



# Pickering & District Civic Society

Reg. Charity 502630

## Newsletter

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As the year came to a close the pundits inevitably reflected on the last twelve months and made predictions for the next. No one can deny it has been a turbulent year with the economic crisis in the Euro zone, the Arab Spring, increasing fuel prices and inflation etc. At home we face increasing austerity and the mass reduction in the number of national and local government employees. As a Civic Society we should perhaps be concerned in cuts to heritage bodies. English Heritage is the national advisory body to the government on heritage issues and makes grants for the restoration of historic buildings. Preserving free entry to the London museums meant that EH had to take the biggest hit and lose around a third of its budget. Plus this reduction comes on top of a considerable number of years in which effectively its budget was frozen in real terms. Staff reductions have been severe and the final outcome has yet to be seen. Locally the impact can be observed in the winter weekday closure of such monuments as Rievaulx Abbey, Whitby Abbey and Clifford's Tower. To balance these closures some monuments, Kirkham Priory and Byland Abbey are now open at the weekend in the winter period. Yet the monuments in care are but one aspect of the work that English Heritage undertakes. Moreover successive governments have failed to recognise the substantial financial contribution that heritage makes to the economy as a whole. What will finally emerge from this financial stringency we will have to wait and see. **SAH**

### **Burgate development appeal**

*'These are challenging times for every city, town and village. So your communities need you more than ever. They need your passion, your pride and the priceless contribution you make in planning for the future, being ambitious for your town and taking the practical steps that make local life better'.* Thus spake the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP at a recent YHACS meeting, as he threw down a challenge to civic societies across the region to get ready to support their local communities.

I thought it apt to start this article about the result of the Burgate planning appeal with this quote. I presume we are the 'big society' and the locals that 'localism' refers to, but how exactly can we rise to any challenge when government and those they instruct ride roughshod over our unanimous views and opinions and flies in the face of all logic to grant permission for radically flawed developments such as this one. What with fruitless battles for a flood scheme and planning decisions like this, my passion, pride and priceless contribution is already wearing woefully thin.

I personally attended the inquiry to present the objections of P&DCS. In addition, there were well reasoned objections from several local residents, Pickering Town Council, RDC and NYCC. The only support came from three men paid handsomely to do so. I will list our, and others objections and you can make your own judgement.

- The site is just South of Brant Hill, between Burgate and Park St, so the gradient is about 1 in 5, with consequent difficulty for access and egress in all conditions, but particular danger in wintry conditions. The terrain is so severe that it was used for the MTB world cup event in Pickering, ridden by the world's top competitors
- According to our former road engineer, access to Burgate will not comply with local authority guidance on visibility, even after alterations to the junction, which include destroying half the adjacent raised pavement – an integral part of the conservation area.
- Access for two of the seven houses will be via the 'garage door' next to the Station Hotel onto Park St. Cars will have to emerge and have their front end a

couple of feet onto the road before they can see anything other than what is directly in front of them. This on one of the most congested roads in Ryedale, complete with illegal and disabled parking, coaches, tourists and quarry lorries. Will this be the most dangerous access in the whole country?

- Extreme difficulty of access for vehicles over 7.5 tons, which will have to reverse in or out (includes bin lorries, fire engines, removal vans and construction traffic). NYCC said the site roads could not be adopted due to their width and extreme gradient.
- Building directly on limestone outcrop on the Newtondale fault line, with no geological survey. Many springs in flood conditions and debatable stability.
- Additional flood risk to Park St properties from increased surface water run-off. These already flood from the Beck and from the sewers, before adding to the risk from the rear.
- Backland development.

To the incredulity of all I've spoken to, this appeal was allowed, based on existing planning laws, which raises some questions: What hope will there ever be of preventing inappropriate development once the new government Planning Policy Framework is adopted or imposed? What will be the role of planning departments and committees if there is virtually no hope of refusal? What are planning authorities and inspectors for, if not to protect communities from inappropriate development, unscrupulous developers, obvious danger and increased flood risks? Who will bear the responsibility for the inevitable traffic incidents and injuries? You can guarantee it won't be the developer or the govt inspector. Finally, I wonder who will buy these houses?

On a slightly more positive note, approaches have been made to the Town Council for joint working between at least ourselves, the council, and town team to formulate a Neighbourhood Plan. What weight this may carry should become clearer in due course. Can you imagine my optimism? **MP**

### Pickering Flood Scheme Update Dec 2011

I attended the latest Programme Delivery Group (PDG) meeting on 7 Dec 2011. The official minutes of Programme Board and PDG meetings can be found at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-7ZUCQY> although they can take a while to appear. As I worked as an analyst and reporter for the final 13 years of my civil service career (definitely without sexing up any dossiers! I did dull for a living), I will report the facts as I heard them first

hand, then add my personal comments and thoughts. Through sheer frustration at the rate of 'progress', these may appear somewhat less supportive, optimistic and diplomatic than my previous updates. If anyone disagrees with my comments, I would welcome corrections, provided they are supported by plausible argument and/or credible evidence.

1. **Small bund option.** Following the failure of the Environment Agency's (EA) more highly engineered bund scheme, it was agreed to investigate reverting to a series of simple small bunds that each held less than 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water and therefore didn't fall with the remit of the Reservoirs Act. Ten such bund sites were identified. Most of these sites are inside the Newtondale Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), so Natural England (NE) have issues around access and damage incurred during construction and would almost certainly object to any planning application. Funding from RDC is dependent on the scheme providing 1 in 25 year flood protection, which would not be possible from the remaining bund sites. There is a possibility of digging down below existing ground level to increase bund capacity, which may fall outside the Res Act remit. No plans yet exist for definite sites, method of construction, cost or timescale, although the EA would be looking to source material on site rather than importing. It is anticipated bunds would be between 0.75 and 1.5m in height. In order to start works during summer 2012, construction of bunds outside the SSSI could begin first, with anything inside the SSSI proceeding later due to anticipated slow progress with planning and NE opposition. The possibility of using restrictions in the deeply incised beck to force water out of bank (reconnecting the beck with its flood plain for natural flood storage) are at last being considered. After questioning, EA did not rule out the bund sites north of Farwath.

*(Comment: It's hard to believe I've been working on the STF scheme for approaching 3 years and we still have no firm plans, construction method, timings or costs. How long will the EA justify staff costs while not actually producing tangible results? Will RDC permit funding for a partial scheme below the 1 in 25 level with no guarantee that NE objections to the remainder will be overridden? Funding is a crucial decision that must be addressed right now – no funding, no scheme. I have little doubt that the EA would be relieved with an impasse giving them the opportunity to walk away from Pickering once again – despite the policy stated in their CFMP and over £1m*

spent so far with no return whatsoever. I still maintain that all necessary people (EA, NE, landowners, contractors etc) need to meet head on and thrash out problems, then get on with it instead of drifting lamely towards the next meeting. The existing situation seems to revolve around the leading players avoiding confrontation or problem solving and staggering round in circles. Strong, decisive leadership is required. How can any plans be put into place without first deciding on construction methods and materials? How can NE assess the scale and degree of construction damage without this information? How long would this damage take to naturally regenerate? Why do NE have to position themselves in opposition to anything remotely damaging in the SSSI, thus delaying or even stopping progress? Would it not be more effective to work together (looking from all perspectives) to find mutually agreeable solutions, or even showstoppers?

It was disconcerting to find that earth covered gabions were not being considered, or the use of local Newbridge stone. The proposed bunds above Farwath had just been ignored – previously on grounds of lack of LIDAR data - despite them appearing to myself and Nick Odoni to be ideal. At the meeting, NE objected due to the valuable grassland (without knowing the footprint of bund construction or assessing how easily this would regenerate) and lack of access for construction (despite a railway running through the middle and an agreement with NYMR about 18 months ago to use it).

In early 2010, I first started suggesting the use of simple beck restrictions to push floodwater into the floodplain and was pretty much ridiculed. Good job I'm persistent eh?

At the meeting, it was interesting to be flanked on one side by residents with little interest in protecting the SSSI and on the other by NE with little or no interest in protecting Pickering from flooding. Neither is the correct approach. EA stands to be criticised by all. Get over it.

For goodness sake, formulate a plan of action, prioritise the actions and act on it. It's meant to be a demonstration scheme – where we don't go, nobody can follow).

**2. Mini bund option.** Reported in previous update - nothing new, although still to be assessed under flood conditions. Legitimate concerns from EA about such structures affecting flood peaks due lack of any method of controlling outflow.

(Comment: This timber structure was built on time and on a ludicrously small budget by a local contractor for Forestry Commission (FC) with

extremely difficult access and absolutely minimal visual and ecological damage. I pointed out that outflow could be increased in minutes by a man with chainsaw, or reduced by blocking holes with brash or clay. Precise calculation and control of outflow would be essential if similar methods were used above Pickering. Monitoring equipment in place to assess effect when next floods occur).

**3. Review of Res Act guidance.** No results anticipated until Oct 2012, then little chance of relaxation of rules. EA, DeFRA etc should have some input to the process. (Comment: Leave this in the hands of engineers and they will come to the same conclusions every time – they'll only think like engineers, yet they frame the act and the guidance, then they design and build the schemes and have been deemed to be personally liable for the results. What other conclusions can they ever come to without big changes from govt or some very tough negotiating from EA/DeFRA etc. Don't hold your breath and it'll all be too late for Pickering and bodes ill for any other simple scheme nationwide).

**4. Land Management update.** Further 7 hectares of riparian tree planting. Additional 17 Woody debris dams (WDD) installed on Levisham Beck. More drain blocking and peat restoration in the Nat Park, plus buffer strips and farm level measures.

(Comment: FC, Nat Park and others are doing a grand job and it's a valuable part of the demonstration project. However, the bunds were to provide around 90% of flood water storage, so don't be fooled by big numbers into thinking that this will have a significant effect in protecting Pickering. It won't)

**5. Flood Resilience.** £85,000 has been found by DeFRA to fund flood resistance/resilience for Pickering households at risk from flooding. It is not available for businesses and is only available until end March 2012. RDC to administer.

(Comment: Sounds shambolic to me. I forget why businesses couldn't have any, but it didn't sound plausible. Timescale way too short and confusion over how to administer. Sounds like a sticking plaster solution and a sweetener in case EA walk away from Pickering again. Blocking airbricks and door barriers have very limited effectiveness – especially compared to a flood scheme for the whole town - but hey, fill your boots). **MP**

Mike's comments on the Burgate planning inquiry above highlight what seem to be iniquities in the planning system. Yet if one delves a bit deeper into the history of this application it perhaps may seem even stranger. The original application was refused at a first appeal solely on the grounds of access. Before this the applicant had reworked the initial scheme at the behest of the council officers to make it more acceptable. After the first refusal it was reworked again regarding the access and resubmitted. The officers recommended that the councillors pass the application but following a site visit they refused it. Then it went to appeal and was passed with conditions. No doubt the inquiry inspector was aware that the officers had recommended the application for approval and that was I think a very significant factor. It is not often Councillors ignore the advice of their officers and is a practice that is very much frowned upon in the planning process. Yet given the factors that Mike outlined one is tempted to query the very quality of that advice. **SAH**

Mike's comments above on the progress, or lack of it, on the Bunds Scheme for Pickering and the intransigence of Natural England and the EA, brings to mind a talk I recently heard on Radio 4 (27<sup>th</sup> Dec- Four Thought) by Tim Smit. He is the man behind the Lost gardens of Heligan and the Eden Project. Both hugely successful enterprises and contributors to the Cornish economy. He suggested this country is largely run by accountants and lawyers, '*the dream killers*', he called them and pointed out the natural inbuilt culture in government bodies to say no and find all the reasons under the sun for not doing anything. Yet he had a real optimistic attitude and sounded a wake up call that things have to change. We used to be the worlds biggest manufacturer but those days are now a fading memory and within fifteen years will be lost. The attitude has to get back to that prevalent when we actually got on with it, made things and actually did things in this country. Communities run on trust and we need to get that spirit back. Towards the end of his talk he suggested that it would be a wonderful thing if we could make the UK independent of outside fuel resources. He is clearly a man with a big vision for the future. **SAH**

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**The closing date for  
 letters, notes or articles  
 for the next newsletter  
 is 20<sup>th</sup> Martch**

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

## **Forthcoming Events**

January 28<sup>th</sup> is the final meeting for the Green Neighbourhood Challenge group. This is for the teams taking part and held at the De Grey Rooms in York. We will report on how we fared on the day.

Members Meeting Sunday 2.00 - 4.00pm Jan 29 or Feb 5 tea and cake. Memorial Hall tba

A chance to catch up with developments in the town and within the society.

Stuart Harrison has been exploring Trondheim Cathedral and will let us into the secret of the link between there and York Minster!

News of YHACs Yorkshire and Humberside Civic Societies.

AGM is at Leeds January 25 11am - 12.30 in the Wheeler Hall of St Ann's RC Cathedral (entrance between Great George St and Dudley St). It is interesting to find out what other Civic Societies are doing and thinking. This is followed to 4.00pm by a regional meeting of the national body Civic Voice

with Guest Speaker Tony Burton Director of Civic Voice.

Civic Voice has been very active in opposing the Localism Bill and also creating a Parliamentary body of supporting MP's for Civic Societies.

This is a good opportunity to attend both events and catch the moment. Offers to Mike Potter.

YHACS Newsletter comes in hard copy or on line - if you would like to see a copy, do ask.

Francis Nicholson 1753 -1844 Painter, Printer and Drawing Master Exhibition in Ryedale Folk Museum (RFM)

Some local events arranged for this bicentenary year of his presidency of the society of painters in watercolour.

We are pleased to announce that a grant from the Spooner Trust has enabled us to print the limited edition catalogue

in colour and furthermore we have been able to loan some work from the Wordsworth Trust and other individuals.

Some works by his nephew George Nicholson 1787 -1878 born in Malton will be included.

March 9 Francis Nicholson in Yorkshire 7.30 FMH WEA Friday Illustrated Lecture. Judy Dixon & Colin Coulson

March 30 Preview of Ryedale Folk Museum Exhibition and catalogue book launch.

March 31 - May 20 Exhibition in Gallery of RFM. Tours and school visits can be arranged.

April 28 Francis Nicholson Painter, Printer and Drawing Master 10 - 4 WEA Study day with Prof Gordon Bell at Pickering Mem Hall and RFM Hutton le Hole. Book with David Clark.

October 12 - November 25 Whitby Art Gallery and Pannett Museum Exhibition

October 24 2.15 Lecture and Tour with Prof Gordon Bell. Whitby Gallery and Museum.

If you would like to help with stewarding/ publicity or in any other way, please contact Judy Dixon.

Heritage Group 2012 - dates being confirmed .

Sunday March 25 tbc a talk by David Mennin who has worked in Africa in agriculture

and Thursday September 20 the Yorkshire Film Archive invited tbc. Help with the following would be welcomed.

The activities in the Castle to be confirmed with EH Easter Monday April 9 activities for family and friends, BH Sunday or Monday Jubilee,

Acoustic music and flower day on Sunday June 24, Fun with fabrics Sunday August 12 and Games for everyone on BH Monday 27 August.