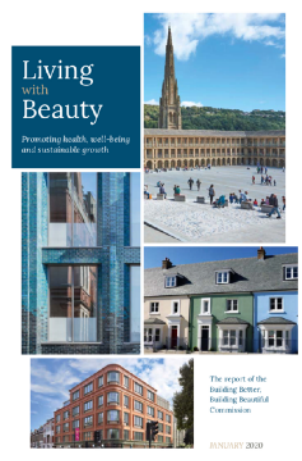
RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2022

We are members of YHACS - the Yorkshire & Humber Association of Civic Societies. YHACS has worked with Civic Voice, the parent association for civic societies, to promote good quality design.
In November 2020 I spoke with members about *Living With Beauty*, the report of the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission.



While the report made many recommendations, it's always puzzled me about how to go about knowing whether developments, public spaces and individual buildings are indeed beautiful. In this edition I'm introducing readers to what items could matter in 'place-making': a means for us to know whether we are indeed Building Better, Building Beautiful.

In April we are presenting the Society's Design Awards. The next edition will explain the winning projects and the commendations.

You can read as well about various achievements in the city and perhaps ponder what the local elections in May could mean for the Society.

… and a plug for a new initiative - the Ripon Podcast. The Ripon Renewal project has engaged young people. Shaun Doyle has been prompted to set up this podcast - do have a listen at https://theriponpodcast.podbean.com/

I guess Shaun will appreciate you liking the page on facebook, subscribe or at least bookmark the one of the pages to stay up to date when new episodes come out.

Enjoy reading.

Christopher Hughes



The Ladder of Place Quality - what it is about

What makes a good place?
For a lengthy period in the last century it was down to developers to lead the way. In the 'noughties' there was resurgence of interest by Government in the design of new development and places leading to the setting up of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment - known colloquially by practitioners as CABE.

CABE introduced a process called Design Review where developers and their design team would meet with recognised experts with the intention of improving building design and creating public spaces that worked well. CABE encouraged the creation of masterplans for developments and challenged the conventional design of highways, especially the lack of attention given to walking and cycling and in 2007 the Government published 'Manual for Streets'.

Together these initiatives reflected the 'new urbanism' of the time which was a response to revitalising existing urban areas as places to live, work and meet as well as a reaction to ever-encroaching suburban development and private car dependency.

Much has been written about perceived deficiencies of 'anywhere housing' but the commercial weight of private house builders and the fixation of local planning with regulation rather than place-making failed to show significant improvement.

CABE disappeared during 'austerity' and the momentum provided by design review was lost. Disappointment with 'anywhere housing' continued. A small number of practitioner and lobbying organisations began to emerge; one being Civic Voice to which Ripon Civic Society gives its support.

Toward the end of the last decade Civic Voice joined with other groups such as Place Alliance to find effective ways of improving design. Now that CABE was no longer available to show best practice, the Barlett School of Planning at London University saw an opportunity for a research programme that over time could reveal whether improvement was being achieved and if so how.



An initial step was to set out the basic concepts. All organisations have their own jargon as introduced in a Place Alliance report of 2019 titled 'Place Value and the Ladder of Place Quality'. Let's see how it was expressed:

The urban places that most of us inhabit are both physical and social, made up of buildings, streets, spaces and landscape, various land uses and a community of users.
In recent years the evidence base that links better place design with value has grown significantly. The evidence indicates that high-quality places add value in regard to health, social, economic and environmental outcomes.

What has Place Value and Place Quality got to do with Ripon? A small city of around 17000 people with a significant rural hinterland; is this an 'urban place' in the sense of the large towns, cities and metropolitan areas of the British Isles? Would this thinking work in Ripon? What might we learn?

Ripon is growing and will continue to do so. Apart from the many small developments of recent times there are the larger housing estates being built at Doublegates and Whitcliffe Lane, 390 dwellings are to be built at West Lane and thirty or so at Ure Bank. Then there is redevelopment of Ripon Barracks. As Place Alliance writes - places … *both physical and social, made up of buildings, streets, spaces and landscape, various land uses and a community of users.*

Place Value and Place Quality should matter to us and this report uncovers the qualities of the built environment that are thought to be good for us and those less so. These qualities are seen to contribute to health, social, economic and environmental outcomes. The sum of these outcomes = Place Value.

The following pages set out the criteria at each of the four steps on the Ladder.
REQUIRE - essential qualities to be achieved
ASPIRE - things that policies need to promote
BEWARE - sometimes experts disagree over what makes a good place
AVOID - and some things are not likely to result in good places anywhere
Are you convinced by these? How applicable are they to Ripon?

At YHACS we heard that this approach has been used recently to assess nearly three hundred developments distributed across English regions. Since the end of CABE regrettably there has been little overall improvement.

It's worth noting that this approach is being followed by Homes England in its proposals for Clotherholme, in particular the Design Guide for future reserved matters applications.

Ladder of Place Quality		
Step on the ladder	Criteria	Evidence and explanation
REQUIRE	**Greenness** in the built environment	notably the presence of trees and grass, water, and high-quality open space
	A **mix of uses**	diversity of land uses within a neighbourhood
	Low levels of vehicular traffic	
	Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly design	including well-connected, safe pedestrian paths and bicycle routes passing through a high- quality local public realm
	Use of more **compact patterns of development**	that are well connected, less sprawling and not fragmented from other urban areas
	Convenient **connection to a public transport network**	
Summary	Only qualities exhibiting the strongest evidence that they improve everyday wellbeing and strongly enhance place value have been included in the REQUIRE list, making them absolutely essential to the design of the built environment. As this list only includes the absolute essentials – which tend also to be very tangible and objective and therefore measurable – these qualities can be required through the formal tools of design governance (such as in planning policy, zoning, street adoption powers or through the use of design codes).	
ASPIRE	**Visual permeability**	being able to see into and through a space
	Sense of place	distinctive sense of local character
	Pedestrian scale	design of streets and buildings are clearly oriented to the scale of the pedestrian
	Façade continuity	façades form a continuous and coherent street wall
	Natural surveillance	the creation of space that is well overlooked by surrounding buildings
	Presence of **street-level activity**	
	Good **street lighting**	where streets are well lit to improve street safety, but not over-illuminated, thus creating light pollution
	A **denser street network**	avoiding large urban blocks in favour of smaller ones
	Low vehicular **traffic speeds**	
	Low neighbourhood noise	

	Presence of **public spaces** that are attractive, welcoming, comfortable and adaptable	
	A positive, **sociable threshold between public and private spaces**	such as front gardens, porches and external seating areas
	Retention and integration of **built heritage** into new development	
	Natural features and a diverse ecosystem integrated throughout the built environment	
	Architectural quality and beauty in the built environment	
Summary	Though some of these qualities (such as façade continuity or traffic speeds) are universally applicable, many require more careful interpretation that is tailored to fit local circumstances. This can be achieved through informal tools of design governance such as design reviews or design guidance.	
BEWARE	**Particular architectural styles**	the evidence does not clearly show superiority of any one architectural style over others
	Higher- versus lower-density development	(there is conflicting evidence linking both higher- and lower-density living to health outcomes, sociability and perceptions of crime and safety)
	Extreme densities	there is conflicting evidence relating extreme densities to carbon reduction, social welfare and ecological richness
	High-rise living	the evidence is unclear regarding the social impact of living in high-rise buildings, although it does seem unsuitable for families with children
	Street length and **pedestrian connectivity**	the health and crime evidence diverges on the relative benefits and drawbacks of longer versus shorter streets and on how connected street networks need to be
	Cul-de-sacs	there is conflicting evidence on the impact of using cul- de-sacs on crime and safety, property value, sociability and children's play
	Separating vehicle and pedestrian routes through urban areas	the evidence is weak and conflicting regarding pedestrian safety outcomes

	Use of shared spaces	there is conflicting evidence relating use of shared spaces – spaces shared by vehicles and pedestrians – to levels of both actual and perceived safety
	Proximity of retail to residential properties	there are divergences within the economic evidence base on the relative size and impact of negative externalities related to living in extreme proximity to retail
Summary	It is generally best to avoid being too prescriptive in policy or guidance regarding the above qualities, as more research is required to fully understand the impact of the beware place qualities.	
AVOID	**Car-dependent** and extensive forms of single-use suburbanisation	
	Relentlessly **hard urban space** with an absence of local green space	
	Too much very local permeability (connectivity) in the pedestrian path network	e.g. unsurveilled back alleys and routes
	The presence of **rear parking courts** and other poorly overlooked or segregated areas	
	Poor maintenance and dilapidation (including of green spaces)	
	A **sense of overcrowding** in residential buildings and estates	
	Presence in close proximity to homes of **too many unhealthy food options**	
	Presence of roads with **higher traffic loads and speeds**, wider carriage-way widths that are elevated or which otherwise cause severance in the local built environment	
Summary	Through formal tools of design governance (such as planning policy, zoning, street adoption powers or the use of design codes) these tangible and measurable qualities are easily avoided.	

Pictures can make a point more immediately than words. There are times when words can prompt the imagination. Hopefully this is one of them.

Heritage Open Days 2022

Heritage Open Days 9-18 September 2022

For many years the Society has participated in this annual festival which celebrates the country's rich heritage. The aim is to get as wide an audience as possible to enjoy what an area has to offer by making sites free to access or by the putting on of free events.

Once again RCS will be opening the Gazebo on Blossomgate (with permission from HBC) and we are encouraging others in the city to take part. Here are just three more to enjoy:

- Ripon Museums will be offering a chance to experience the dark holding cell beneath the Courthouse (with the permission of the Cathedral)
- Neil Clayton's wonderful collection of items from Ripon's engineering and industrial past will again be on show at his site beside the canal on Dallamires Lane.
- The beautifully-restored St Wilfrid's Catholic Church on Coltsgate Hill will be extending a warm invitation for all to visit.

This year we are encouraging even more sites to get involved in the wider area around Ripon. Some already take part such as Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal (the National Trust are sponsors of Heritage Open Days nationally) and the Landmark Trust will open The Ruin, their holiday property at Hackfall. For others this will be their first HODs opening .

The Society is working with the Ripon Business Improvement District (the BID) to ensure as many sites as we can are open this year in recognition of just what the Ripon area has to offer. Look out for publicity material nearer the time to showcase our heritage to a wider world.

For more information please visit www.heritageopendays.org.uk The HODs website will include listings for all events in due course.

Andrew Curtis and Richard Taylor



Left: The Gazebo on Blossomgate

Right: The Ruin at Hackfall (Photo courtesy Landmark Trust)



Updates

Following the success of previous lighting displays, Ripon Museum Trust are once again lighting up the front of the Workhouse Museum with a new lighting display celebrating people. The theme of the latest projection was chosen following a vote across social media where followers and the local community overwhelmingly voted for people.

Entitled *People of Ripon's Past*, the new display uses historic photographs from the Ripon Re-Viewed collection which are projected onto the museum building on Allhallowgate each evening between 6pm and 12am. The display will run until Monday 21 March.

Images chosen feature people from across the community of Ripon including North Eastern Railway staff, workers from Ostcliffe's Tannery, land girls from Kirkby Malzeard and a refugee family from Belgium amongst others.







Footnote from Ripon Museum Trust
There are lots of projects going on in Curation at Ripon Museums Trust which means we have some exciting volunteering opportunities - we need help with cataloguing, cleaning and conserving objects, research for exhibitions, digitising our collection and community engagement. No experience is necessary as training will be provided. If you are interested or would like to find out more please do visit our website Volunteering - Ripon Museums

Shedding a bit more light …

Ginnels are important to Ripon Business Improvement District - the BID. Following cleaning of several last autumn, BID are progressing with better lighting. It's been good to see Lavender Alley at the head of the list especially as we provided the interpretation panels in 2018.





More on military heritage at Clotherholme …

Our September 2021 Newsletter carried a piece on Ripon Camp. Since then more information continues to emerge.
It was recognised that before long the planning application to redevelop Ripon Barracks would be decided and before then the new research needed to be made known to Homes England and Harrogate Borough Council. Ripon Civic Society offered to use our position as a consultee on the application to support the emerging Ripon Military Heritage Trust and promote a military heritage centre project.
In January supplementary information was submitted by Homes England but this did not update the military heritage. Ripon Civic Society has submitted representations on military heritage on behalf of the emerging trust and asks that this is included in the development if planning permission is granted.



Meeting in person …

Our March meeting *Ripon's Industrial Heritage* was held in person at the Workhouse to the pleasure of those attending.



Full Stop

You may remember that our February talk online had the opaque title of *Why is April 2023 important for Ripon Civic Society?* And a dry topic it was too, all about local government reorganisation in North Yorkshire.

Elections will be held on 5 May for the new North Yorkshire Council. This will provide all local services and replace the present county and district councils. Councillors elected in May will serve for five years. Up to April 2023 they will be County Councillors, then they become the North Yorkshire Council. At that date Harrogate Borough Council will be abolished. There will also be elections in May for Ripon City Council.

So, why is this important? North Yorkshire Council will be the largest council area in England. It will use parliamentary constituencies for its area committee structure. As we should expect there will be area offices and local customer access points. What is especially interesting is the opportunity to form community networks. There are around a couple of dozen towns and large villages where these networks could play a part. Ripon and its area (which defines Ripon Civic Society's area of public benefit as a charity) is clearly one of these.

According to current proposals community networks would bring together residents, councillors, town and parish councils, MPs, voluntary, community and social enterprises, local businesses and other public sector partners like the NHS and police, fire and rescue. They would encourage and develop local action and ideas, leading to greater collaboration, community focused priorities and delivery.

Local (parish and town) councils have long been able to hold public assets and deliver services. Community networks could be supported by their capability, capacity and willingness to do so.

Ripon Civic Society is not political. This doesn't stop us having a view on the well-being of our city and area and contributing to how this is articulated. If a candidate for North Yorkshire Council or Ripon City Council comes seeking your vote you might want to ask them …

"What does a Ripon Community Network look like for you, what will you do to support one and what should it achieve?"