



Photograph by Kevin Temple

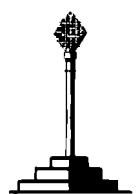
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Sadly we have to report the passing of two members who both, in different ways, made important contributions to the work of the society.

David Lovie died peacefully at home on 19th July 2020, aged 78 years. David was our chair in 2019, and the driving force behind many of our recent initiatives. He leaves a wife, Jean, and two sons, Alistair and Ed.

John Jones died peacefully at the age of 82, on 21st July 2020, in Cramlington. A long-standing supporter of the society, John's health prevented him from playing a more visible role in recent years, but behind the scenes he continued to help Gill Parker maintain and review our accounts. He leaves a wife, Elizabeth, two children and three grandchildren.



Local Area Committees: response from Councillor Castle

Introduction.

The Civic Society Newsletter continues as always to be the most interesting and well written regular journal about Alnwick presently available. I'm sure the readership is increasing as it deserves to, and partly because of its growing influence I think I should respond to the leading article in the June 2020 edition in my capacity as local member for Alnwick and also Chair of the North Northumberland Local Area Council, presently suspended. I have been a member of decision-making planning committees for over 20 years

The Reality of Planning.

Planning is quasi-judicial and, unlike any other council decision making function, it is not primarily driven by broad policies set by members themselves but is answerable to national planning guidelines and planning law. There is a county-wide Local Plan undergoing ratification now, former district plans to take account of and new Neighbourhood Plans with real planning weight, as we have seen in the case of Alnwick's after the Willowburn Ind Estate decision (though more recently we have seen that they are not blueprints and can be open to interpretation). These plans cannot depart fundamentally from guidelines and policies set nationally. The whole development process of plans is very complex and time consuming and everyone affected, including the housebuilding industry, has a right to argue their case. This requires formal steps to ensure everything is valid in planning law, and certainly before Neighbourhood Plans get close to the referendum that gives them weight.

I have to say it again – if you own land then you may do with it as you wish unless your proposal can be found and proved to cause demonstrable harm or contravene planning laws and guidelines, very much as citizens of this free nation may do as they wish within the law without seeking permission first. You might be surprised to know that it is not even a legal obligation to apply for planning permission! Not to do so merely runs the risk of falling foul of legally enforceable planning decisions by the council - applications submitted retrospectively may not be dealt with differently to those submitted before work starts, however much it irritates people.

Let me deal with your early statement:

"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."

Only half true at best, I'm afraid. Whilst many applications are controversial and some are unpopular (so far as that can be ascertained), the job of planners and the planning committee is not to balance the positions of groups or reconcile opposing views. It is to establish as far as possible if the objections to a development are valid in

planning terms and supposing they are valid whether or not they amount to sufficient grounds for refusal. Huge numbers may not want a development, but evidence is weighed, not counted. Simply "not wanting it" in itself is not a valid planning reason for refusal. Many residents are concerned that planning is weighted in favour of the applicant, and I hope the foregoing shows that it is – just as a judge will tell a jury that they may not convict an accused citizen without satisfactory evidence of guilt, whatever the fury of the mob!

Planning and Elected Members

The advantage to having elected members on planning committees is that they are able to place greater or lesser weight on elements of benefit or harm arising from a scheme. In this way they can interpret features of the application as they relate to particular local circumstances within planning guidelines. It is usually a very narrow channel of arguable options and the most subjective relate to design or how a scheme fits into the future vision for an area. It can be very difficult for an individual member to convince colleagues that a particular development should be refused if the local plan is silent on the matter and even more difficult if there is no up to date local plan. A figure of housing set in the Local Plan is not a maximum figure or "ceiling", it is an aspirational figure, and more may be justified given the national and local housing shortfall. Housing needs surveys tend to relate to housing types like retired accommodation or affordable housing, not the general need for housing nationally, which is just about irrefutable. Members cannot refuse applications because they think the prices may be too high – selling them is a problem for the applicant. Village residents may think that their village is already big enough; but, without a Neighbourhood Plan made by referendum, that is just an opinion not a planning reason – people wanting to move there might disagree! What is the difference between need and demand? What about the housing need for people who can't yet vote?

Your statement that elected members are accountable to local people in a way that officers are not is of course necessarily true, but my concern here is the implication that they should bend in the face of electoral pressure rather than exercise their best judgement insofar as the law requires. If they don't (and I wish I could say that all do) then the risk arises that an appeal will succeed, and the decision of the independent inspector is final. This could very well entail loss of any favourable conditions incorporated by officers as well as losing the case and its costs. NCC was rather poorly rated in terms of its planning department until quite recently, but it is now good, and we win 84% of appeals, significantly better than the national average of 63%. It is indefensible to decide an application on the grounds of perceived electoral popularity, though it can be difficult to explain this to upset residents! Equally, as we are hopefully being as objective as possible, we sometimes refuse applications with no objections!



Local area committees, continued...

Changes Required by Covid

Covid has changed everything. We have had to make changes to how we make planning decisions to keep the system moving, and more changes will be made in the coming months. Some of you may be concerned that this will mean a reduction in democratic accountability. We have been keen to make sure that as many safeguards have been put in places as possible during this period to make sure the public can still get involved in planning decisions. While the Chief Planning Officer can exercise a degree of discretion about making more decisions, any increased delegation in this regard is not at his sole discretion. It can only be exercised following briefing, discussion and agreement with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee. This is normal, as Chief Planning Officer Rob Murfin has always determined approximately 95% of all applications under delegated powers. This is absolutely standard practice in all Local Planning Authorities.

The provision for a local member to request that an application is "called in" to committee has been retained. A member of the LAC (or any other local member) can speak directly at the Strategic Planning Committee if they feel that an application needs to be given a specific local context or to supplement the issues that have been raised in writing. All Parish and Town Councils will also be consulted on applications in their areas.

An alternative to public speaking has been written into the protocol around the submission of written supplementary statements of around 750 words, which will be read out at Committee - this is in addition to making objections in the normal way. This step was needed to make the meetings manageable and prevents potential claims of connection drop out whilst still allowing full public involvement. To reaffirm, there has been no reduction in the ability to make public representations to Committee. The committee will also be live streamed on Youtube - so anyone can watch and see what elected Members say (or don't say!) by using a computer, tablet or phone. My personal view is that what is written is usually better retained and understood than what is said verbally, though strength of feeling may be lost, not always for the worst!

NCC Planning Service Function

While you may only be aware of the applications in your area, the Planning Service makes more than 5,000 decisions a year on a range of planning application types. We have to keep the system moving. As I mentioned above, most full applications, including major proposals, have always been dealt with via delegated decisions outside of any planning committee. It is really important to emphasise that these delegated applications are handled in the same way as those determined by the planning committee. The full range of technical/specialist input is invited from internal/external consultees and additional studies and evidence is regularly

required from the applicant. The detailed evaluation of proposals often triggers further rounds of public consultation (on amendments, new information or studies) or the Council needs to commission specialist input, such as on cost viability assessments. Finally, a full evaluation and report is prepared on each delegated decision in the same format as a committee report, and this evaluation is made available as a public document.

The same national rules about rational, evidenced decision making apply to delegated decisions, and the same national provisions for appeals also are unchanged for delegated or committee decisions. The basic starting point is the same for all types of decisions - the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plan policy, Neighbourhood Plan policy and material planning considerations.

Local Area Committees

The Local Area Committees have been suspended for a temporary period, but they will be reinstated as soon as is practical, because the County Council wishes to make sure that all decisions are made robustly. The Strategic Planning Committee is made up of highly experienced members and we wish to focus on training them to utilise this different way of virtual working. There are really difficult problems in terms of supporting what would be effectively the entire membership of the Council in conducting planning meetings on a virtual basis on 5 LACs. The transfer of those responsibilities to SPC allows the resource and expertise necessary to hold such meetings to be concentrated on one committee as opposed to five at a time when the conduct of such meetings is still very much in its infancy. However, I can confirm that applications with a very strong local interest and a wide range of views will most likely be deferred until physical meetings can take place normally - this is in the interests of maintaining public confidence.

We have not taken these decisions lightly and certainly not by the need to save money, for convenience, or to push through applications. I must emphasise that the Council, like other Local Authorities in the country, is continuing to handle applications in as normal a manner as possible during the current crisis. Central Government has been repeatedly emphasising that local authority planning decision making and local plan work must carry on as quickly as possible. It regards this as a key part of the economic recovery agenda. It has accordingly been introducing a wider range of provisions and legislation to support LAs, including the measures to allow virtual planning committees to take place online. We have been constantly updating our website with information about these issues for both applicants and the public.



Estate agent boards

We have been looking into some of the concerns that members have raised about risks to Alnwick's built heritage. Several involve the use of Estate Agent advertising boards.

Some Civic Societies are concerned about a proliferation of these boards, particularly in areas with a large student population. That's not a problem in Alnwick. Local sandstone and fine ashlar is easily damaged. The main concern here is the harm done to historic buildings when boards are fixed directly to stonework.

We have tried to develop a response that is proportionate to the scale of the problem. We looked at how boards are used, reviewed the regulations, and spoke with agents in Alnwick. Now we would like feedback on our conclusions.

These concerns are not specific to any one agent, and they were not a surprise to agents with a presence in Alnwick. Some agents value the way these boards raise their own profile, but they rely on them less than they did for property sales. Some told us that they would refuse to have a board attached to historic stonework, even if the client wanted one. Others were more flexible, but would still discourage a board on an unsuitable property. The rental market is different, though. Here we were told that landlords, tenants and agents normally expect a board to be installed.

These boards are installed by specialist contractors, and everyone told us that contractors were familiar with the need to take care of Alnwick's historic buildings, and that an owner would need to sign a disclaimer in case of damage. Contractors work within the Control of Advertisement Regulations of 2007. No special permission is needed as long as these signs lie within the curtilage and respect certain conditions (see panel, right).

Many buildings in the conservation area front directly onto the street, and there are a number of cases where it seems to have been difficult to install a board within the curtilage of the property. This is a concern, but in other respects we believe agents and contractors are generally acting responsibly.

What can we do?

At a time of economic uncertainty it is crucial to fill vacant premises in the town centre. Some agents will argue that tighter restrictions on advertisements or more stringent enforcement would have an adverse impact on their business, and cause difficulties for their clients. In practice it will prove difficult to challenge that view.

On the other hand we are confident that responsible local agents will want to know of any concerns over public safety, or evidence that one of their boards is causing damage. So we would encourage members to promptly report examples of actual damage to the relevant agent. If you are reluctant to do that directly, then use the form on the society web site: <https://tinyurl.com/y5uaat4o>

More judgement is needed in cases where no damage has occurred, but a member fears that it might, and wants to prevent it. Or a case where a member believes that a board has been attached in a way that breaches the regulations. Here we have considered two options.

One option would be to lean towards a zero-tolerance approach. Here we would encourage members to challenge any suspect compliance and report poor practice. We could press the council to seek a voluntary agreement, impose tighter restrictions, or enforce existing conditions more rigorously.

We prefer a more incremental approach. Like us, the authorities have finite resources and other priorities. At present we think a zero-tolerance approach would be disproportionate to the scale of the problem, and unhelpful.

So we suggest an incremental approach, with an emphasis on raising awareness, and encouraging everyone involved (owners, landlords, vendors, agents) to consider carefully before attaching a board directly to stonework. We have spoken with them, so most local agents are aware that our members have concerns about the risk of damage to historic buildings. We can continue to broadcast these concerns, and encourage members to help. We hope members will continue to scrutinise advertising boards, and report examples where there is clear damage, or where there are concerns about safety.

We think this approach will be welcomed, but for now it means a degree of tolerance about the way some boards are installed, and accepting that we are more likely to influence local agents than those based elsewhere. We can always consider other options in future if the situation deteriorates.

Do you agree?

Conditions and Limitations

- (1) Not more than one advertisement, consisting of a single board or two joined boards, is permitted; and where more than one advertisement is displayed, the first to be displayed shall be taken to be the one permitted.
- (2) No advertisement may be displayed indicating that land or premises have been sold or let, other than by the addition to an existing advertisement of a statement that a sale or letting has been agreed, or that the land or premises have been sold or let, subject to contract.
- (3) The advertisement shall be removed within 14 days after the completion of a sale or the grant of a tenancy.
- (4) No advertisement may exceed in area: (a) where the advertisement relates to residential use or development, 0.5 square metre or, in the case of two joined boards, 0.6 square metre in aggregate; (b) where the advertisement relates to any other use or development, 2 square metres or, in the case of two joined boards, 2.3 square metres in aggregate.
- (5) Where the advertisement is displayed on a building, the maximum projection permitted from the face of the building is 1 metre.
- (6) Illumination is not permitted.
- (7) No character or symbol on the advertisement may be more than 0.75 metre in height, or 0.3 metre in an area of special control.
- (8) No part of the advertisement may be higher above ground level than 4.6 metres, or 3.6 metres in an area of special control or, in the case of a sale or letting of part only of a building, the lowest level of that part of the building on which display is reasonably practicable.

Planning matters

An application has been submitted for conversion at 6 Paikes Street. This is a form of development in the town centre that we expect to become more common in future. We are learning about what works well, and what doesn't (see page 7). The proposals seem well-developed, and we felt that nothing needed adding to the position taken by Alnwick Town Council. They made no objection, but requested a condition stating that there must be no vehicles parked in the area outside the property, and that proper provision is made for bins.

Although the proposal is uncontroversial, the history of this building will be of interest to members. It has two entrances: 6 Paikes Street, and 14 Fenkle Street. It's likely that what is now 14 Fenkle Street was built first (around 1750), and followed by 6 Paikes Street soon afterwards. The buildings were occupied early on by drapers: the Greens and Millers. A courtyard existed initially between the two buildings for the draper's wagon but the properties were soon joined into one town house. The building has a long history of being used by drapers and clothes shops. It was owned for many years by Forresters, and many Alnwick children have been fitted here for their school uniform.

George Tate was born in Alnwick on the 21st. May, 1805. He was educated at the Borough School and the Grammar School, then apprenticed to Thomas Riddell, a linen draper in the Market-place.

In 1826 he set up in business on his own account, here, at 6, Paikes Lane. In 1832 he married Ann Horsley, who was, says Robert Middlemas, an excellent wife who *'so assisted him in his business that he was able to devote a large portion of his time to antiquarian and scientific research'*. Ann died in 1847. George's father, Ralph, had been a stonemason, but joined him here, briefly, before being killed in an accident during construction of the Presbyterian Chapel in Warkworth.

George lived here, as Alnwick's postmaster, until 1855, when the

Post Office was moved to the other side of Fenkle Street, at number 25, next to the old Star Hotel. That building was demolished when construction of the new post office began in 1939.

On August 4th approval was granted for conversion of the Duke's School and development of elderly living accommodation and residential dwellings in the grounds. The Strategic Planning Committee was faced with more than 60 objections, including strong submissions from both the Duke's School Neighbourhood Resident's Association and Alnwick Town Council. Described as "very difficult" the decision turned on whether or not the proposal was in line with the Neighbourhood Plan. The discussion acknowledged that by building on the south of the site the development did not comply with the layout that the community had agreed in the neighbourhood plan. However, the committee felt that the proposal offered the best opportunity to achieve the intentions behind the neighbourhood plan but in a different way to the one that the community had envisaged.

Approval is subject to securing a contribution to education, support for expansion of the town's GP surgeries, 11 affordable homes, a coastal mitigation contribution, replacement playing fields, and public access to the remaining green space in perpetuity.

The owner of Loan End on Argyle Terrace has applied for planning permission to erect a self-contained cabin with decking in the garden. The house, built in the Georgian period, is a Grade 2 listed building. The cabin would be used for short term lets. This lies outside, but on the edge of the conservation area, so raises questions about whether such a development is appropriate in this location, the potential impact on the setting of Loan End, and about the degree of visibility from the surrounding area, including the Summer Seats footpath. Neighbours have expressed concern about the access road and parking

provision. We share these reservations but felt that we had nothing to add to points that had already been made.



The paperwork for new signs at Barter Books on South Road tells a sorry story behind this application. We saw no need to comment on this, or on an application for change of use from what was the Evil Needle Tattoo parlour to a barber shop on Bondgate Without.

On August 6th the Government launched a consultation called "Planning for the future" on reforms of the planning system. There is widespread support for reform of the system, but these specific proposals are proving controversial. We want to understand how the changes will affect Alnwick, and the way that the society deals with planning matters. With help from Gordon Castle we have arranged a discussion with the Director of Planning at Northumberland County Council on 5th October. We invite members to join that discussion, and we hope that you will participate, and let us know what you think of these proposals. To book, please email : contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk. We will then send you joining instructions for the online meeting.



Our 21st century heritage: what will our descendants keep?

We value the heritage that has been handed down to us, but what will future generations make of the heritage that we hand on? Which buildings best illustrate the lives of the people of Alnwick in the early decades of the 21st century? What will our descendants value? What will they want to keep?

We began with a list of 21 candidates (see box) then asked our followers on social media to help us select a “top ten”. We ended up with more than ten, and some are controversial. Would this be your choice?

2000: In 2002 Country Life would pick Alnwick as the best place to live in the UK, but there was already a shortage of affordable homes. **Militia Court** tackled the issue by converting a former Parish Workhouse (1810) and Militia Depot to provide more choice.

2002: **Bailiffgate Museum** was originally the Grade-II listed St Mary's Roman Catholic Church (1836). A lift and new mezzanine floor were installed, but the fabric and original features were left intact. The project was featured by Historic England as a case study in reducing environmental impact by reuse of a historic building.

2005: The **Treehouse** aimed to broaden the appeal of Alnwick Garden, and attract a wider range of visitors. It predated criticism that the garden risked looking increasingly like a theme park.

2006: Alnwick Garden **Pavilion** was designed to welcome visitors, but would more retail and catering draw footfall away from the town?

2009: Flooding in June 2012 brought much of Alnwick town centre to a standstill, but it was in 2008 that floods washed away a **Footbridge in Hulne Park**. It was replaced in 2009.

2011/2012: Both **Towergate** and **Ropery Court** were Gentoo developments supported by the Homes and Communities Agency Kickstart Programme. This aimed to accelerate the recovery of building trades following the financial crash. They went some way to address problems with housing affordability and a high demand for social housing.

Candidates

- A) Militia Court (2000)
- B) Alnwick Garden Cascade (2001)
- C) Aydon View (2001)
- D) Bailiffgate Museum (2002)
- E) Pottergate Housing (2003)
- F) Willowburn Sports Centre (2003)
- G) Alnwick Garden Treehouse (2005)
- H) Alnwick Garden Pavillion (2006)
- I) Cawledge Business Park (2006)
- J) Sainsbury's Willowburn (2008)
- K) New Hulne Park Footbridge (2009)
- L) Lion House (2009)
- M) Ropery Court (2011)
- N) Towergate (2012)
- O) Lionheart Station (2013)
- P) Willoughby's Bank (2014)
- Q) Duchess's Community High Sch. (2016)
- R) Maltings (2017)
- S) Weavers Court (2017)
- T) Willowburn Retail Park (2019)
- U) Beech Tree House (2020)

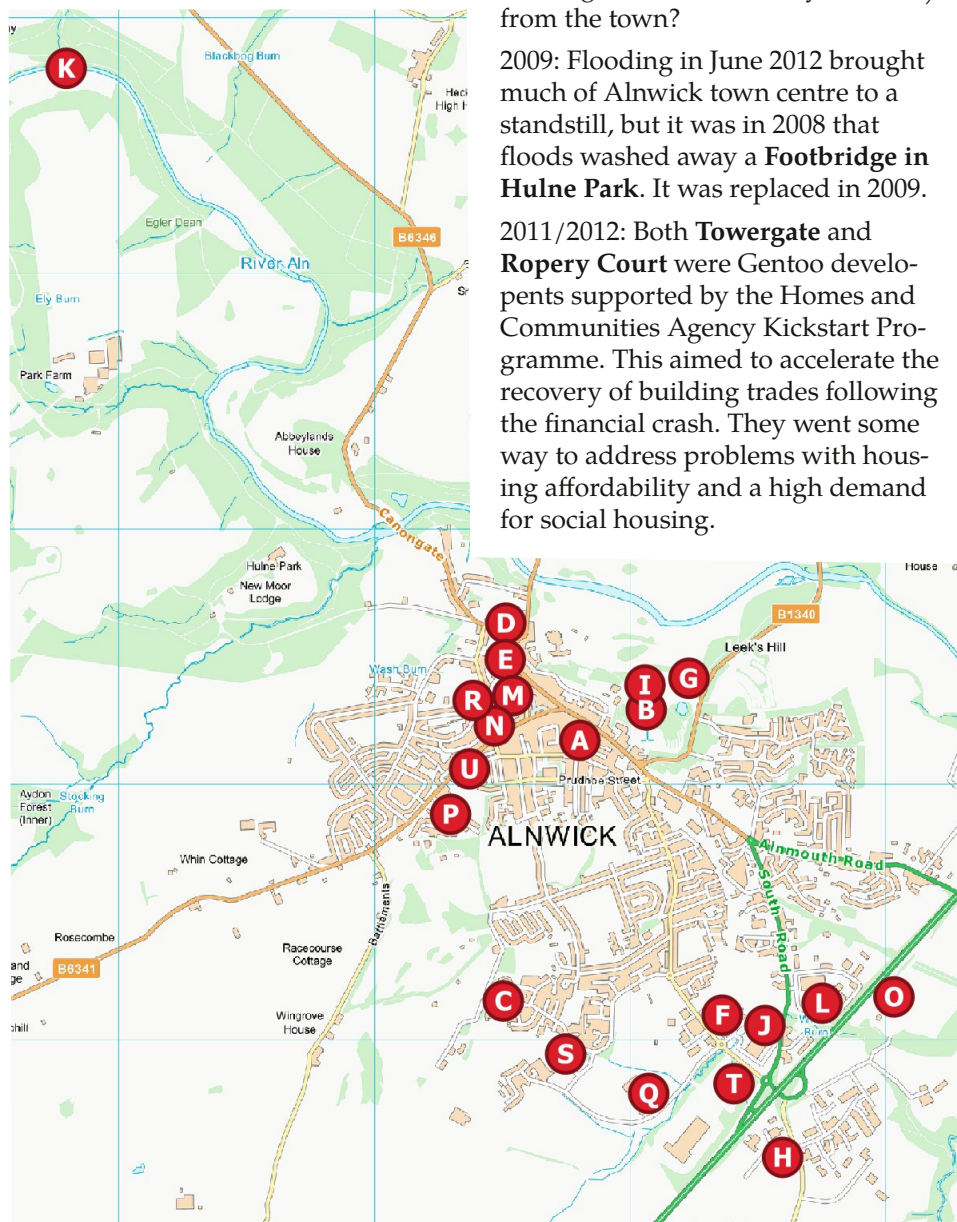
2013: Alnwick **Lionheart Station**: the western terminus of the Aln Valley Railway opened in 2013, the first public passenger services ran in 2017, and a safe greenway alongside the railway line opened in 2019.

2016: **Duchess's Community High School** (extended 2018), was funded by the Priority School Building Programme. Replaced Howling Lane site (built 1965) and Bailiffgate (used since 1888).

2017: Conversion of a former Brewery and Malthouse on Dispensary Street was approved in 2004, began in 2007, but was interrupted by the 2008 financial crash. In 2017 the site was acquired and the **Maltings** completed by Ascent homes (at the time, the house-building arm of Northumberland County Council's Arch Development Group).

2017: In 2017 the neighbourhood plan anticipated growing demand for sheltered housing and other forms of assisted living. **Weaver's Court** opened the same year. Designed by IDP, built by Galliford Try.

2020: After the community objected, plans for a new care home on Lisburn Street were rejected by councillors in 2014. But their decision was overturned by the inspector, and **Beech Tree House** opens this year.



Retail to residential conversions

Sadly, over the past few weeks, we've seen a number of high-profile shop closures in Alnwick. This is, as we know, a national problem, with our high streets struggling to cope with competition from on-line suppliers and major retail parks. But it's not all doom and gloom. Small local businesses can provide products, expertise and service that cannot be matched by larger national chains, and can respond more rapidly to the changing environment, including the consequences of Covid 19. With greater numbers of people seeking to work from home, more demand for local produce and the growth in the domestic tourism industry due to overseas travel restrictions, we can be optimistic that new businesses will emerge to fill some of these spaces. At the same time, it is difficult to see all the current vacant shops being occupied in the foreseeable future.

We have heard that the government is looking to simplify planning rules, including those for converting vacant shops to residential use. Anticipating that developers might well be considering conversion projects in Alnwick, and wanting to encourage designs which enhance the town, we have been scouring the internet to see what information exists relating to the "best practice" for such work. In this rapidly changing environment, we perhaps have an opportunity to help shape the future of Alnwick's high street.

The first question must be whether a conversion is appropriate. It should enhance and not detract from the overall character of the town, and not hinder the working of the town as a retail and living space. For example, creating too many gaps within a row of shops should be avoided.

Once a conversion is considered acceptable in principle, what design principles should be used? We have included below a summary of what we have uncovered so far and would be interested to hear the views of Civic Society members on this.

Shops by their nature are in highly visible locations, so it is essential that the design of the conversion is of the highest quality to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the street. In some situations, it may best to try to retain as much of the original, traditional shopfront as possible, so helping to reference the building's heritage. When privacy is an issue, the lower section of a shop window could be covered by blinds, internal shutters, louvres or frosted glass.

When the shop frontage is to be replaced, or when new doors and windows are to be added, it is important to relate the ground floor features with those above in order to achieve a balance in the building façade. Ground floor windows and doors should normally be aligned with upper windows, using centre lines and window edges. The shape and style of upper floor windows and reveals

should be followed, and doors should be recessed at least as much as the window reveals. And of course, it goes without saying that the choice of materials is of vital importance to any design and should match or complement both the existing ones and adjacent buildings.

To encourage street activity and give greater security for residents, doors should be provided at the front of the property rather than the rear. The privacy of residents should be considered when drawing up proposals for a conversion. For example, it is better to locate the lounge and kitchen at the pavement edge of the building, rather than the bedrooms and bathrooms.

Service fittings such as meter boxes, gases pipes and cabling can have an adverse effect on the appearance of both the individual property and the street. These should be well considered at an early stage in the design process and details should be included on drawings submitted for approval. Services should be avoided on front elevations wherever possible, and where it is unavoidable, the impact should be minimised through good design and using colours that blend in with the background. Also, it is important to consider how residents will store their rubbish as this has the potential for considerable adverse impact on the appearance of an area.

So perhaps it's time to start a dialogue. We don't currently have very many retail to residential conversions in Alnwick to use to assess these ideas, but we can perhaps look for examples in the wider area? Are there any vacant properties that might make suitable projects, or ones that should be resisted? And how could these design principles help in enhancing the town?

What do you think?



The ex-Gas Board shop on Bondgate Within - does this meet our tests?

Retail to residential conversions: some basic principles

- ✓ Retain as much of an original, traditional shopfront as possible ("cornices, corbels and pilasters should be retained").
- ✓ Ground floor windows and doors should normally be aligned with upper windows, using centre lines and window edges.
- ✓ The shape and style of upper floor windows should be followed. This will include window heads which can be used above windows and doors. Window heads are often dominant features of the façade.
- ✓ Window reveals (how deep the window is sunken into the façade) should be the same at ground floor as they are at upper floors.

- ✓ The door should be recessed at least as much as the window reveals.
- ✓ Ground floor materials (such as brickwork) should be 'matched' to upper floors. The builder should also be instructed to follow the bonding pattern and mortaring style of upper floors. Rendering will not be considered favourably unless this is typical of the area.
- ✓ Limit the number of doors on the front elevation, a single door is usually the ideal.
- ✓ Refuse and recycling storage should be integral to the design. Where there is a forecourt, this may be converted to a front garden and designed to accommodate bins. Where this is not possible, consideration should be given to a store

inset into the façade, or internal storage where appropriate.

- ✓ Resident privacy and parking should be considered at an early stage. Where a shop has a forecourt, the area should be separated from the pavement by a low wall or other appropriate boundary treatment and landscaped. Bedrooms and bathrooms should not be positioned at the pavement edge of a building as these rooms require greater privacy.
- ✓ Paraphernalia such as meter boxes, gases pipes, satellite dishes etc. do not proliferate the front elevation and have been well considered.

John Wood's Map of 1827

Anyone interested in the history of Alnwick will be familiar with the map drawn by John Wood in 1827. This isn't as accurate as the Ordnance Survey would achieve later, but the detail is remarkable. So Wood's map is an important source of information about the history of our town. We regularly return to it, to see what he recorded about the people and buildings of Alnwick in the 1820's.

John Wood was born in Yorkshire around 1780-85, and he died in 1847. He trained in North Yorkshire then lived in Edinburgh after he married. He is best known for his detailed plans of Scottish towns, but he produced town plans across England and Wales as well. Apparently his normal practice was to do field-work between late March and September / October, then he would return to Edinburgh to have his drawings engraved over the winter. By 1826 Wood had almost completed his work on Scottish towns, and he mapped Alnwick for a Town Atlas of Northumberland and Durham.

Wood's maps were not printed in large numbers, and few of us will ever be lucky enough to have access to an original copy. However, Northumberland Archives hold an original at Woodhorn and they can produce duplicates. Much of Wood's work can be found online, and we have provided links on the Civic Society web site: <https://tinyurl.com/yy5l5286>



Northumberland Local Plan

Northumberland County Council is preparing a local plan to guide future development in the county. The plan is an important planning document for Alnwick as future planning decisions, including the determination of planning applications, will have to be made in accordance with the policies within it. The plan will also detail the scale and distribution of new development, including housing and commercial development, in Northumberland.

The Northumberland Local Plan has already been through various stages of public consultation in line with statutory procedures. The civic society has monitored the plan's progress and made a number of representations at various stages. Most recently, the society supported the introduction of a settlement limit for Alnwick as a guide to future development.

The local plan is now at the end stage of plan preparation – public examination by an independent inspector appointed by the Government. A number of hearings were held in October 2019 and February 2020. As a result of these hearing sessions, the county council was requested by the Inspector to prepare additional evidence on a range of topics. The Inspector has requested that consultation on the additional documentation produced be carried out. The consultation period started on 13 July 2020 and will run until 7 September 2020. The society has looked at the new material, which is largely technical in nature, and has concluded that no further representations are necessary at this time.

A second phase of hearings is provisionally programmed to start on 20 October 2020 and to end on 17 November 2020. A number of matters will be examined including the supply and delivery of housing land and the implications for the plan of changes to Use Class regulations recently announced by the Government.

When all hearings are finished, the Inspector will send a report to the county council setting out those changes considered necessary for the plan to be considered legally compliant and sound. These changes, known as 'main modifications', will be the subject of more public consultation. The society will consider the proposed modifications in due course.

Trees

A number of members have expressed a willingness to encourage the Society to look after the trees in Alnwick and perhaps being more proactive in thinking of the trees of the future in our town. The Civic Society is part of the Alnwick Partnership, a group which has already identified a number of aims based on the Alnwick and District Neighbourhood Plan regarding trees. The Partnership's Environment Group states that it wishes to seek to create and manage new sites for nature conservation, complete a tree identification and mapping survey, explore opportunities for diverse structural planting and plant fruit and nut bearing species of trees in green spaces.

Alnwick Town Council has plans to plant eight more trees as part of the 'Ribbon of Trees' project and recent underplanting has taken place for example at Meadow Riggs. Aid may be available and has already helped Friends of the Earth organise a tree planting event at the Duchess's Community High School. There exists an invitation to organisations such as ours to pass on to the Partnership any potential planting or management initiatives. Whilst we have a role as guardians of the trees already in our town, we should also look to the future.

Alnwick Market re-opened on June 11th, some ten weeks later than planned because of Covid-19 restrictions. The new operator, appointed by Northumberland Estates, is Groupe Geraud. Markets will now be held weekly on a Thursday and Saturday, with a Farmers and Craft market held on the last Friday of each month. The number and quality of stalls is encouraging, and we understand that feedback from the public has been positive. Groupe Geraud have been pleased with the initial performance. Work is under way to extend the mix of stalls. Geraud have made one stall available to help new business start-ups to become established. We hope that efforts to secure a greengrocer and fishmonger will prove successful, and we understand that Geraud are working with "Produced in Northumberland" at Northumberland County

Council, and they plan to hold a market on that theme.

<https://producedin.northumberland.gov.uk>

When we asked why people value a thriving local market you told us: (1) the contribution a local market makes to the local supply chain; (2) attracting footfall to the town centre (3=) providing affordable choice, and (3=) opportunities for employment and business incubation. We hope members will support the efforts that Groupe Geraud are making in these areas, use the market, and encourage others to do so as well.

<https://www.groupegeraud.co.uk>

We were pleased to see progress on replacing broken bus stop signs. Earlier in the year we found ten broken bus stop signs around the town. At the time of writing all but two of these had been fixed, and we are told that work is scheduled on the remainder. There are numerous problems with street

furniture. We can easily get accustomed to each of them, but the cumulative effect lets down the appearance of the town. So we applaud the efforts that have been made to get these fixed; we stand ready with a list of further issues that members have raised; and we promise to continue pestering.



As yet we have no news of progress with the Alnwick Shopfront Guide, but continue to press.

David Lovie

David Lovie died peacefully at home in Alnwick on Sunday 19th July, aged 79.

Members of the society will need no reminder of David's boundless enthusiasm for the conservation of our built heritage. He served as chair in 2009, but he had long contributed to the work of the society as a member of the committee; he informed our appreciation of the town through his encyclopaedic knowledge; and he gave the society a national profile through his extensive network of contacts.

In the wider town David was best known for the contribution that he made to the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and his associated work with the Town Council, on the Town Team and development of the Alnwick Partnership. Within the society he was the driving force behind a series of initiatives, including the latest update to the Town Trail and culminating in production of Some Alnwick Heritage Heroes. This project celebrated, among others, the work of M. R. G. Conzen who David had known while he was a student in Newcastle, and who had an important influence on his own choice of career.

David had worked on the conservation of historic buildings throughout his career, and he was a well-known writer on heritage. He was rightly proud of his contribution to the development of Grainger Town, and author of *The Buildings of Grainger Town*, as well as a guide to the Cathedral Church St Nicholas in Newcastle upon Tyne. He worked with John Grundy on the BBC North East series, 'Townscape', on *Town Teacher*, and on the Inspired Future Church project for the Diocese of Newcastle. He was a founder member and past president of the Institute for Historic Building Conservation.

David leaves a wife, Jean, and two sons, Alistair and Ed. He has left his mark on our society, our town, and on his adopted region. But above all, those of us who had the privilege of getting to know him will remember a true gentleman: for his good company, appetite for life, compassion and generosity.

Heritage at risk

Historic England is the public face of the country's heritage protection systems, managing the scheduling and listing processes which provide legal protection to our most important historic assets. This legal protection ensures that any proposed alterations to a protected building are properly reviewed and approved before work commences, so preventing, as far as possible, irreparable damage.

These statutory protections, however, provide very limited powers to ensure that the owner adequately maintains the building. We can lose as much heritage through neglect as we can by ill-considered modification work.

Partly to try and address this problem, Historic England operate a programme which identifies properties (scheduled, and grade I and II*) that are significantly at risk of deterioration through neglect. Aptly named "Heritage at Risk", it tries to bring together stakeholders to find long-term solutions. Any issues regarded neglect of grade II properties are dealt with locally by Northumberland County Council.

Within Alnwick and Denwick there are three sites which have been designated by Historic England as 'at risk'. Of these, probably the most serious is Bondgate Tower. As we know, the biggest threat to this important building is damage due to inattentive and incompetent drivers, steering their high vehicles into the structure. Historic England acknowledge this on their listing of the site, stating; "The main defects relate to damage from high-sided vehicles passing through the central portal. Further impact of a similar nature could cause a serious collapse." Remedial repair work is critical, but must surely be preceded by changes to the way traffic is managed in order to prevent further collisions.

The problem with Bondgate Tower is not a new one. On at least two occasions during the nineteenth century there were proposals to relocate the tower to a more convenient place. That would at least have solved today's problems! Today, however, we have a real issue. We are currently in discussion with Heritage England trying to work out a way forward.

For the record, the other two "at risk" sites are General Lambert's House, which is now having some rectification work carried out, and the Iron Age defended settlement at Heiferlaw which is being damaged by tree roots. This site also contains the WWII Zero Station, which although vulnerable, is not currently considered "at risk".



Bondgate Tower on a typical summers day. Do we need to consider a different traffic arrangement?



Is the the fate of the Bondgate Tower?

Lincoln has a similar, though smaller, arch at one of its entrances. Collisions have, in the past, dislodged large pieces of masonry, requiring the entire structure to be dismantled and rebuilt.

Quiz: things are looking up

Things are looking up, and this time our picture quiz takes members on a tour of stuff that stands on the roofs of Alnwick. All of these are in the Alnwick Conservation Area. Do you know where?

As always, generous points are awarded for every correct answer, but there are no prizes, other than the warm glow of satisfaction that comes from being able to correctly identify more than your friends and family.



Diary dates

At 4:00 p.m. on 5th October, with support from Councillor Castle, we have arranged an online discussion with Rob Murfin, the Director of Planning at Northumberland County Council.

Rob has agreed to discuss:

- How the changes proposed in the “*Planning for the future*” white paper could affect Northumberland in general, and Alnwick in particular.
- What communities like Alnwick should be doing to engage effectively in the planning system.
- What the Civic Society should be doing to ensure that Alnwick’s built heritage is protected for future generations.

Members will be invited to participate. If you wish to do so please email: contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk. We will then be able to send you joining instructions for the online meeting.

Other 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: [alnwickcivicsociety](https://www.instagram.com/alnwickcivicsociety) and our web site: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk.



Reminder: 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

Web: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Email: alnwickcivicsoc@gmail.com

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

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

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

Heritage at risk: report your concerns

<https://alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk/heritage-at-risk/>



The Oddfellows Arms in 1996.

Quiz Answers

- A) Dome above Bailey's (junction of Bondgate Within and Market Street)
- B) Saint James Hall (Pottergate)
- C) Former Jubilee School / Library (Green Batt)
- D) Town Hall (Fenklee Street / Market Place)
- E) Saint Andrew's Hall (Pottergate New Row)
- F) Methodist Church (Chapel Lane)
- G) Playhouse (Bondgate Without)
- H) Masonic Hall (Prudhoe Street)