RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER - JULY 2021

We subscribe to a couple of organisations: the Yorkshire & Humberside Association of Civic Societies, better known to its members as YHACS (yes, it does sound bovine) and Civic Voice, the national association for societies such as our own. Why?

We share objectives, learn from each other and collectively provide a voice on issues that matter to us. Finding out about other places is worthwhile in itself and from time to time we visit each other.

Over the past year or so our Society has been learning how to go digital. How to provide activities online for our members and to meet in as convivial way as possible across screens. Sadly some people are being left out. It's why we keep track on being able to meet in person, but also to get a sense of whether this is what our members want any time soon. YHACS is a good forum for this. So far there is little evidence that others are planning meetings in person. YHACS meetings will stay online for now.

Civic Voice promotes our interests at national level. Recently it has focused on the design of places and getting the best from new development. This year the focus has turned to the Government's proposed changes to the Planning system. Civic Voice is advocating protection of statutory public involvement in Planning and has set up contact with MPs, some of whom are expressing concerns about the wisdom of taking forward aspects of last year's White Paper. We shall expect to be speaking with our MP explaining our response to the Planning Bill once it has been published, we understand, later this year.

Christopher Hughes
Chairman

Destination Ripon






RIPON BID
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Harrogate has one, so do Northallerton, Skipton and York. Ripon businesses have recently voted to have one here too. So what is a **Business Improvement District**?
BIDs are arrangements whereby businesses get together, decide what improvements they want to make in their destination, how they will manage these and what it will cost them. This all goes into a business plan which is voted on by all those who would have to pay. The BID lasts for a maximum of five years and must be able to demonstrate how it benefits the businesses that have funded it. BIDs deliver additional projects and services over and above those already provided by public bodies.
Ripon has chosen to be a 'Destination' BID, which means it will not only help promote our retail offer to the local catchment but will also support the area's tourism economy. A steering group of local businesses led by Richard Compton of Newby Hall is now ready to form the first board of the BID company. A BID manager is being recruited and the operation should be up and running in the autumn. We will then be hearing much more about what the BID is doing and planning to help revitalise Ripon. Meanwhile there is information on this exciting and timely initiative at

https://riponbid.co.uk

Richard Taylor

Recent Changes to Planning

Permitted development rights are in effect planning permission given by Government regulation for specific descriptions of development.

In December 2020, the Government consulted on changes to permitted development rights (PDRs) and streamlining public service infrastructure application procedures. The stated aim was to support 'the economic future of our high streets and town centres, … jobs and the faster delivery of our schools and hospitals'. The key proposals were:

A new permitted development right for the change of use of shops, financial and professional services, restaurants, gyms, creches and offices to residential;
Enhanced permitted development rights for expansion of schools, colleges and universities, hospitals and prisons;
Reducing the consultation period on applications for new schools, colleges and universities, hospitals and prisons from 21 to 14 days.

Ripon Civic Society made objections. We were especially concerned that, whilst the right to change to residential use would not apply to listed buildings, of particular significance to Ripon City Centre was that it went further than previous changes to permitted development rights in that it would apply in conservation areas.

We considered that current and future local initiatives for regeneration and re-imagination of historic market towns such as Ripon would be undermined by piecemeal, speculative changes of uses to residential. Even with some suggested controls at ground floor level, the proposed changes would undermine future planning of a vibrant and diverse historic centre without necessarily creating a high quality residential environment.

The outcome of this consultation has now been published and the Government laid regulations on 31 March 2021 to create a new permitted development right to enable the change of use from the new Class E to residential use 'to help support housing delivery and enable more homes to be created in town centres'. The right will have effect from 1 August 2021. It is subject to a size limit of 1,500 sqm of floorspace changing use and applies to buildings that have been in a Class E use for two years, including time in former uses now within that class. To protect viable businesses the right only applies to buildings that have been continuously vacant for at least three months and to protect local amenity the right is subject to prior approval by the local planning authority on a range of planning matters.

To help deliver improvements to public service infrastructure the 31 March regulations also amended permitted development rights to allow for larger extensions to schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and, for the first time, prisons. In addition, they have made further changes to align the permitted development rights for ports and airports to help deliver Freeports. Finally, the regulations ensure that a planning application will always be required for the removal of unlisted statues, memorials and monuments which have been in place for 10 years on the proposed demolition date subject to certain exceptions.

Leaders of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) have since written to the Prime Minister asking that he reconsider the new housing permitted development rights. They argue that the Class E to Class C3 PDR "presents a risk for our nation's town centres and small businesses" and "risks creating poor-quality housing".

In January 2021, the Government consulted on draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework and sought views on the draft National Model Design Code. Ripon Civic Society made representations.

One of the proposals was to ensure Article 4 directions can only be used to remove national permitted development rights allowing changes of use to residential where they are targeted and fully justified to avoid essential adverse impacts or alternatively to protect an interest of national significance. They should also apply to the smallest geographical area possible.

Together these amendments 'would encourage the appropriate and proportionate use of Article 4 directions'.

We did not support the changes. In our view, the Government was trying to pre-empt a widely anticipated move by local authorities to apply Article 4 directions to remove the new Permitted Development right to convert 'high street uses' new Use Class E (commercial, business and services) to residential (C3), which was proposed in December 2020 and will come into operation on 1st August.

The Government is still considering responses to the consultation and will be issuing its response as soon as possible. This will set out any changes to Article 4 policy.

Rachel Wigginton

Footnote.
Secretary of State Robert Jenryk has announced that Article 4 Directions to bring change from a non-commercial use to residential use should be limited "to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts". Loss of the essential core of a primary shopping centre would be very unlikely to extend to the whole of a town centre. He concedes that protection of local amenity or well-being (such as demolition of local facilities) can be addressed as long as there is robust evidence and the area is the smallest geographically possible.

Kirkgate Yards











Do you recognise this place?

Ripon Neighbourhood Plan describes this (the central purple area on the map) as the Kirkgate Yards Action Area. Why? Simply because this backland is trying to do several things and not really doing any one well.

The poor appearance of Kirkgate Yards make it an uninviting public area detracting from making best use of buildings and sites and playing a stronger role in the city centre.

The north side is the Sainsbury's delivery access. Vehicular access to the Unicorn and Royal Oak, individual houses, upper floor flats and apartments is restricted. Some open land is used commercially for car parking whilst ad hoc parking takes up most the remaining land.

Frontage vehicular access to Kirkgate premises inhibits the vitality of this important pedestrian link between the Cathedral and Market Place. The arched entrance on the north side of Kirkgate records a historic route and is today the southern entrance to the Yards, in particular to the Old Court House and Court Terrace.

The rear of the north side of Kirkgate and part of the Market Place provides the visual backdrop to the Yards. Court Terrace is the most significant occupied building facing into the Yards but there are other significant unoccupied buildings, notably the ‘maltings’ and the former ‘Palladium Cinema’ / “Matrix’ night club.

Rationalisation of roads, yards and parking areas could offer alternative vehicle access to Kirkgate properties, improved pedestrian circulation and public realm.

Recently there have three planning applications for new housing. Two have been for cottages, the other for conversion and redevelopment of the former nightclub. The first two were refused consent whilst the third has been subject to extensive negotiations.

An interesting aspect of these applications is the reference by Historic England to providing archaeological investigation for evidence of the former Archbishop of York’s palace.

Pulling these issues together really does warrant an action plan to coordinate development, conservation, access and land ownership, but so far this has not happened. The Ripon Renewal city centre masterplan project offers an opportunity to revitalise Kirkgate Yards in its several aspects producing a good urban design and public realm solution.






Footnotes

Ripon Renewal Project
The engagement stage has now ended. We are aware that there is an opportunity for government funds to be made available for what could be elements of the emerging city centre masterplan based in part on the neighbourhood plan. We look forward to more news soon.
The project supported a Speak Out initiative for young people. This has opened doors for us to be introduced to the project leaders and their ideas and we expect to share our conversation with you soon.

Design Awards
The committee has started assessing candidates for the Society's awards. Do tell us of anything that has caught your eye in Ripon and our surrounding area. Possibilities will need to have been completed by the end this month.

Development updates:
Tower Road field - the planning decision is still awaited
Redevelopment of former North Yorkshire Timber premises - this application is still under consideration. Interestingly, there are Council officer comments against it.
Spa Baths - discussions are said to have taken place between the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and the Borough Council. Ripon City Council is seeking a stay on the sale on the grounds that the baths should be registered as a community asset.

Rome to Ripon artwork
Whilst we encourage the principle of public art, sometimes the details have significant drawbacks. Such, unfortunately, is this case.

Our next meeting is on 2nd September on the National Trust's Skell Valley project. Social distancing restrictions are to be lifted on 19 July but we will watch and listen to how this is received. Unfortunately we can't be any more specific than in our May newsletter for this event to take place provisionally at the Workhouse.