



Pickering & District Civic Society

Reg. Charity 502630

Newsletter

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A Quiet Time Recently

Matters have been relatively quiet over the past few months and getting sufficient copy for a Newsletter has proved more difficult than usual. The two big developments that were passed in the autumn for Methodist Homes and McCarthy and Stone have now started construction. A huge piledriver was used to put foundations in on the Eastgate site and spoil from excavations appeared last week at the bottom of the Methodist Homes site in Malton Road.

The New Year saw the completion and opening of the new Lidl store which seems to have been a roaring success, no doubt much to the detriment of trade at the Co-op. The Lidl car park seems to be full a lot of the time but how much of that is genuine supermarket custom or people taking advantage of the free parking is a moot point. No doubt with time custom will tail off as the novelty of the new store wanes. The new traffic lights seem more responsive to the traffic flows, as Lidl promised, but the acid test will be the summer peak traffic period. **SH**

Weekly Planning List

We have mentioned this before as an indicator of economic activity in Ryedale. The list shows no sign of an increase in planning applications and if anything has declined further. Most applications are for minor works such as extensions or alterations. Local builders aren't making any new building starts at all and I recently discovered a reason why. A neighbour proposed to apply to build five houses on a plot he owns. He had to jump through various planning hoops such as Environmental Survey, Highways etc. All this cost quite a bit of money. Then he was told that if he applied for five houses that one of them had to be 'affordable' but if he reduced the total to four then none would have to be. Having done a redesign to build four houses he discovered that these would be subject to a 9% surcharge on the completed value. This is the Community Infrastructure Levy apparently but didn't apply if he included an affordable home. Then the final hurdle was the production of a statement of sequential analysis which was supposed to show reasons why his development should be given consent ahead of others in the district. At that he simply gave up. In summary the whole thing proved a costly failure. I had advised that it was unlikely he would be

able to tempt a small local developer anyway and none of the big developers would be interested in such a small site. His experience perhaps explains why no small local builders are building houses anymore and in the future it seems only large developers are likely to do so in Pickering. That might not be a bad thing if it halts the practice of putting houses on every small green backyard plot.

This might also be the reason that some small developments already granted planning consent have failed to materialize. The controversial development off Burgate and behind Park Street, passed on appeal, seems to have run into the sands with nothing happening. It was a relatively small number of houses that wouldn't tempt a large developer but possibly too big for one of the smaller developers to tackle. The site also had major problems because of the relative steepness of the topography anyway that would surely act as another deterrent. Those who vehemently opposed the development should keep their fingers crossed, that given time, it will wither on the vine.

Apart from a proposed temporary road closure application the proposal to demolish the old cinema in Burgate and build two houses on the site seems to have gone quiet too. That was a development that we thought would actually improve the area and which had gone to some lengths to make the proposed houses fit the existing street scene and Conservation Area.

Another small development, again passed on appeal, to build semi detached houses on the corner of the traffic lights next to the Granary seems to have quietly sunk without trace. Clearly no one wanted to buy the site and build the houses. Hopefully it will never resurface but as with all such things, one can never be sure. Much depends on the economy and the housing market.

My son reports that house sales are booming in Sheffield. His brother-in-law set up a new Estate Agency about 18 months ago and it's thriving. He recently had to sell his grandmother's house for her and put an asking price of £180K on it to attract interest. Within a week he was getting bids over £220K for it. The house was nothing special, just a semi that needed a makeover in an area that's not particularly popular. My son is concerned that a housing inflation bubble is being created and that will inevitably lead to another crash. In his own profession, as a Civil Engineer, he reports a substantial increase in work with just about every client eager

for their project to progress rapidly. It therefore seems that the recovery is rolling ahead but how long it will take to hit Ryedale is another matter. **SH**

Flooding

No one can have escaped noticing the large amount of flooding this winter in the south and west midlands. Much of it on large river systems that once flooded up take considerable time to drain down again. Fortunately in the north we have escaped the heavy rain that produced the flooding. Yet there is a marked contrast to be observed between the reaction to the northern flooding of 2007 and that recently in the south and west. More properties were flooded in 2007 but it was soon forgotten and people largely left to their own devices to pick up the pieces. That was because the floods were of different duration- quick flash floods that soon receded. Those recently have stayed in place for days and sometimes weeks before receding. The resultant hullabaloo from the public has embarrassed politicians and the Environment Agency alike. Brickbats being flung in all directions in order to shift blame.

Private Eye, always eager to sniff out scandal and inefficiency, has had two recent goes at the Environment Agency. It pointed out that money wasn't the problem on the Somerset Levels but where it was going. Mostly it seems into farmer's pockets in subsidies to promote wet areas for wildlife- they quoted up to £180 an acre for some of these payments. The EA had allegedly largely abandoned dredging and maintenance on the Parret and Tone rivers so they now have only 65% capacity of flow. The Levels have always flooded but drainage had improved things by the 1960s. We all know that river dredging is a waste of time in a lot of circumstances but the key thing to realise is that the Somerset Levels are largely a man made agricultural landscape achieved through effective land drainage. Previously it was Fenland and largely peat bog. So neglect the drainage and it will begin to revert to its natural state. Rumours now abound that the EA is dominated by a bunch of 'tree huggers' and natural reversion to fenland is exactly what they want to happen long term. Never mind the people who live and work there- they will just have to like it or lump it or take the subsidies and shut up. As I write, new proposals to dredge, improve drainage and raise some roads on the Levels have just been announced. £100m worth- it will be interesting to see if it works. Certainly a lot of public shouting loudly seems to have had an effect.

Many Fenland areas have been drained since the middle ages and are now rich areas for agriculture. I have recently been working on several monastic sites in Lincolnshire and the picture that emerges of these fenland monasteries shows they were largely surrounded by peat bogs, or set close to the edges of the fens. These now former peatlands show up on air photographs under plough as black fields from the decayed peat. Many roads are also causeways where the peat has shrunk and left them standing much higher than the surrounding fields. All the result of extensive man made drainage systems that have to be maintained lest the fenland returns. It was in fact notable how many obviously neglected ditches and drains had been

quickly dredged last year following heavy winter rain that had caused local flooding to Lincolnshire roads and fields.

The Eye's latest blast at the EA points up the culture of paying off whistleblowers and aggrieved employees that has cost £3m. 33 cases of such payoffs in total. If true the whole piece is a damning report on the internal bullying management culture prevailing at the EA. Like the NHS culture of hiding bad news, also exposed in the Eye, these payments involved gagging clauses to keep it all secret. No doubt having got it's teeth into the EA and chairman Chris Smith the Eye will continue to report on future developments. I shall read them with interest- you should too.

Reading the Internet Blog 'Inside the Environment Agency' <http://insidetheenvironmentagency.co.uk> was a real eye opener- written by whistleblowers working for the EA. It is a detailed mass of complaints about staffing, inefficiencies, bad management, fraudulent expense claims, fiddling of hours worked, etc. Apparently the EA has a leased vehicle for every two members of staff, which is simply mind boggling. A local Drainage Board source is quoted as saying "*To dredge a 1.2-mile section of the Parrett, they got a quote of £7,500. For five miles dredging of the same river, the Environment Agency claims it will cost £4 million. By then assessing the economic cost of flooding agricultural land as zero, it is then very easy to show that flood prevention is not "cost effective".*

It was so revealing that I copied it and emailed it to our MP who responded within minutes to say she would read it with interest. **SH**

Boulby Potash Mine Trip

On 25 Nov 2013, five P&DCS members and three guests enjoyed an excellent visit to Boulby potash mine, north of Whitby. The visit had been organised by Eden Blyth, who sadly had to miss the trip to answer the call of duty and attend an important meeting about Moorsbus at NYMNP HQ. Greater love hath no man!

The day started with a presentation lasting a couple of hours about the history of the mine and some basic geology and chemistry – pitched at just the right level by our excellent guide to make it interesting for all. Rock salt, potash and polyhalite are products of the mine, all formed millions of years ago by movements of the land leaving seas and lagoons cut off and slowly evaporating to leave these strata. The rock salt is a fairly low value by-product, but nonetheless in demand and vital for winter road treating. Potash (potassium chloride) and Polyhalite (sulphate of potassium, calcium and magnesium) are both highly valued agricultural fertilisers. These seams cover a huge area of the North Sea, right across as far as Germany, where it is also mined.

After the theory, we prepared for the practical, changing into rather fetching outfits of fluorescent orange shorts, tee shirts and shin pads, plus the obligatory safety belts and helmets, lamps, goggles and ear defenders. It may have been a fine frosty morning, but 3,500ft down the mine (and therefore much nearer the molten core of the earth) the

temperature varied between about 32-40 deg C and very dry and salty. Sadly, no batteries were allowed (to avoid risk of sparks and fire hazards), so there were no cameras to record our well-dressed motley crew for posterity.

We plummeted to a great depth in the cage into another world, with ear defenders in place due to the roaring fans pumping air round the mine. After quick pleasantries exchanged with a bunch of scientists enroute to their 'dark matter' facility in the inert bowels of the earth, we jumped into/onto the open back of one of many Landrovers that bounce along miles of tunnels to reach distant mining operations. Walking the last few hundred yards to watch a huge remotely controlled machine clawing potash from the seam, the air choked with salty dust. Another low vehicle loaded up the piles of crumbly rock and took it back to a conveyer belt. The scene was something straight out of a sci-fi film, but fortunately, neither Arnie, nor a fleet of Daleks emerged from the gloom.

Yet another crew and machine inserted long steel bolts into the newly exposed ceilings to bind them in place, temporarily overcoming the effect of gravity on around half a mile of rock and sea above us. At this point, we were about 4-5 from the coast – on the Dutch side!

Back into the Landrover and the cage to retrace back to the surface, it abruptly ceased to be shorts weather and the cold of winter came as a shock to the system. After inspecting the lifting gear and huge electric motors that power them, it was shower and change, a short debrief, last questions and brew, then home. All in all, an excellent and informative trip. Eden would have loved it!
MP

Flood scheme

Following the criticism of the Environment Agency reported above it is good to report more positive news about progress on the 'Slowing the Flow' Flood Defence Scheme for Pickering. A major milestone has been reached. About 6 years since P&DCS started campaigning for a flood defence bund upstream of Pickering, work is well under way. Yes, boots on the ground! After all those years of talking, planning, failing and re-planning, the bund will be built about 100yds from the site that myself, John Addyman and Stuart Harrison inspected and recommended around late 2007.

Since late Oct, contractors Jackson have improved the access lane, put down lime chippings to form an access track to the construction site and for the site offices. Following agreement with the Duchy of Lancaster for access (for a substantial fee), tree felling at the site is now complete, although there will be comprehensive replanting after the bund is finished. During the NYMR's winter closure period, the track was removed and sheet piling driven up to 25ft into the ground to tie the bund into the valley side, then the track reinstated. The railway crossing at Low Hunters Bridge (LHB) was

also rebuilt to handle the heavy lorries carrying clay for the embankment, due from March onwards.

As I write, construction is about to begin on the control structure - a concrete culvert of very specific dimensions, through which the main beck will pass, but this is all dependent on weather and ground conditions.

There will soon be restrictions on access along Blansby Park Lane and LHB is closed, but you can still view the site from the path along the east side of Newtondale that passes Lowther House, Newbridge. I have a full set of plans should anyone wish to view them. I also installed a time lapse camera for Durham University, so hopefully, video of the whole construction process will eventually be available and perhaps also when the bund is first called into action.

Natural Flood Management pioneered in the Slowing the Flow scheme has not surprisingly become even more high profile since the major winter flooding in the S and SW, so I am doing my utmost (with the limited influence I have) to convince those in power that this is a viable and cost effective method of flood protection - **but** with a number of critical limitations. Please don't be fooled by the simplistic arguments about dredging being the panacea for all our flooding ills. It's often a costly and ineffective solution to the real issues but in some cases appropriate and a necessity. **MP**

Tree and Shrubs at Orchard Close

The residents of Pickering's Orchard Close will benefit from an attractive new planting scheme thanks to the hard work of Pickering & District Civic Society (PDCS) and Pickering in Bloom (PIB). Money won by the victorious P&DCS team in North Yorkshire's Green Neighbourhood Challenge was augmented by generous sponsorship from RV Roger and the Co-op to purchase trees and shrubs for a scheme designed by Susan Strange. Then with the help of Jeremy Strange and PIB's Margaret Hemmings and Catherine Stables, an attractive new border was planted out, along with a Rowan sapling. This latest partnership working between the two organizations follows previous planting schemes last year at Smiddy Hill, Willow Court and Wilf's Café to help brighten up the town - along with numerous other sites voluntarily maintained by PIB. **MP**

Betty Hood

Our chair for many years, Betty Hood, is now resident at Omega Barn, Nawton as she has been diagnosed with cancer. All who worked with Betty during her tenure of the chairmanship will testify to her contribution and the huge amount of work she put in to promote and advance its aims. Especially towards getting a flood defence scheme for the town. **SH**

Public transport in the Pickering area.

Sadly, there are few improvements to report. The NYCC bus funding cutback was confirmed after an unsuccessful appeal to their relevant Scrutiny Committee by seven

unhappy County Councillors, so we are to lose £2,000,000 of bus funding in North Yorkshire, not the £1,100,000 that the public was consulted about.

The Pickering Town Service is to be run by NYCC themselves as a “Dial-a-Ride” service, although rumours persist that a commercial operator may still come forwards to save the existing service. The 173 (Pickering to Rosedale) and 174 (Pickering to Kirkbymoorside via Hutton – le – Hole) are to be merged and reduced to Mondays only from 22nd of April, although no timetable seems to have been produced yet.

The Moorsbus successor is still being developed by the Friends of Moorsbus, and a new Moorsbus Community Interest Company is being formed to look after the new services. One service has been offered for 2013 so far, the “Moors Explorer” from Hull to the Moors on Sundays and Bank Holidays between the end of May and the end of September. It would also make a couple of trips between Pickering and Danby each day. Others are looking possible. Keep an eye on the Friends of Moorsbus website at <http://www.kms-environmentgroup.org.uk/friends-of-moorsbus/> Funding is being sought, in conjunction with DalesBus, from the Governments’ Local Sustainable Transport Fund for 2015/16. This would give us several more local services. Fingers crossed.

Our MP has asked Parliament to change the bus concession scheme to one similar to the Senior Railcard system used on the railways. This is open to those over 60, costs £30 per annum and gives 1/3 off a standard fare. She was told that the law would not be changed to allow this, so the English National Concession Scheme is safe for the time being. **EB**

Events

3rd Nicholson Exhibition at Danby NYMP Centre May 17 to June 15th with meet the curator Gordon Bell on May 17 between 12.30 and 3.00pm . This is entitled *The Landscape of Georgian Yorkshire* and will include several new finds of paintings and lithographs since our first exhibition three years ago. We are also expecting our Nicholson family researchers from the south of England to be with us in that time with their considerable volume of information.

The Wizard of Oz Flower Festival in the church of St Paul and St Peter’s between 23rd May and 2nd June- we ask for support for this from our members and to tell friends and relatives about this especially as it is a fund raiser to light up Pickering’s special treasured wall paintings. The previous flower festival The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was spectacular. Those helping to construct it tell us will be even more so. **JD**

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The committee would love to hear the views of the wider membership. If you have any burning issues you feel we should address, or views that don’t agree with something we’ve decided, then get in touch or come along to any members meeting to discuss it. Our **AGM** held in May will soon be here and members will be notified of the date in due course. **MP**