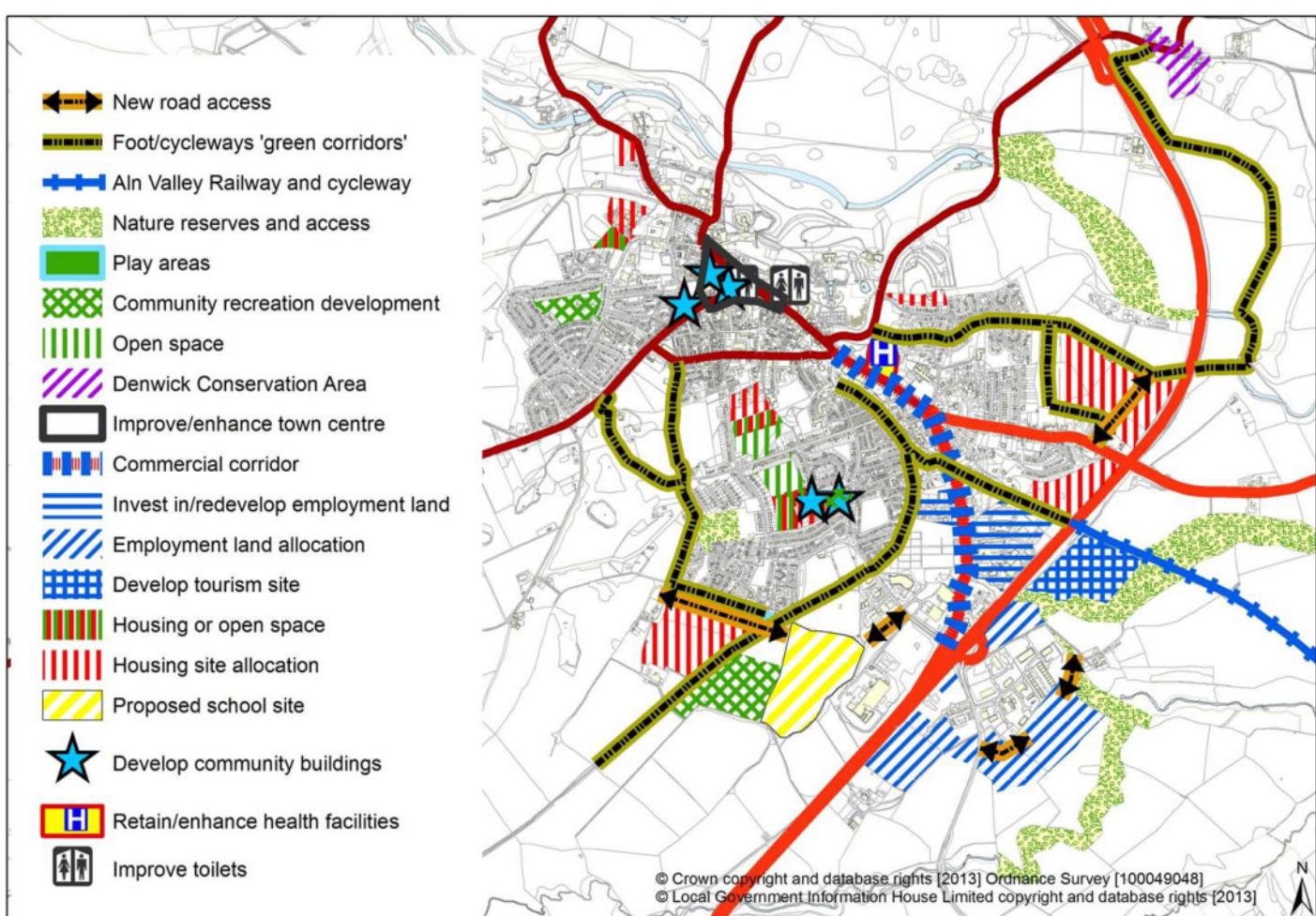
The location and form of any proposed new development will be a major issue as the Neighbourhood Plan is progressed. Because of heritage and topographical constraints to the north and east, the main thrust of development is likely to be to the south of the town. At a consultation meeting in June the aims and objectives for each Topic were translated into the form of a physical plan (see below). This single map draws the different Topics together and shows development possibilities as well as the assets and resources which should be protected. It includes, for example, the possible boundary of a conservation area in Denwick, and the possible locations for 700 new house units over the fifteen year plan period.

The process has thus begun of finding the best balance and location for future development. The Civic Society believes strongly in the importance of well-planned and designed

development and that Alnwick's long distance quality views should be protected. The siting of the new high school is a particular concern.

In recent weeks we have also learned that English Heritage have identified Northumberland as one of their priority territories, with Alnwick of particular interest given its importance in heritage terms. Alan Hunter, the Principal Planning Adviser for English Heritage's Historic Places Team in the North East is keen to stay close to the development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and he has offered to assist with the process of incorporating and using heritage information to inform policy, and helping the community to recognise and use heritage assets – all within the context of the developing Neighbourhood Plan.

A Heritage and Culture Policies and Proposals sub-group has now been established, and we look forward to working with Alan on how the historic environment can best guide and inspire development which maintains and enhances the vitality and individuality of our special town.



## Planning matters

So far the number of planning applications in 2013 has been around 25% higher than at the same time last year.

Most are uncontroversial, but of great concern at present is the application for a care home on the site of the former bus garage on Lisburn Street. This is a highly sensitive location on one of the iconic approaches to Alnwick. The design takes no account of the character of the town, it is unsightly, and if it were to go ahead it would waste an opportunity to link two

important parts of the conservation area: Clayport Bank and the 19th century planned suburb around Howick St and Lisburn St.

Parking provision is inadequate for a well-staffed 88 bed residential home; neither the ambulance space nor the delivery space is bigger than a normal car parking space; and there is no provision for visitor parking. We also question the logic of an ultra-modern building, for use by elderly Alnwick residents, more used to traditional buildings. We are urging the council to reject the application and to suggest that a more traditional style would be more appropriate.

In the last newsletter we reported our objection

to an application for a mast on the listed former Territorial Drill Hall in Fenkle Street. This application has subsequently been withdrawn in favour of a new location in Greenwell Lane. We also voiced our concerns over the size of the proposed BT cabinet in Bondgate. We continue to believe there were flaws in the process used to consider this application, but as the cabinet installed is smaller than envisaged we have decided not to lodge a formal complaint.

The closure of Bow Alley raises a number of different issues. The current situation is a response to safety concerns, but the Gazette has reported



that traders find it is proving devastating for footfall in this part of town. We hope to see a solution that addresses both of these issues in the short term, but we also need to see one that secures the integrity of an historic building, and hope that the opportunity is grasped to realise more of the potential of this important quarter of the town.

## Viewpoint

The Society exists to encourage high standards in architecture and planning, to stimulate public interest in the character of Alnwick and to encourage conservation, development and improvement of the townscape. To realise these aims we must reach beyond our own membership and garner support across the town.

The Society has always done that - through meetings, exhibitions, publications, and collaboration with other bodies on various schemes. As a result of efforts by many people the society has always been highly regarded in the town (and among professionals who work in the relevant areas).

This issue of the newsletter begins the second year in our new format. We hope that members have enjoyed the result, and found it of value, but now we would like to see if the newsletter can do more to help raise the wider profile of the society.

We are not a large organisation (we discussed membership numbers in Berwick, with some envy), but this is not just about numbers. We

draw on a range of knowledge and enthusiasm far greater than our size might suggest.

We haven't credited individual contributors to the newsletter, and naming everyone now would take too much space, but thanks are due to several members of the executive committee, a growing number of other members, and an occasional supporter, who have been generous in contributing suggestions and material for each issue.

But they have no monopoly on good ideas, so the challenge we would now like to offer all members is to propose one item for a future newsletter. Something that you believe deserves greater attention among our membership - and beyond.

We don't have a mass circulation (yet!), so we could (eventually) include something from almost every reader: whether it is a full article, a short note, a picture, or simply a suggestion of an item you would like others to cover. It's up to you.



## Diary dates

### Civic Society...

Berwick Civic Society will visit us in Alnwick on Saturday 28 September, for a social meeting, and tour of the town.

On 15th October, a panel will discuss topical issues in "Any Questions?" from 7:30pm at Bailiffgate Museum

On 28th November, we are looking forward to a lively debate with members of the Auriga Club, 8:00pm at the Rugby Club

### ...and more

A facsimile of the Lindisfarne Gospels will be on display in Bailiffgate Museum during the month of August.

The temporary exhibition on William Davison's Printing Shop will continue at Northumberland Archives (Woodhorn) until 29th September

Details of Heritage Open Days (12-15th September) can be found on their web site:

[www.heritageopendays.org.uk](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk)



## Quiz answers

1) Picture C dates from before Robertson's Pant was constructed.

2) Picture D shows the opening of Robertson's Pant in 1891.

3) Picture B dates from before the copper dome was added to the corner building.

4) Picture A dates from after the copper dome was added.

## About Alnwick Civic Society

Alnwick Civic Society was formed in 1974, following the defeat of proposals to re-develop the town centre with a modern shopping area. Since then it has sought to influence development proposals, especially in the town centre and conservation area, to ensure they protect and enhance our heritage.

The society has been involved in a number of successful high profile campaigns. It continues to pursue its objectives by providing a voice for members; through dialogue with planning and conservation professionals, and like-minded organisations; by offering advice, scrutinising and commenting on development proposals; and by recognising excellence, organising public meetings, developing guided trails, and a variety of other activities.

In response to recent changes to the planning system the society is heavily involved in development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and works with local partners to influence policy at a county level. It seeks to influence national policy in co-operation with other bodies within the civic movement, and was a founding member of Civic Voice.

All who share our aims can support the work of the society: by joining as an individual, family or business member; by participating in activities, sharing ideas, raising areas of concern and pointing out examples of good practice. Or simply by demonstrating pride in our town, and spreading the word about the value of our work.



Founding member

## Who's who?

**President:** Philip Deakin

**Chair:** Peter Ennor ([peter.ennor@gmail.com](mailto:peter.ennor@gmail.com))

**Treasurer and Membership:** Gill Parker

**Honorary Secretary:** Sue Smith

**Other Executive Committee members:**

Michael Apted

Elizabeth Jones

Trish Jones

Brian Lamb

David Lovie ([davidlovie307@btinternet.com](mailto:davidlovie307@btinternet.com))

Peter Reed / Newsletter ([peter.reed@aligre.co.uk](mailto:peter.reed@aligre.co.uk))

Caroline Stewart

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**Twitter:** [@AlnwickCivicSoc](https://twitter.com/AlnwickCivicSoc)

**Facebook:** [AlnwickCivicSociety](https://www.facebook.com/AlnwickCivicSociety)