



A Registered Charity (No. 1016770)
and Member of Civic Voice

The Newbury Society

August 2021 Bulletin

From your Chairman

Newbury Society meetings are due to start again in-person in September, with John Handy talking about “Horse Chestnuts -vulnerable giants” on September 9, at St John’s Church Room. As before, meetings will be on the second Thursday of the month, and the October meeting will hopefully see us cover the business of two AGMs, as well as me reviewing the past two years and the present for Newbury.

The main threats to the town are still the Kennet Centre redevelopment plans, with their 8-, 10- and 11-storey blocks of flats, and some sense of scale can be drawn from the 4- and 6-storey buildings of the “urban village” which are nearing completion near the railway station and on Market Street.

One member has stepped forward to take on the work of Treasurer. We welcome Mike Hood, who was co-opted onto the committee in July and will also be dealing with membership subscriptions and administration from now on. Chris Marriage stepped back from the Treasurer’s role at the same time, but remains on the committee.

For Coronavirus / Covid-19, many local people have now received two vaccinations, and the large-scale vaccination centre at Newbury Racecourse has come and gone. More vaccinations and testing continue. To date [July 9, registered to July 17], 257 people have died across West Berkshire of Covid-19.

I look forward to seeing many of you in September.

David Peacock Tel: Newbury (01635) 524017

Kennet Centre update

Opposition has been growing to the plans to redevelop the Kennet Centre with blocks of flats up to 8-, 10-, and 11-storeys high.

The plans, from developers Lochailort, were officially lodged in April, and involve 402 flats with either two office buildings or 91 additional retirement flats. Most of the flats would be build-to-rent.

As we went to press, there were 150 emails and letters submitted in opposition, covering a wide range of issues but with most focussed on the height of the development, taller than the town hall clock tower and the Newbury telephone exchange, and completely unsuitable for a town centre which is largely two- and three-storeys in height.

Not everyone is against; more than 30 letters have been submitted in favour, including those from Lochailort’s managing director Hugo Haig and the manager of the Kennet Centre, Richard Farley.

The plans would involve demolishing the whole of the existing Kennet Centre with the exception of the cinema and the multi-storey car park, with a sweeping reduction in the amount of retail space included in the new development, which would have open streets rather than covered walkways.

The Newbury Society has made two detailed submissions against the plans, on various grounds, which can be briefly summarised as:

1. Excessive Scale and Mass;
2. Effect on the character of Newbury Town Centre, including Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area;
3. Lack of Affordable Housing;
4. Insufficient Parking;
5. Poor Retail Plans;
6. Damaging to Economic Development.

The listed buildings affected include the Catherine Wheel and Save the Children in Cheap Street, which would have an eight-storey block of flats immediately behind, and a new five-storey block between them and the cinema.



The *Catherine Wheel* with part of Block A behind

By our calculation, the developers should be offering 121 or 148 affordable homes (depending on whether the 91 retirement flats are included); yet they propose none at all. And there is a massive shortfall in the parking designed into the scheme. WBC standards indicate that the 402 flats (with one, two and three bedrooms) should have 459 spaces, yet the developers offer just 76. Although they have put forward no details and offered no commitments, it appears that the developers' intention is to repurpose the existing multi-storey car park for the flats and offices of their new development.

The Newbury Society is in favour of redeveloping the Kennet Centre; however, redevelopment could take many forms. We accept that it is likely to include flats. But any redevelopment should be appropriate for Newbury, and should protect and enhance the unique qualities and attractions which Newbury possesses. These Lochailort plans, with 8-, 10- and 11-storey blocks of flats, will inflict long-term damage on the town's character, making it less attractive both for visitors and for existing residents.



Bartholomew Street, showing *The Newbury*, Block E, and the development behind

Anyone who has not yet expressed a view can still do so by emailing planapps@westberks.gov.uk or writing to the Development and Planning Service at West Berkshire Council, quoting application numbers 21/00379/FULMAJ and 21/00380/FULMAJ.

Victoria Park cafe

Plans to replace the café in Victoria Park were approved recently.

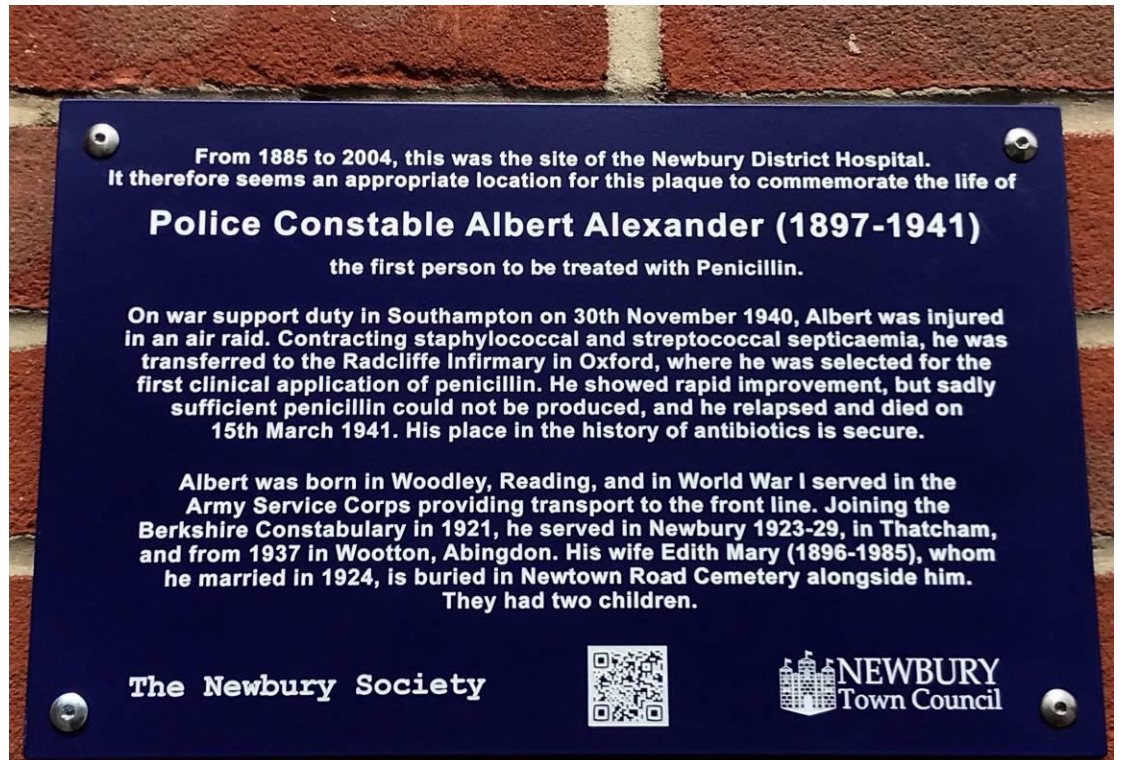
The plans were put forward by Newbury Town Council, which now has the park on a 99-year lease from West Berkshire Council. As well as a kitchen and space for café customers, the new building will include toilets and changing-rooms. It will be solar-powered, and is designed to be energy efficient.

A new café was first proposed several years ago, and the latest design was approved at the end of June by West Berkshire Council's western area planning committee. It will replace the existing café in the park (a bland building), together with the nearby storage building, which was originally a surface air-raid shelter for the then-adjacent nursery school. This will be photographed and recorded before demolition.



The one-time air-raid shelter

Newbury's 13th Blue Plaque – P C Albert Alexander



The first person to be treated by penicillin is the subject of the latest Blue Plaque for Newbury, which was unveiled back in May.

Albert Alexander was a policeman in the Berkshire Constabulary, who served at several police stations in the county and is buried in the Newtown Road Cemetery, Newbury. Born in 1897, he was married at Speenhamland church in Newbury in 1924, and during the 1920s was stationed at the police station in Pelican Lane (now flats).

In 1940, while stationed at Abingdon, he was one of a number of Berkshire policeman called to help in Southampton during the Blitz. He was wounded during an air raid, taken to hospital, and developed blood poisoning. He was transferred to the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, where it was decided to treat him with the newly discovered antibiotic penicillin. He showed immediate improvement, but not enough penicillin was available in time to continue treatment, and he relapsed and died on March 15, 1941. He was buried in the Newtown Road cemetery, where he lies alongside his wife Edith.



Pc Alexander's story was brought to the attention of Newbury Town Council by the Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery. As his historical significance is medicine-related, it was decided the plaque should be sited on the former Newbury Hospital site (now Carnarvon Place) in Andover Road, where it was unveiled on May 25 by the Mayor of Newbury, Billy Drummond. Among those present were the chair of the Town Council's Heritage Working Group Anthony Pick, Brian Sylvester from the Friends, and Newbury Society vice-president Garry Poulson.

The series of Blue Plaques is co-ordinated by Newbury Town Council, with support from the Newbury Society. If members have any proposals for people to be memorialised with a plaque, they can put them forward to the Society or to Newbury Town Council. No plaques will be installed to living people.

Newbury Masterplan draft “Vision”

A draft “Vision” for the future development of Newbury, associated with the Masterplan for Newbury town centre commissioned last year by West Berkshire Council, was put out for consultation at the end of June.

The draft “Vision” came up with five general principles for the future development of the town. “Newbury will continue to be a successful, modern market town by ensuring it is a place that:

- promotes its heritage and independent identity
- is innovative and entrepreneurial, able to respond quickly to economic change
- is social and welcoming, where people gather to meet and celebrate
- is green in the widest sense, promoting sustainability, biodiversity and healthy living
- listens to the needs of its urban and rural community”



The Canal near the Waterside Centre – one area affected by Masterplan proposals

The full text of this draft is still available on the West Berkshire Council and Newbury Town Council websites. Proposals were put forward under ten headings, mostly area by area, including the Kennet & Avon Canal, and Newbury’s “Lanes and Yards.” Each section included a combination of proposals, with respondents asked to comment on the proposals as a whole. This posed difficulties in sections where both good and bad proposals were put forward, and where proposals were so vague that without further details it was difficult to decide whether they were good.

For example, the section on The Wharf stated “The Wharf has the potential to meet a variety of local resident priorities, including more green space, improved access to Victoria Park, better access to the waterside, more space for events or just to ‘hang out,’ better leisure facilities, food and drink or cultural facilities.” However, buried in the text was a sentence stating “The Vision seeks to promote new jobs and homes at The Wharf as such uses bring life to the area...” We objected to the Wharf proposals because while we understand that waterside flats appeal to developers, we are passionately against new homes being built on The Wharf. We also opposed the suggestion of using shipping containers on The Wharf to house food and drink outlets.

The vague proposals included “improvements to the towpath” between Newbury Bridge and the Park Way (“American”) Bridge; a suggestion that Victoria Park should be “better connected to the town centre”; improving Park Way as a “civic street”; proposals for “innovative forms of housing” in Newbury (is this intended to include high-rise housing?); and “improvements to improve the sense of arrival in London Road.”

Although heritage was included in the central aims, there were no related proposals in the plan; nothing about protecting Newbury’s historic architecture, and nothing even on the more limited aim of promoting the town’s heritage.

The draft “Vision” was created by Hemingway Design, NEW Masterplanning, Urban Movement and G.L. Hearn. It was put out for consultation on June 28, but many people were only informed of it several days after the consultation was launched. Consultation was due to close on July 16, but was later extended to July 30. West Berkshire Council says a final draft of the “spatial vision and masterplan” will be published in the early autumn, adding “This will then set the formal planning framework for the future regeneration and development of the town centre.”

THE NEWBURY SOCIETY – OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2020/21

President: Lord Benyon Vice President: Garry Poulson

OFFICERS

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Dr Paul Bryant

Yolande Fothergill

John Handy (Trees & Landscaping
Advisor)

Chris Marriage

Garry Poulson

Football Club assurances

A new football ground or “Sports Hub” will be up and running at Monks Lane by March next year, according to assurances given by West Berkshire Council to Sport England.

The council’s Western Area planning committee met in July to consider plans to demolish the clubhouse at the former Newbury Football Club in Faraday Road, and turn the pitch over to short-term “recreational space” in advance of redevelopment plans for the whole of the Faraday Road area, the London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE); plans which were referred for consideration by the higher level District planning committee in September.

Sport England had been seeking guarantees that a new ground would be provided before the Faraday Road facilities were removed, and there were last-minute talks between the two. This led to a letter from the council, publicised by Sport England, in which WBC leader Lynne Doherty gave the following assurances:

1. A planning application for the new “Sports Hub” at Newbury Rugby Club will be submitted before the end of this summer.
2. A planning application for an additional playing pitch will be submitted before the end of December.
3. In December, the new short-term “recreation space” at the former Newbury Football Club in Faraday Road will open to the public.
4. The new “Sports Hub” at Newbury Rugby Club will open in March 2022.
5. Within 18 months of planning approval the additional playing pitch will open to the public.

Work on the redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate is currently due to start in 2023, five years after the Faraday Road ground was closed. The Newbury Society still feels that the Faraday Road area, with its links to Victoria Park, is a good area for sports facilities; and that losing these to build more flats (the council’s plan), is not a gain for Newbury. A new ground at Monks Lane, on a less secure basis and as part of the Newbury Rugby Club site, feels like a step backwards for sports facilities at a time when the population of the area is expanding.



Planning permission for replacing the former Newbury Weekly News building with flats was refused at least in part because of concerns about flood risk – what does this mean for the proposed flats on the football club site?

New business starter units at the railway station

New business starter units have been proposed for the south side of Newbury railway station, in the car park on the west side, former home to some unsightly Network Rail units. We have supported the principle of this development, but have raised some reservations about the siting and design.

The proposed design is suitable for an industrial estate, but is a little uncomfortable this close to the centre of town. Bearing in mind that the height of the retaining wall rises as you move west towards Bartholomew St, we felt it would make more sense to site the units further west, as it is only at the eastern end of the site that they would be intrusive.

Progress on some current developments



The Sterling site flats



The Market Street 'urban village'



The top of some plant at the former *Narrowboat* site (new London Road Lidl) offers good views!

Dates for Your Diary – 2021

(all subject to confirmation due to the Coronavirus pandemic)

Talks are held in the **Parish Room, St John's Church**, St John's Road, Newbury RG14 7PY. Admission is free for members or £2.50 for non-members. **Visitors are most welcome.**

Thursday 9th September, 7:30pm – John Handy: Horse Chestnuts: vulnerable giants

Horse chestnut is a much-loved tree, but recently in the news because it appeared on the Endangered list from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, listed with about 400 other trees and shrubs as vulnerable. It is a familiar tree and Newbury has several fine specimens; the talk will include what the main dangers are and look at some local examples.

Thursday 14th October, 7:30pm – AGM + Newbury in 2020 and 2021

Newbury Society chairman David Peacock will be reviewing the past two years; talking about Newbury today, some of its attractions, and the range of challenges it faces.

Please contact the Secretary if you would like to received copies of the annual reports and the accounts in advance of the meeting

Thursday 11th November, 7:30pm – details to be advised