



Pickering & District Civic Society

Reg. Charity 502630

Newsletter

Issue No.35
Sept 2014

In this issue of the newsletter we look at the Localism Act and how it functions in the aspect of **Local Listing of Community Assets**. Some members also visited **Howsham Mill** and we have a review of that visit. As the **Pickering Bund Scheme** approaches completion, Mike Potter gives an update on progress. It is hardly believable that this scheme is actually being built let alone nearing completion. Perhaps a brief recap of the history of this is worth recounting.

When the Environment Agency first announced a scheme for building hard wall flood defences in Pickering we naturally took an interest. Having obtained copies of the plans Betty Hood and Stuart Harrison walked the proposed areas of construction and immediately started to pick up on various areas of concern. On a wider scale it didn't provide protection for some areas of the town and we were very worried that these might be adversely affected. Our MP, John Greenway, was closely involved and discussions and meetings ensued- some, frankly, got somewhat heated and some strong views were expressed from some quarters.

Eventually the scheme was abandoned because it did not meet cost effective criteria. Here it must be remembered that a whole series of such schemes, such as that at Malton/Norton and Stamford Bridge were being railroaded through at the prompting of John Prescott following disastrous flooding in the region. Ours was the only one which fell at the first hurdle and the others were all completed. Yet we were told by an EA official that because of the haste these schemes were not properly engineered and would cause the Environment Agency problems for years to come. Malton/Norton surely has done!

A second more comprehensive scheme for Pickering was then envisaged which cost £700k to design. A local committee was formed as a consultation group with the EA. Test drillings were made, archaeological test pits were dug, surveys were done and a scheme designed. To this we gave our reluctant backing but again it hit the buffers on cost effective grounds. Yet it doesn't take a genius to

now realize that if the cheaper first 'hasty' scheme failed on that basis then a much more effective properly designed and more expensive scheme had no chance of success. I now take the cynical view that we were sucked into a political maelstrom and were naïve enough to take the bait.

Following the demise of the second scheme, the Pickering Flood Defence Group emerged in Pickering to promote the abandoned scheme and get it built. We had never liked any of it and for that we were vilified by them in the press. Some very dirty tricks were employed to blacken our name as the people who stopped Pickering getting flood defences. The fact we had pointed out that it wouldn't work and would look awful fell on deaf ears. Some interesting letters were exchanged in the pages of the local press on this subject. A member of CPRE then gave us the inspiration to suggest an alternative. He suggested a bund above the town to slow the flow of water and stop it rushing through and causing the flooding. We then campaigned for this and again were vilified by PFDG.

It took the formation of the Ryedale Flood Research Group by university-based academics to change opinion and get the attention of government. Betty Hood and Mike Potter joined this study and it is to them we should be thankful in getting our bund built. They suggested using bunds and the academics took this idea up, computer modelled it and found it would work. Having been ridiculed for this idea it was interesting to see the reactions when academics said it would work! The Pickering Flood Defence Group accepted it as a solution and gave up the idea of conventional hard wall defences.

Yet it took some considerable time and effort to get action and Mike Potter was unstinting in his pursuit of this. Just when we thought it would be a reality it failed the Reservoir Act test at the last minute but eventually, somehow, budgets were juggled and revised and the figures were squared to make it all possible. I suspect our fundamental role in this will not be remembered. **SH**

The Localism Act now gives communities the power to create a list of properties and other assets that have local value. Below we reprint an extract from a recent

YHACS newsletter which sets out how the act works in practice.

The Localism Act 2011 introduces an important new power for local communities to protect buildings and open spaces they value. The “Community Right to Bid”, relevant to all civic societies, came into effect on 21 September 2012.

Communities can ask their local council to list certain assets as being of value to the community. If an asset is listed and then comes up for sale, the new right will give communities that want the asset six months to put together a bid to buy it. This gives communities an increased chance to save much-loved shops, pubs or other local facilities.

Parish councils or local community groups can nominate both privately and publicly owned assets which meet the definition of community value. A building or land in your council’s area must be listed as an “asset of community value” if:

- current primary use of the building/land or use of the building/land in the recent past furthers the social well-being or social interests (cultural, recreational, or sporting interests) of the local community

- it is realistic to think that now or in the next five years there could continue to be primary use of the building/land which will further the social well-being or social interests of the local community (whether or not in the same way as before).

Owners of listed assets cannot dispose of them without:

letting the local authority know that they intend to sell the asset or grant a lease of more than 25 years. waiting until the end of a six-week ‘interim moratorium’ period if the local authority does not receive a request from a community interest group to be treated as a potential bidder.

waiting until the end of a six-month ‘full moratorium’ period if the local authority does receive a request from a community interest group to be treated as a potential bidder.

What can be listed as an “Asset of Community Value”?

Although the Act notes that “social interests” includes “cultural, recreational and sporting interests” the phrase “social well-being” can apply to a much broader set of activities. “Assets of Community Value” might therefore include any land or building listed - examples are:

Shops and Pubs

Community/Village halls, Nurseries and children’s centres, Health centres, surgeries and hospitals

Sport, recreation and culture

Parks and open green spaces, Sports grounds, Theatres and Cinemas, Swimming pools and lidos, Community services, Community centres, Youth centres

Pickering Assets Listing

The Civic Society undertook at the Town

Meeting in May to make a listing for Pickering as recommended by the Communities Minister. We shall start to make a preliminary list of Assets on Sunday September 21 and then opening up afterwards to anyone in the town to make additions. If we had had a list some years ago maybe Askham Bryan College on Swainsea Lane might not have been handed on so easily and then sold for housing. Or in the case of Norton, the Bowling Centre might not have been so casually proposed as something to be asset stripped and sold by the RDC! There are obvious assets of buildings, open spaces but it will be the less obvious ones which could catch us out. If you are unable to attend on Sunday 21 September 2 - 4pm at the Memorial Hall do send in your thoughts by email or by post. **JD**

Howsham Mill Visit

In July, several Civic Society members visited Howsham Mill, south of Malton. I first visited this mill over 15 years ago, while walking along the course of the River Derwent. I would not have believed from that visit that such a transformation could have taken place over the succeeding years. The Renewable Heritage Trust has transformed an ivy covered ruin into something closely resembling the original Gothic building of 1755, designed by John Carr of York. Wherever possible they have replaced fallen original masonry and where this was not possible new stone closely copying the damaged originals. At the same time they have altered the purpose of the mill from grinding corn to hydro electric power generation.

The original mill wheel had largely rotted away and a replacement wheel has been installed in its place which now drives a generator. The largest part of the power generation is now provided by a large double reverse Archimedes screw. This was the first of its kind installed in Britain. The ability of the screw to handle very dirty water containing debris, widely varying rates of flow at high efficiency and using a relatively low water head are some of the screw’s major advantages. The down side is the relatively high capital cost. The two power sources together generate up to 30 kW. The mill is situated on an Island, as the lock out of the old, and now sadly derelict, Derwent

navigation cuts the mill site off on one side and the river on the other. This situation called for considerable ingenuity when it came to installing the new plant as there is no vehicular access from the adjacent land.

The installation at Howsham is a pioneering example of how old mill sites can be transformed into small scale hydro electric plants. The number of available sites in Yorkshire alone is huge. They are much less visually intrusive than the ubiquitous wind turbines and provide around the clock power unlike solar and wind sources which are inherently intermittent. Only drought and high levels of flooding can cause interruption of supply.

The mill is open every Sunday from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. and is well worth a visit. Park at the end of Howsham bridge and take the path that goes under the bridge then walk along the river to the mill. MS

Pickering Flood Scheme

The Pickering flood defence bund is fast approaching completion, so by the time you read this, the town could be protected from up to 1:25 year flood events. The control structure was completed in August and is currently disappearing from view as it is buried under the last remaining section of clay embankment to a height above ground level of around 2m. The only visible bits of the control structure (actually just a concrete culvert of a carefully calculated size) will be the upstream and downstream faces on either side of the bund.

The contractors have now dug out a new section of river channel to join up with the existing beck, so its new permanent route will be through the control structure. The temporary diversion channel currently taking the beck around the main construction site, can be blocked off and filled in, so Pickering will at long last have some degree of protection. It's been a long hard road, but we're on the final lap. That will leave only general site restoration and tree planting to complete, so by this time next year, it should look like an unexceptional field in the countryside with a 6ft high hump across it.

I suspect there will be a fresh flurry of media interest on completion, and again whenever it's first tested by flood conditions. In fact, it's highly likely I'll be prompting the media interest in order to stress that this is the sort of cost-effective 'Slowing the Flow' that could be used countrywide.

Interest in both the bund and more natural STF

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measures continues from various universities too, with the most recent being Maastricht, Lausanne and Oxford, spreading the word around the academic world and hopefully far beyond. MP

Fracking

The government continue with their enthusiastic sledgehammer approach to ensure oil companies can exploit the potential of shale that lies deep under our green and pleasant part of the land (and desolate of course). Licences to operate are currently being awarded, so it may not be long now before the drilling rigs start to move in to industrialise our countryside. A company called Tesla have been carrying out extensive seismic surveys around Ryedale to investigate viability. In the meantime, I have had no answers to specific questions, concerns and suggested safeguards that I put to our MP last December.

Unfortunately, the potential for catastrophic environmental damage still appears to be unacceptably high, judging by what has already happened in the USA, Canada, Australia and elsewhere. Given the stories of gagging clauses, who knows the extent of the damage - certainly not us. Personally, I have absolutely no trust in people who tell me that a high standard of environmental safeguards will be applied when they stand to make hefty profits from the process, unless they provide conclusive proof first. Absolutely none has been forthcoming so far from either government or the companies, so my suggestion about the need for openness and honesty appears to have fallen on stony ground for reasons I can only guess at. Consequently, they will only gain the trust of the uninformed and the investors. Do make your own mind up about fracking, but assuming you will base that on hard evidence, please share it with the rest of us, as my own investigations have unearthed nothing much more than a promising investment opportunity (perhaps similar to the great railway boom of the 1800s).

I initially assumed claims were accurate that said there was little or no chance of toxic frack fluid from depths of around 10,000ft contaminating aquifers close to the surface (our essential water supplies), although the risk from leaking wells would be ever present. Those of you who attended the AGM in May will have heard expert geologist Mike Windle tell us that claim wasn't entirely true, particularly close to the sort of geological fault lines that occur near Pickering. I wonder who's right?

NYCC also recently granted permission for an injection well at Ebberston Moor. This allows waste water to be pumped down an existing well to get rid of it. As this could potentially be either frack fluid or waste associated with sour gas purification, it's another source of serious concern, particularly after the doubt cast by Mike Windle and the geology of this area.

The parliamentary EFRA committee that Anne McIntosh chairs will soon convene to investigate this subject. I have submitted questions and comments on behalf of P&DCS and I sincerely hope the line of questioning will be suitably robust and hard hitting as she has indicated that she shares many of our concerns.

In conclusion, the general view of PDCS has moved from undecided and open-minded to greatly concerned, sceptical and very much lacking in trust for those in positions of power. **MP**

Blooming Winner

It was very pleasing to note that the flower & herb beds at Mr Wilf's café have won an award in Pickering in Bloom's (PIB) competition. The work on these beds was instigated by Susan Strange on behalf of PDCS when we were looking to plant trees and shrubs round the town in conjunction with PIB. Susan has continued her involvement in maintaining these beds, which benefit the Wilf Ward Trust residents, the café and the town generally, so our congratulations and thanks go to Susan as well as the trust.

Forthcoming Events

Weekend 12 - 14 September HERITAGE WEEKEND many places open for free. Look on web.

SATURDAY 13th Pickering Library 10 -2pm World War One Ryedale Villages Local History Groups displays plus Pickering Census Group pre 1914, also local museums.

SUNDAY 21 September 2 pm Listing Pickering Assets Memorial Hall - first PDCS open meeting.

Saturday 27 September YHACS 1.00pm - 4pm at Richmond (Visit to Georgian Theatre in morning must book) contact Mike for more details.

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Sunday 19 October Walk around the Bund on Pickering Beck. Meet at High Mill at 2.00pm. Lifts available.

Saturday Nov 1st 9 -12 GIVE AND TAKE Civic Society with the Lions. Memorial Hall. HELP required.

Sunday Nov 23 2.00pm John Addyman on Scotland's Mighty Water Power. Memorial Hall.

Saturday Jan 31 YHACS AGM at Harrogate. Suggestions for topics and speakers for future meetings required. NOTE WEA has an excellent programme of Friday lectures and Saturday Day Schools - see leaflet in library

Any opinions, beliefs or views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Civic Society