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Inside

Local Area Committees.....	2
Local Heritage List.....	3
Derwentwater House.....	4
Planning matters.....	5
20th Century Heritage.....	6
Traditional shopfront features.....	8
News in brief.....	9
Gas in Alnwick.....	10
Quiz: gas lighting.....	11
About Alnwick Civic Society.....	12
Who's Who?.....	12
Diary dates.....	12

We are concerned about the decision of Northumberland County Council to suspend the role of Local Area Committees. For the next six months their functions will be replaced by the central Strategic Planning Committee and by delegating more decisions to officers.

The members of the Local Committees have unrivalled knowledge of local conditions and voters expect them to make decisions and be able to hold them to account.

We do not understand why virtual meetings cannot be used to allow Local Area Committees to continue, and we urge members of the Civic Society to press for them to be reintroduced.

For more on this issue, see page 2



Local Area Committee: powers suspended

When the Covid-19 restrictions were first introduced we began to hear that planning authorities elsewhere in England were suspending planning meetings, and relying more heavily on officers, rather than elected members, to deal with planning applications.

In our view Northumberland is not the only council where too many decisions were already delegated to officers, but (at the time) few councils had arrangements in place to hold any virtual meetings and the wording of the legislation prevented elected members from using technology to participate remotely in a planning meeting.

Initially we were reassured to hear that Northumberland County Council were looking to introduce virtual meetings once the regulations were changed to allow this. However, we then heard that the Chief Executive had decided to suspend Local Area Committees, to replace their role by the centralised Strategic Planning Committee, and to delegate planning decisions to officers wherever possible, for a period of six months.

Why is this important?

Most planning decisions are straightforward, but some involve carefully balancing the positions of different groups, and reconciling strong opposing views. In Alnwick it is often the wishes of the developer that conflict with the views of local people, but there are also plenty of examples where different local groups have clashed.

The outcomes of some planning decisions have a significant impact on the lives of those affected. A major development can affect the community for a generation or more. Any heritage that is destroyed has gone forever. We don't expect to agree with every decision made by planning committees. But even where we disagree with a decision (and maybe especially where we disagree), we want to have confidence that the system has operated effectively, that anyone affected has had an opportunity to express their views, and that the expectations of local people have been properly represented and considered.

Even as an individual we can sometimes be in two minds about a planning application. The Civic Society sometimes has to resolve different views among our own membership, and we make an effort to understand differences within the wider Alnwick community. So we feel strongly about the importance of taking local knowledge into account, and seeing that decisions are taken by local representatives who are accountable to local people.

These are challenging times for local government, and parliament anticipated some of their difficulties. On 25th March the Coronavirus Act introduced the power to change regulations that apply to local authorities and the relevant changes came into force on the 4th April. These allowed Northumberland County Council to hold virtual planning meetings, and for members of the public to attend. However, for the next six months the Chief Executive of NCC has decided to suspend the powers of Local Area Planning Committees. Planning decisions that they would normally handle will need to be handled centrally, by the Strategic Planning Committee, or delegated to officers.

What have we done?

As soon as we became aware that the powers of Local Area Committees had been suspended we wrote to the Chief Executive urging her to reconsider. We also contacted other Civic Societies in Northumberland. We know that Berwick Civic Society and the Northumberland and Newcastle Society have raised similar issues.

The key points we made to the Chief Executive were that: Local Planning Committees have unrivalled knowledge of local conditions, voters expect them to make decisions and hold them to account, and there was no need to suspend them. The new arrangements rely too heavily on the judgement of the Chief Planning Officer. And it was excessive to set a time limit of six months, when preparations were already being made to ease restrictions.

The response we received was comprehensive, but disappointing. It explained how some of the powers of local members would be preserved, but didn't justify centralising planning decisions for a period of 6 months.

Next we looked into referring the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman but they are not accepting referrals at present, so instead we shared our concerns with Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP. The response from her office gave us hope that the situation may not last the full six months. It offered some reassurance that other options were still being considered, and that we would be kept informed. We also hear that there are ongoing discussions between elected members who have similar concerns about these new arrangements.

What more can we do?

We want to keep up pressure to end these temporary arrangements. We see no reason why Local Area Committees shouldn't continue, by using suitable technology. We hope the emergency arrangements won't leave decisions open to being challenged, or undermined. But most of all we want to ensure that these temporary arrangements don't undermine public confidence in a democratic planning system.

Over recent months a series of decisions, appeals and changes to the system appear to have reinforced central decision making at the expense of localism. It's tempting to speculate about a hidden agenda to subvert democratic participation at a local level, and we cannot deny having succumbed to such speculation ourselves. However, there are some difficult planning decisions in the pipeline for Alnwick and the greater priority is to ensure that the Local Planning Committee is able to play their full part in those decisions. We believe a number of County Councillors share that view. So we are urging our members, wherever they live in Northumberland, to support efforts by their local councillor to get these temporary changes reversed.



Getting Involved in Creating a Local Heritage List

As we all know, Alnwick and Denwick are both rich in heritage. Between them, there are over 300 statutory protected sites. This protection is mainly by listing, though a number of sites are protected using scheduling. In addition, most of Alnwick's town centre is a conservation area which provides an additional layer of safeguarding. There is, however, yet another form of protection which can be used – the Local Heritage List. Currently, this is something that neither Alnwick nor Denwick have. But we've started laying the foundations for such a list and we'd like to get as many Alnwick Civic Society members as possible involved.

A Local Heritage List (LHL) identifies those heritage assets which, while not protected by statutory designations, are of local interest, contributing to the sense of place and history of the local area. Whilst local listing provides no additional planning controls, the fact that a building or site is on a local list means that national planning policy requires its conservation as a heritage asset to be taken into account as a material consideration when determining the outcome of a planning application. In order to be used in the planning process, the LHL must be adopted by the local authority.

The current local neighbourhood plan includes a project to develop a LHL for Alnwick and Denwick. The project has the County Council Conservation Team (CCCT) allocated as lead, supported by the Alnwick Civic Society, Alnwick Town Council, Alnwick Town Partnership and Northumberland Estates. Little progress has been made to date.

While the Covid-19 restrictions have impeded some of our activities they have also created the opportunity for us to move forward with the LHL. With the agreement of the CCCT, and with the awareness of the other stakeholders, we have started to lay some foundations.

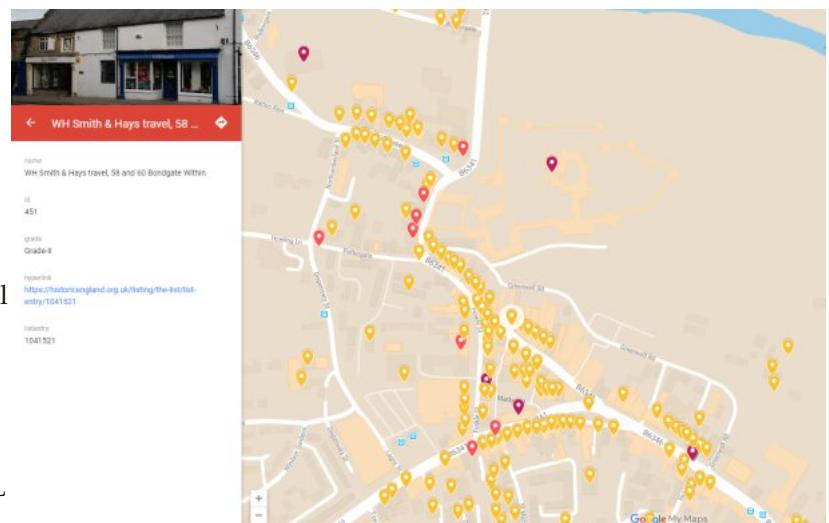
In broad terms, the first step is to create a draft list of assets. This will then need to be refined in order to create a final version which can be considered for adoption by Northumberland County Council.

Along the way we will provide a number of opportunities for residents to get involved, possibly

including an exhibition of the project. We will also need to engage with the property owners. Though being on the list places no constraints on the owners, it would be

inappropriate to proceed without their involvement. At this early stage, and before we broaden any communication, we are now seeking the input of Civic Society members.

To be on the 'list' it is important that the site is not already protected by listing or scheduling. We have therefore created a searchable map on the Civic Society website which identifies all currently protected sites.



Take a look – it's fascinating information! Clicking on 'heritage' on the Alnwick Civic Society homepage will take you to the Heritage Protection page from which all the other information is linked.

In order to collect candidates, we have created an on-line form, which includes the criteria which must be used in order to consider a place for inclusion on the final list. There is a link to an explanation of these criteria.

Once we have a number of suggestions, we'll start adding them to the map on the website, but don't be worried about duplication as this all helps to indicate

support for a particular place.

We are also trying to include a photograph of every designated site on this map, so if you find a blank, and you have a suitable photograph, send it to us and we'll get it uploaded. Even without the LHL, this map will be a very useful local resource.

Local List Proposal

First check <[here](#)> that the site is not already protected.

Your name: (required)

ianhall25

Your e-Mail: (required)

ianhall25@hotmail.co.uk

Name of the asset (required)

Please explain the reasons why you believe this asset should be included. (required)

Identify which <[criteria](#)> you think are relevant. You don't need to use every criteria – some places might tick a number of boxes, but others maybe only one – it doesn't matter.

Choose at least one (required)

- Rarity
- Representative example
- Architecture
- Townscape / Landscape impact
- Group value
- Artistic interest
- Historic association
- Archaeological interest

SUBMIT

Alnwick Civic Society

Heritage Protection

Alnwick and Denwick are both rich in heritage with over 300 protected sites, dating back into prehistory. These are all listed on a map maintained by Alnwick Civic Society – [view map](#)

Heritage Legislation

Alnwick has been very successful in protecting its historic heritage through legislation and regulations, with the last two years seeing building and scheduling.

Listing is used as the primary protection for buildings, and is managed by the English Heritage. The Civic Society has been instrumental in getting the Grade II listing for the Alnwick Castle.

Grade II – An article in the National Inventory of the Historic Environment, which means that it is of special interest.

Grade II* – An article in the National Inventory of the Historic Environment, which means that it is of outstanding interest.

Grade I – An article in the National Inventory of the Historic Environment, which means that it is of exceptional interest.

Monuments Protection Act: This is a mainly applied to archaeological sites, though in the past it has been used for other structures. As a result, some sites are both scheduled and listed.

Conservation Areas

In addition to the national system of protected, local authorities can designate parts of their towns and villages as conservation areas. This is a way of protecting the character of an area and giving wider planning rights through the planning system. Alnwick town centre is such a conservation area. For more of Alnwick's conservation areas – [click here](#)

Local Heritage Lists

Local authorities can also adopt a Local Heritage List which identifies those buildings and places which, whilst not meeting the criteria for statutory protection, still contribute to the character and identity – or 'feel' of our towns and cities. The Alnwick Civic Society is currently in the process of adopting a Local Heritage List for Alnwick and Denwick – [more here](#)

Heritage at Risk

The outcome of protection is the main deal with the avoidance of damage to important assets. Historic England are responsible for the Register of Listed buildings which includes buildings and structures of special architectural or historic interest. There are currently three buildings in the Alnwick and Denwick area which are deemed to be at risk – [more here](#)

Derwentwater House



Proposals have been submitted to convert the former Duchess's High School buildings at 2-8 Bailiffgate into a Hotel.

Number 2, Bailiffgate is often referred to as Derwentwater House. Strictly speaking, though, the name "Derwentwater House" refers to the previous building that stood on this site. The story of this earlier building begins a century before the property came into the hands of the Percy family.

The earliest reference dates from 1679 and it was described as the "slate house". In an 18th century painting it appears as being lower than the present building with two storeys, a dormer attic, and what may be a pantiled roof.

James Radclyffe, the 3rd Earl of Derwentwater grew up in France as a companion to James Francis Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender. He became the Earl of Derwentwater and inherited his Northumberland estates on the death of his father in 1705. This was shortly before his 16th birthday.

For the next few years he travelled on the continent, then returned to England in 1710 and lived at Dilston, near Corbridge. He joined the Jacobite Rising of 1715. When the rebels were defeated at the Battle of Preston he was taken to the Tower of London and impeached on 19 January 1716. He pleaded guilty and was condemned to death. Efforts to procure his pardon were unsuccessful and he was beheaded on Tower Hill on 24th February 1716.

The Derwentwater Estates were forfeited to the Crown, then given to the Greenwich Hospital in 1735, as a way for the charity to fund itself. They sold Derwentwater House to the Percy family in 1780. In 1796 the Duke of Northumberland appointed James Dormer as commissioner, and replaced Derwentwater House with Bailiffgate House to provide him with accommodation. It was occupied by subsequent Commissioners between 1805 and 1847, and continued in residential use until 1888 when it was taken over by the Duchess's School.

The footprints of the adjoining properties (numbers 4, 6, and 8) match earlier maps, and the frontages are of similar style, but later date. The most likely explanation is that after Bailiffgate house was built, the frontage of Nos. 6-8 was altered to match the style, and that the frontage of number 4 was later changed to match both.

The application to convert these buildings into a hotel includes a number of documents that describe aspects of the building's history. We found the Heritage Assessment particularly useful, while maps at the end of the Archaeological Assessment show how the layout changed through the 18th century and 19th century.



Planning matters

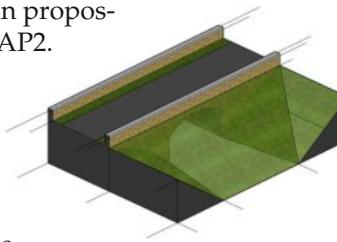
Highways England Historical Railways Estate is proposing to infill two bridges on the former Cornhill branch. One is at Rugley and the other at Mossyford. The possibility of future development is not a valid reason to object to such proposals, but we think the applicant should be aware of the strength of local feeling that the potential use of the former railway as a recreational route should not be compromised. Such a development would be in accordance with the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan policies TRA1 and TRA2, and with community action proposals TRA CAP1 and TRA CAP2.

Alnwick is currently the only market town in Northumberland not located on the National CycleNetwork, but the recent connection along the Aln Valley Railway has increased the potential for further development, including an enhancement to the Sustrans National Cycle Network by starting to provide the only East-West cycle route between Ponteland and the Scottish border.

The former Cornhill Line is already well used as an ad hoc walking route and opening up the next section would also release further recreational opportunities, in accordance with the Government's pronouncements during the Covid19 crisis. Any changes now should avoid compromising the future provision of a pedestrian and cycle route.

In addition, the junction at Mossyford is a known accident blackspot, and the proposals do not take advantage of this opportunity to improve visibility at the junction. There may also be a need to provide a safe crossing point for pedestrians and cyclists in future.

Alnwick Town Council has acknowledged that the safe use of the bridges for motorised traffic must continue, but these plans have serious negative implications for any future Greenway. They say that it would be helpful if the two bridges could be reassessed in this light, perhaps with a tunnel left through each, to permit Greenway usage. Infilling would be almost impossible to reverse.



An application has been refused for the sales area on Denwick Lane associated with the Windy Edge development. We had already remarked that the temporary cabin appeared before the application was submitted, and Alnwick Town Council objected to the proposal due to the visual impact of the sales cabin. We were not disappointed with a rejection on the basis that the scale and visual impact of the sales cabin would be detrimental to and out of character with the immediate surroundings, the wider landscape and the approach to

the town. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policies HD4 and HD5 of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan.

We welcome the application for conversion of 2-8 Bailiffgate to a hotel to the extent that it offers an appropriate and viable long term use for the buildings and conserves important heritage assets. Whilst supporting the development in principle, however, we are concerned about certain details, so submitted our response as an objection.

We have concerns over the impact of traffic and parking on The Peth, Walkergate and Bailiffgate, and of the new hotel building on The Peth and the longer views when approached from the north. While recognising the commercial pressures to develop a hotel of this size, we feel that insufficient attention has been given to how to make best use of this steeply sloping site.

To enable vehicles to turn it would be necessary to ban parking over a significant length of The Peth. Currently this is well used by both tourists and commuters looking for long term parking close to the town centre. Without it, these people would look to Walkergate as the next nearest alternative but not only would this create parking problems for the residents, who mostly have no alternative, but would also create congestion for traffic using the hotel entrance and exit on that street. At the very least, special provision should be made

for residents to park off-street (possibly within the curtilage of the planning application) and for on street parking to be restricted to short blocks, with passing places between.

We do not accept that the proposed new hotel building will not have a significant impact on The Peth, The Lion Bridge or the western end of the Pastures. The development will result in the loss of mature trees which will help to shield the site, especially if the retaining wall on the west side of The Peth needs to be rebuilt, as is strongly implied. The lower northern end of the whole building will be over 18 metres above the adjacent road level on The Peth, while the northern end of the main block will be over 19 metres above the corresponding road level. What is more, we think it will compete with the grandeur of the curtain wall of the castle opposite. The proposed eastern elevations shows that the visible build up to ground floor level would be as much 2.67 metres above the height of the top of the retaining wall on The Peth (and therefore 3 metres or more above the adjacent access road level) at the north end of the main block.

Alnwick Town Council accepts the general principle of the development as it will bring empty buildings back into use, provide additional employment, reinforce Alnwick's stature as a premier tourist destination and signals renewed faith in the future of the town. However, they share our concerns about massing, parking, and access.



Alnwick's 20th century heritage: what's in your top ten?

In our celebration of Alnwick's Heritage Heroes we chose 25 examples of the buildings that make Alnwick special. We only had room to include four from the 20th century. Here we offer a longer list: twenty of Alnwick's 20th century buildings. What would you include in a list of Alnwick's most important twentieth century built heritage?

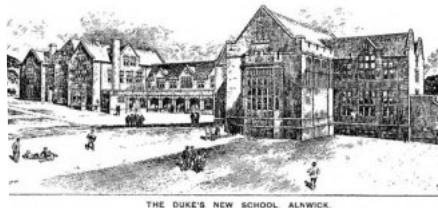
1902-12: Several large villas were built on the edge of Alnwick at the end of the 19th century and start of the 20th. We chose two examples built by brothers Charles and William Percy.



Charles became a solicitor and Coroner for North Northumberland. Hillcrest was built for him in 1902. Later it became a maternity hospital and is now a care home.



William Percy trained in Alnwick then worked in London before returning to run a successful drapery business. He built Ravensmount in 1912. It became a care home but is now unused.



1904: The Duke's School was built on its current site between 1901 and 1904. The architect was James Wightman Douglas, an old boy of the school.



1904: St James's Hall was designed by George Reavell, in Arts and Crafts style. More recently it was converted into an award-winning housing scheme.



1908: Alnwick Infirmary replaced the outdated infirmary on Dispensary Street.



1909: Lloyds Bank is the most prominent in a row of banks on Bondgate. It was designed by George Reavell, in a style that was described at the time as "English Renaissance" and later as "Bankers' Georgian".



1905-10: King Street was the first council housing scheme in Alnwick. Built to rehouse tenants of housing at the foot of Clayport that had been condemned as unfit. The development also helped to connect the Station and Clayport along Prudhoe Street and Lisburn Street.



1912: Ten cottages in Augur Place provided "suitable accommodation at a reasonable rent for deserving members of the working classes in receipt of Old Age Pensions". They were said to offer "ample accommodation for old couples".



1922: On the War Memorial three bronze figures with reversed rifles: a sailor, airman, and soldier stand around a pillar and lamp, at the corners of a triangular pedestal.



1926: Built as a cinema and occasional music hall, this landmark building has become an important part of Alnwick's social and community life and has recently been updated to include a library, information centre and cafe.



1933: Early in the morning of Tuesday 31st Jan. the personnel of Alnwick Police Division, with Superintendent Spratt at their head, marched from their old police station on Green Batt to their new building on Prudhoe Street.

Alnwick's 20th century heritage (continued)



1939: When NESCo House opened it was said that it "embraces the most up-to-date architectural features in its design, yet is thoroughly in keeping with its surroundings". Built to encourage the use of electricity, it is now a charity shop and restaurant.



1939: Lindisfarne School opened as Alnwick County Secondary School. It was extended in 1958 before becoming a middle school on the change to comprehensive.



WW-II defences: Three pillboxes can be found to the east of the town on the south bank of the river. All are a beehive style. Other defences include a loopholed wall in the cemetery to command the main road into town.



1941: Two weeks before war was declared work began to construct a new post office on the site of the Star Hotel on Fenkle St. It opened two years later.



1948: The Duke's Memorial Cottages commemorate Henry George Alan, the 9th Duke of Northumberland and other sons of Alnwick who lost their lives in the Second World War.



1958: After tenants in the Hotspur Street Clearance Area were rehoused, the Salvation Army negotiated to buy this plot, and their simple and unassuming building dates from 1958.



1960s: Oaky Balks (1961) and later Chapel Lands (1969) were not the first post-war private housing developments in Alnwick (Blakelaw Road, for example dates from the mid-50s). However, they typify a way of laying out owner-occupied housing on the edges of town that has remained popular for fifty years.



1966: Westgate House was the last in almost a century of schemes to replace homes that had been declared unfit in 1867.



1983: The Territorial Army Centre, on the corner of Lisburn Terrace dates from 1983. Designed by Frank Harrison of Mauchlen, Weightman and Elphick Partnership.

Which 20th century buildings would you include on a list of Alnwick's most important built heritage?

I-Spy the traditional features of a shopfront

90% of Alnwick's retail premises are in the conservation area. Almost half are based in a listed building. Shrewd traders make good use of their traditional features.

Pilasters frame the shop vertically. They separate it from neighbours and appear to support the fascia.



The pilaster on a traditional shopfront has a decorative capital at the top, and a plinth at the bottom.



The plinths might vary to deal with a sloping site.



Mullions divide the window vertically, transoms divide the window horizontally.



Mullions strengthen the glazed area, and limit the amount of glazing that needs to be replaced following a breakage.



A transom divides the window horizontally. This is done to improve proportions, introduce decorative glazing, or to allow panes to open for ventilation.

Details in the window add interest.



The stallriser is the part of the shop front that lies below the window.



Stallrisers protect the window from knocks, splashes and other damage. They help to frame the shopfront and raise goods towards eye-level.



Handrails create interest, as well as assisting with safe access.

The top of the window is called the entablature. It is made up of the fascia, cornice, console brackets, and dentils.



The fascia displays the name and other details of the business. On earlier shopfronts the fascia would be mounted vertically. Later fascias were set higher (to be more visible) and tilted forwards (so they could still be read from the street).



The fascia is protected and framed by the cornice. Sometimes the cornice seems to be supported by large brackets at each end, sometimes by small brackets (called dentils) that look like teeth. Sometimes by both, and sometimes by neither.



Console brackets frame the fascia and separate it from adjoining shops.



Flamboyant console brackets add richness

News in Brief

Our thanks to everyone who responded to our questions in May about the Bailiffgate hotel development and tree protection. On the hotel we received a number of detailed and thoughtful responses. There was widespread support for the development in principle: even a sense of relief that there was a solution to the immediate need to address the poor condition of several important buildings, and seemed to provide a sustainable purpose for the long-term. However, alongside the support we also received specific concerns about traffic, parking, and the visual impact of the development. We have tried to reflect the balance of your views in our final response (see page 7).

Similarly we received very detailed responses from members who feel strongly about the protection of Alnwick's trees, alongside a range of views that highlight some differences in emphasis. This demands a nuanced approach that respects both the importance of effective tree protection and the risk that excessive regulation and enforcement potentially places an unacceptable burden on owners.

There are a number of bodies in Alnwick with an interest in this area, but the committee has felt for some time that the Civic Society should play a more active role. Trees are an important element in the townscape, and fundamental to Alnwick's place in the landscape. The society already scrutinises developments that affect tree cover, and has unique expertise and contacts across different aspects of statutory protection. So we are pleased to report that several members have offered to assist, and Brian Lamb has agreed to lead increased effort in this area. Brian has already begun to collect information, build contacts, and put a plan together. If you are able to help he would be pleased to hear from you, and we are happy to put you in touch.

When lock-down began there was a noticeable increase in dog-mess on Alnwick pavements. So we helped to distribute reminders and free poo bags. After a few weeks the supply of bags is running out and the notices are getting battered. The dog poo problem

hasn't entirely gone away, but there seems to be less mess now than there was a couple of months ago. So we've decided that the exercise has run its course and we have started to take down the reminders. If you come across one of these that we've missed then please feel free to remove it, or let us know and we will take it away.

We're able to de-clutter because we think the reminders have done their job. Not because it's now OK for dogs to mess on the pavements. Thanks for your support.

Bondgate Tower has been clipped again by a vehicle, and briefly closed while it was checked by engineers. We carried out a quick poll on social media to see what measures people



would support to protect the tower from further damage. The most popular option was better signage (40%). Almost one in three wanted to add some metal bars to restrict height and a smattering supported moving the tower elsewhere, or doing nothing (other than repairs). What came as a surprise was the level of support for closing the tower to traffic completely. We didn't offer that as an option, but a significant minority wrote individual comments in support of the idea.

As we finalise this issue of the newsletter non-essential shops are beginning to open, the market has restarted, and footfall in the town centre is picking up.

The authorities and other stakeholders have introduced a number of measures to ensure that we can shop safely. Now is not the time to debate the fine detail of these. We appreciate the efforts traders are making to present our town centre in a positive way; and we thank those who have been keeping essential services going, sometimes under considerable pressure. We can

expect changes on the high street in future, but for now the priority is to support local traders and ensure that re-opening is achieved safely. The measures include:

- Enhanced social distancing signage (ground stickers, signs), targeted at pinch point areas including the pedestrian crossing points on Market Street and the pedestrian footways at Hotspur Tower.
- Working with traders to remove unnecessary street advertising boards / display of goods on the pavement.
- Work to relocate any street furniture, if this is creating an obstruction that results in social distancing problems.
- Increase maximum stay on-street parking limits from 30 minutes to 2 hours to allow shoppers more time should they encounter queues etc.
- Adjust timings of pedestrian crossing to make it easier for pedestrians to cross quickly and reduce the potential for queues to form.
- Provision of additional cycle parking racks to encourage more cycling into the town centre.
- Provision of 'Community Ambassadors' for at least the first week of reopening to provide a visible presence, offer support and guidance to shoppers and traders and to have 'eyes on the ground' to identify any issues for escalation.
- Allocation of a senior manager to act as a key point of contact to the Town Council and other key stakeholders for any issues that require escalation/resolution.

Other options will be discussed as a possible next phase to create additional pedestrian circulation space for social distancing purposes.

- Temporary suspension of some parking spaces on the cobbles at Bondgate Within and on Fenkle Street.
- Temporary pedestrianisation of Bondgate Within from Yorkshire Trading to 'Bailey's Corner', except for blue badge holders' vehicles and deliveries.



Gas in Alnwick

The 'picture quiz' in this newsletter recalls an earlier time when our streets were lit, not by electricity, but by gas. Today, it is hard to imagine what a dramatic change to the lives of residents would have been brought about by the introduction of proper streetlighting. Before gas lights, there would have been an occasional dim oil lamp, maintained by individual property owners, but we can easily imagine that Alnwick at night would not have been a welcoming place to stroll.

It was in the last few years of the 18th century that the concept of creating gas from coal, and using this gas as a source of light, was demonstrated.

London adopted gas lighting in 1812. Alnwick was at the forefront of this revolution when, in 1817, William Davison built a small gas production plant, possibly somewhere on Green Batt, which supplied eight streetlights within the town.

It seems that this early plant was not successful, and in 1825 work started on a larger gas works, on land between Ratten Row and Canongate, where Swiss Cottage stands today (see below).



The plant was enlarged in 1859 but by the late 1870s, the site was too small for the projected increases in demand for gas. Rather than provide extra land at this site, the Duke of Northumberland favoured the gas works being relocated and a new site on South Road was agreed. This site had the advantage of being adjacent to the Alnwick branch railway line which would be able to deliver coal directly to the new plant. The new gas works started operation in December 1882 with the old Canongate works closing down a few weeks later. By this time there were 136 gas streetlights in the town.

The South Road gas works was periodically upgraded and became one of the main producers in the area. The nationalisation of the gas industry in 1949 led to the various independent systems being connected and to the closure of smaller plants, including Amble and Rothbury. Alnwick continued gas production until 1964, though remaining in operation, providing storage and pressure control for the national gas distribution system.

A major change took place in 1972 with the switch to 'North Sea Gas'. The lack of luminosity of this gas resulted in the extinguishing of the last six gas streetlights in Alnwick on Denwick Lane. Gas storage was maintained until 1984, when the large gas holders were finally demolished. Pressure control is still carried out in a new facility on South Road, maintaining the link with the original South Road plant and its predecessors.

From the 'quiz', it can be seen that there are a large number of old gas light fittings throughout the town. But what else remains of the heritage of Alnwick's local gas supply industry? There are no remains of Davison's Green Batt site, and indeed, the location remains unknown. Of the Canongate works, there is only some brickwork which formed part of a wall of one of the gas holder tanks in the Garden of Swiss Cottage.



At South Road, there is a row of terraced houses called "Gas Works Cottages" (above). The larger of these properties was the manager's house, with the other three being for workers. The gas works itself occupied the site behind the cottages which is now a small industrial estate. By the entrance is the old office and weighbridge (below) while behind is a larger building originally built for purifying and metering the gas, and for workshops. Later the building was also used to house pressure boosting compressors.



Dennis Dalby passed away on 1st June, and this article pays tribute to his excellent book, "Gas in Alnwick", which tells the whole story in much detail. We also thank Barbara Woodhouse for her permission to use illustrations from Zig Zig: Alnwick.

Quiz: Gaslighting

Alnwick's first gas works was opened in 1817, probably on Green Batt. It closed in 1822, and in 1825 a new Gas works was constructed in Canongate just below St Michael's church. This was enlarged and converted to coal in 1859, then closed in 1882 when the Gas Works moved to the South Road.

The last six gas street lights in Denwick Lane were stopped in 1972.

There's more history on page 10. Meanwhile, how many of these obsolete fittings can you locate?



Diary dates

Our events are postponed until further notice and we are careful not to make excessive use of email to stay in touch with members. So we are relying, even more than usual, on members to follow our activities on Twitter: [@AlnwickCivicSoc](https://twitter.com/AlnwickCivicSoc), Facebook: [AlnwickCivicSociety](https://www.facebook.com/AlnwickCivicSociety), Instagram: [@lnwickcivicsociety](https://www.instagram.com/lnwickcivicsociety) and our web site: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk.

We are gradually building a stronger presence on social media. This is now our most effective way to reach beyond our membership, raise our profile outside Alnwick and share activities across the wider Civic Movement. However, newsletters are still the most effective way of keeping members informed.

We normally aim to produce four newsletters over the course of a year but during the Covid-19 restrictions we have managed to produce one every couple of months. Usually we distribute about 50 copies by email, and a similar number by hand. Another dozen copies are posted to members and supporters who live outside the area.

It has only been practical to distribute newsletters by email because our printer has not been operating during lock-down. However, they expect to be back shortly and it shouldn't be long before we can start to distribute printed copies of the newsletter again. You may have received this as a printed copy.

We still have a couple of dozen members who we cannot contact by email. If you think this applies to you then you won't have received this newsletter by email, we won't be able to let you know when our normal activities resume, and it's difficult to seek your views on emerging issues.

If you think we may not have your current email address it would be a big help if you could let us know.



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, and amid growing concerns about the future of our town. Since then, we have sought to influence developments, especially in the town centre and conservation area, to ensure that proposals protect and enhance our heritage.

The Society pursues its objectives through a variety of activities. We provide a voice for members through dialogue with planning and conservation professionals and like-minded organisations. We offer advice, scrutinise and comment on development proposals; recognise excellence; and organise public meetings. Members were heavily involved in development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and we work with local partners to influence policy at a county level. We seek to influence national policy by co-operating with other bodies in the civic movement, and the Society 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, student, 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.



Who's Who?

President: Philip Deakin

Joint Chairs: Mary McIlroy Hipwell and Peter Reed

Treasurer and Membership: Gill Parker

Honorary Secretary: Sue Smith

Other Executive Committee members:

- Peter Burns
- Peter Ennor
- Ian Hall
- David Lovie

Web: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Email: alnwickcivicsoc@gmail.com

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

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

Instagram: [@lnwickcivicsociety](https://www.instagram.com/lnwickcivicsociety)

Quiz Answers

A) Chapel Lane (East side)

B) Back Duke Street (North-East corner)

C) Corner of Northumberland Street and Bailiffgate

D) Back lane between Percy Terrace and Upper Howick Street

E) Walkerigate - the retaining wall on the south side

F) East Parade, south corner

G) Green Batt, Youth Hostel yard

H) Green Batt, corner of Chapel Lane

