RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

September 2025

AUTUMN EDITION

SOCIETY PONDERS RIPON'S FUTURE FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION



Obelisk and Town Hall - the North Yorkshire Local Plan will affect everyone in Ripon

RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY HAS provided comprehensive comments on the proposed North Yorkshire Local Plan. North Yorkshire Council's 'First Conversation' posed questions about the future direction of the county under the unitary authority. Here we look at a few of the main points we made.

The Society first set out what makes Ripon one of the most important historic settlements and unique among the settlements in the county: it is

- The only city
- The only settlement with a Cathedral - hence the 'Cathedral City of the Dales' attribution
- The only one with a World Heritage Site close by at Studley Royal/Fountains Abbey

and it has

- a marketplace designed as a Roman forum with the first free-standing obelisk in the country
- the intangible asset of the hornblowing tradition, thought to be unbroken since medieval times
- the only settlement in the UK with a trio of historic law and order sites open to the public - a former Workhouse (the most complete in England), Courthouse and Prison/Police Station
- surviving structures and features marking the city's important place in 20th century military history
- A fine setting on the edge of the Vale of York with the Nidderdale National Landscape to the west and Special Landscape Areas in and around the city
- Three rivers and a canal

We noted that all this contributes to Ripon's character and appearance, providing tangible significance and a sense of identity for the city and intangible significance to the people that live here. This local distinctiveness is particular to Ripon and should be protected and celebrated.

The Society then dealt with a number of significant matters. *(continued on page 2)*

Sustainable Development
We noted the current housing targets for the county, though we pointed out that patterns of living and working caused by the Covid pandemic, and changes to patterns of retail and leisure due to online shopping, for example, would seem to make it difficult to predict what these future needs might be.

We pointed out that the county is unique in containing a relatively low population in a very large area constrained by some of the most important protected, and visited, landscapes in the country.



Planned development needs to recognise the well-established patterns of development and character of the county that already exist, and which is proportionate to the various areas. Development should be planned for but not necessarily implemented if the actual need is not there. There is no point building a housing estate if there are no jobs for people to do, or no point building an office park if there is no one to work there. Growth should be planned to be adaptable as needs continue to evolve.

Extensions to Ripon
We do not support the exploration in the North Yorkshire Local Plan of further large extensions to Ripon. There is already a significant, not yet started, urban extension for 1300 homes planned at Clotherholme in Ripon, with building projected to continue until 2040.

Identification of additional large sites in Ripon is also severely limited by the designated National Landscape immediately to the west, the extensive flood land to the east and north, the inadequate historic road system and the deficient public transport options.

Service Centres and Development Limits
Ripon has the status of a tier 2 Key Service Centre in the Plan's settlement hierarchy; the Society agrees with this, but notes that the villages of Sharow and Littlethorpe relate closely to Ripon and should be linked in the plan hierarchy and in the search for sites for development. Pateley Bridge and Masham, in the wider area around Ripon, are designated as tier 4 Neighbourhood Service Centres. The Society believes that this underestimates their significance: they have good rather than basic ranges of services because they serve much wider catchment areas than their local populations and have a significant tourism function and should be moved to tier 3.

Consideration should be given to the wider catchment areas and populations of the small towns/larger villages in the more rural areas rather than ranking them according to the populations within the settlement boundaries. The importance of tourism should also be a factor.

We note that development limits have, in the past, been drawn tightly around the built footprint of settlements, restricting development to existing built up areas and making it very difficult to gain approval for many buildings, particularly dwellings, just outside or next to existing developments. In some cases, this makes it almost impossible for settlements to expand. We suggest that if, as suggested, development limits were removed, there should be policies that introduce 'buffer zones', similar to that which in Ripon protects the Fountains Abbey/Studley Royal World Heritage Site, to protect the fringes of settlements. Such an approach would require robust criteria-based policies that are enforceable: this represents an opportunity for a radical new approach to development planning, though, of course, the devil will be in the detail.

Open Spaces
We said that In the case of new development,



planning for and maintaining open space is crucial for creating safe and healthy communities. In the case of Ripon, the development of the former college site in the early 2000s included provision for play parks, areas of woodland, and a playing field. All of these spaces are valued locally on the development and citywide, with many people making use of the green lungs within the city. The recent withdrawal of the proposal to build a cathedral annexe on Kirkgate Park *(above)* has also demonstrated

the importance that the local community places on these spaces. The Council must ensure that the Local Green Spaces already designated in Ripon's adopted Neighbourhood Plan are carried through to the new Local Plan. This should be a formality and not require further consideration.

Urban trees should be genuinely protected and the council should encourage additional urban tree planting.



As well as communal spaces, private gardens are also important to biodiversity and help provide green corridors through the built environment. The Council should consider whether a 'minimum garden size' policy could be implemented to work hand in hand with nationally designated space standards for dwellings. This could work alongside providing more smaller, affordable homes that would maintain housing densities.

Landscape Character

Ripon Civic Society welcomes the proposed preparation of a landscape character assessment, but urges this to go much deeper than a box-ticking exercise. The criteria for assessment must be updated so that they include a wider range of landscape types and consider how best to enhance the currently protected areas, including the Nidderdale National Landscape Area, which is of particular significance to Ripon. The Society would like to see consideration being given to extending its area. Work should be done to identify historic landscapes, and policies introduced to ensure their survival as important indications of the county's past and as possible exemplars of future land use.

Footpaths and routes already exist along many of the rivers and enhancing these with appropriate lighting and surface materials would make them even more accessible and well-used. They already connect many parts of the city, and the small scale of Ripon means it is an ideal location for this to be undertaken.

The Council proposed to consider pollution and ground conditions under a single heading. The Society pointed out that the gypsum dissolution that causes ground instability in the Ripon area is not pollution and does not have the same cause or effect.

Changing role of Ripon city centre

The 2019 Ripon Neighbourhood Plan identified the city centre as Ripon's hub and 'meeting place of choice' serving a wide area. We made the point that recent changes included fewer banks and building societies, more restaurants and coffee shops, more living over the shop apartments and holiday accommodation. We would welcome greater use of outdoor spaces for eating and drinking, subject to safeguards for residents and pavement users.

To allow local retail to thrive, a diverse and independent retail offer that attracts locals and tourists alike should be encouraged alongside complementary uses such as cafes etc. Whether local businesses can be encouraged with a lower level of business rates should be explored.

Part of the Society's remit is to encourage good design. It is time, we said, to require new development to be designed by suitably qualified architects and designers, and for works to our important listed buildings to be given to experts. High quality design can also be aided by writing sensible and progressive design codes for specific areas that allow for a range of design styles if they respond to context and are locally distinctive.

Heritage Protection

One of the main reasons why the historic environment of Ripon is in largely good shape has been the active involvement of local authority conservation and planning staff working with community organisations such as Ripon Civic Society, the Ripon Business Improvement District (BID) and Ripon City Council. The loss of local authority conservation staff to administer the systems of protection means that the voluntary sector has a growing role in heritage protection. Ripon Civic Society will continue to do what it can to offer advice and support to owners and to NYC to help ensure that heritage assets in Ripon have a sustainable future.



With special thanks to Rachel Wigginton, Mandy Whitehead and Ed Jagger for their work in producing our responce to this consultation.

The full text of our response to the 'Conversation' can be found on the Society's website at
https://riponcivicsociety.org.uk/2025/07/18/north-yorkshire-local-plan-first-conversation-2025-comments-by-ripon-civic-society/

DOROTHY TAYLOR - THE SOCIETY'S FIRST WOMAN CHAIRMAN



Dorothy Taylor with *(left)* David Winpenny and (*centre)* Richard Taylor and represenatives of Booth's store at the planting of the Society's 40th anniversary tree in the car park off Marshall Way.

Dorothy Taylor, for many years Chair of the Society, died in the summer. Moira Smith, who served as the Society's Secretary under Dorothy, pays tribute.

Dorothy took over the post of Chairman (she would never countenance being just Chair!) of the Civic Society in 1998, at a defining time for the Society. The Society took its role of care of the Conservation Area of the City of Ripon very seriously. Although many people were aware of the great need for sympathetic development of this small market town to increase the viability of businesses, which were dependent on the local population for employees and for sales, there was a reluctance to tolerate wholesale building of houses. In addition, the College of Ripon and York St John was under threat because of lack of adequate funding and of easy transport to York or Leeds. Both the Society and the city benefitted from the academic presence of the staff and resources of the college. Its eventual closure caused a huge readjustment of the economic environment.

Dorothy was a thinker and an organiser, a very good cook and a very determined person. She was quick to draw on the abilities of those around her and able to seek out gifted people to generate new ideas and develop old ones. The city was trying to encourage new business into Ripon and this generated a great impetus to improve the looks of the buildings in the city and development of new contacts with the councils of Harrogate Borough and North Yorkshire to encourage sympathetic development of transport links. Ripon Improvement Trust created many opportunities and its committees, covering many aspects of life in Ripon, were actively encouraged under her leadership. The Environment Group, with its comprehensive membership, created wide links across the whole area.

With the expertise on its committee the Civic Society used the opportunity to draw up designs for the city's central area and for traffic management. The decision to construct the by-pass allowed for freer thinking and the present city centre is the result of Dorothy's encouragement for this aspect of the work of the Society.

She and her husband, Maurice, also encouraged the historical emphasis on publications, the historical plaques and the awards appropriate to an historic city.

The Civic Society was only a part of Dorothy's influence on the life of Ripon. She was instrumental in setting up the U3A organisation locally. She always focussed her forward-looking approach with a lively interest in the history of this City. She is much missed.

David Winpenny, Co-Chair, adds:

For the last year of Dorothy's Chairmanship I had the pleasure (and sometimes the task!) of serving as Co-Chairman with her. This was in the Society's 40th anniversary year, which appropriately culminated her 13 years at the helm. I think we worked well together, and I was always grateful both for her knowledge of Ripon (and of Maurice's, too) and her determination always to do the best for the city - despite having been born in Harrogate . . .

There are few people who have had so profound effect on the city. She was a great motivator, and it was said of her that if she saw a committee, she would be determined to join it. So many organisations, in addition to the Society, benefitted from her work, and we are all so sorry to have lost her wisdom and her grit.

RIPON OPENS DOORS FOR HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS this year run from 12 to 21 September and offer a wide variety of places and events in and around Ripon

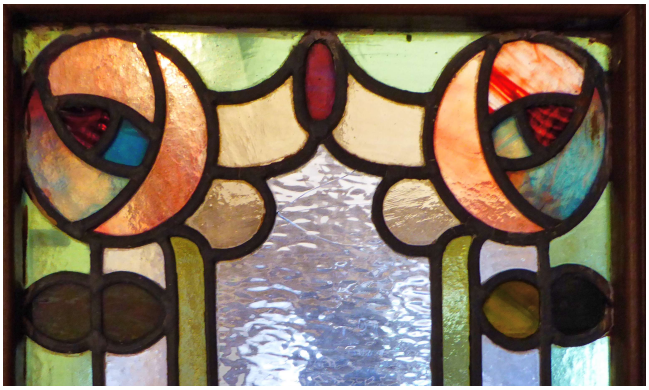


As usual, the Civic Society will be opening the **Gazebo**, off Blossomgate *(above)*, this year on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 September, from 1.00pm to 4.00pm. These will be the only opportunities this year to see this Grade II* listed building, which is hidden away from public view, so if you've never been, now's your chance!

In association with the opening of the refurbished St Wilfrid's Church, the Society's Co-Chair Richard Taylor will give a talk about the First Marquess of Ripon - '**In the Footsteps of the Marquess**' - at the church on Coltsgate Hill at 7.30pm on Tuesday 16 September - booking is required.



On Wednesday 17 September Richard Taylor and David Winpenny will lead a short walk of about an hour, under the title '**What's Up In Ripon**?'. We shall look up at details often missed on Ripon's historic buildings. The walk starts as the Obelisk in the Market Place at 11.00am - no booking is needed.



With help of Ripon BID, and with thanks to the owner Sterne Properties the Society has organised has organised a series of 'hard hat' tours inside the **Spa Baths** building on Park Street as it is being refurbished. There is the chance to see the wonderful art nouveau tiling and stained glass *(above)* in the former pump room. Tours (which must be booked in advance) take place on Thursday 18 September and Saturday 20 September at 10.00, 10.30, 11.00 and 11.30.

We are also unveiling two new plaques during Heritage Open Days, both of them on Friday 19 September. A plaque marking the City's oddest Listed Building, the Sewer Gas Light on Victoria Grove, will take place at 2.00pm, and a plaque on Alma House, once Skellfield School and formerly home to antiquarian Thomas Stubbs, will be unveiled at 3.00pm. Everyone is welcome to attend. There will be a full report in the next newsletter.



Other events in and around Ripon include a Heritage Tour at Clifton Castle, a tour of the architecture of St John's Church, Sharow, an Open Day at Ripon Town Hall, visits to Allhallowgate Methodist Church, to Holy Trinity Church, St Mary Magdalen Chapel and Christ the Consoler in the grounds of Newby Hall, a Fun Historical Ripon Cathedral Trail, The Masons' Story at Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, Ripon & District Light Railway *(above)* and Historical Ripon events at Ripon Library.

For detail of all events and for booking as necessary, go to *https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/* and search for Ripon.

With thanks to Andrew Curtis for leading on our HODs events

PLANNING REPORT

The Society's Planning Team looks at the weekly Planning Lists from North Yorkshire Council, and comments as appropriate, and has also been involved in identifying green spaces and bigger special landscape areas in response to calls from the Council.

Two major projects are on-going:



- Clotherholme: Homes England, which is dealing with the site of the barracks, has produced a strategy framework document for the military heritage, and work is also progressing on recording the historic huts on the site to satisfy other conditions of the outline planning permission. Ripon Military Heritage Trust, on which the Society is represented, is watching progress.



Canal Gates car park, Studley Royal, showing the scarring of the landscape *(aerial image: Google Earth)*

- Studley Royal: Now that planning permission has been given for a new building at the Canal Gates entrance, we are awaiting the setting up of a meeting about the car park, which we consider needs better layout and screening. We are also hoping to be involved in the development of information about the history of the estate in the new building.

Planning correspondence can be found on the Society's website: www.riponcivicsociety.org.uk/planning-correspondence/

SUMMER VISITS 2025

WE HAD TWO very successful visits over the summer, benefitting from glorious weather.

On a beautiful May evening Dame Susan Cunliffe-Lister showed us around the gardens and estate of Swinton Park, highlighting the planting and the 18th-century designed landscape. The garden produces a vast quantity of fruit and vegetables for the hotel, and Dame Susan generously gave of her time in explaining the secrets of cultivation! We are most grateful to her; she asked that donations went to the work of the Yorkshire Air Ambulance.



Dame Susan Cunliffe-Lister speaking to some the group by one of the lakes at Swinton

In July Geoff Dickson, a volunteer with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and one of our speakers in last season's series of talks, showed us many of the military graves in Ripon Cemetery, and told the stories of those commemorated there, including a number of German soldiers. We are most grateful to Geoff for allowing us an insight into one of the most poignant aspects of our local cemetery.



Geoff Dickson with the Society's visitors by some of the Commonwealth War Graves in Ripon Cemetery

Thank you to David Hall and to Alison Brayshaw for arranging and facilitating these visits.

MARKING THE MARQUESS OF RIPON - 200 YEARS ON



GEORGE FREDERICK ROBINSON, later 1st Marquess of Ripon, was born in 10 Downing Street on 24 October 1827. A remarkable man and astute politician, he was throughout his life a pragmatic radical, on the side of working people and the poor of society.

He served in every Liberal cabinet from Palmerston's in 1861 to Asquith's in 1908. He averted war with the US after Britain seemed to aid the Confederate side in the American Civil War - he was made Marquess for that achievement and a Knight of the Garter.

He was Grand Master Mason of England until his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1874. He was later Viceroy of India. He died in 1909, and his statue stands in the Spa Gardens.

You can find out more about him at the talk '**In the Footsteps of the Marquess**' - at St Wilfrid's Church on Tuesday 16 September - *see page 5*)

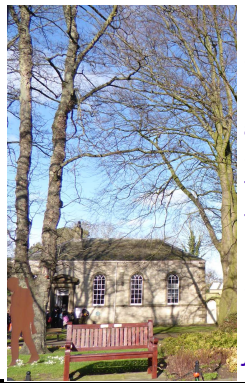
There are plans to mark the bicentenary of the Marquess's birth in 2027, and we should like input and ideas from our members - and others. First, do you think that we should celebrate his life, or is it too contentious an idea? Second, what form should it take? We already have a few ideas; for example:

- Commemorative gathering at the statue
- Walks around Ripon to key points of interest associated with the Marquess
- Links with Studley Royal in association with the National Trust



Do let us know what you think, and of any ideas you may have. We need to get on with the planning if we are to be ready for the bicentenary!
You can email *chair@riponcivicsociety.org.uk*

KIRKGATE PARK FRIENDS



Members may wish to know about the recently-formed **Friends of Kirkgate Park**, a group dedicated to enhancing and protecting the Park next to the Cathedral with flowers, shrubs and more benches to create a relaxing and welcoming environment. **Find out more at** *friendsofkirkgatepark.org.uk/*

LAST CALL FOR SILVER

IN THE LAST issue of the newsletter we wondered if anyone had a spare piece of silverware that they might wish to donate to the Society as a replacement trophy for our Craftsmanship Shield, which has come to the end of its days.

No one has so far been willing to give up either a family heirloom or a piece of unregarded silver; if it's modesty or forgetfulness that has prevented your offering us your treasure, we hope that this reminder might jog your memory. Please email us at info@riponcivicsociety.org.uk; if you wish to be anonymous, privacy is guaranteed! Thank you.

NEXT QUESTION?



WE OFTEN GET email enquiries from people searching either for information about specific buildings in Ripon or, more widely, about aspects of the city's history.

Over the last few months we have answered - or pointed the enquirer towards sources of information - about the Public Rooms (now Sigma Antiques), early medieval Ripon, the former Chain or Archer Bridge and, most startling of all, a request for a list of hangings in Ripon. It's flattering to think the Society has such a wealth of information at its fingertips!

OUR PROGRAMME

HERE'S THE PROGRAMME of talks and events for the forthcoming season. We hope to see you there! REMEMBER that we are now meeting at Allhallowgate Methodist Church, at 7.30pm; tea, coffee and biscuits from 7.00pm

- **September 4th - *LITTLE KINGDOMS: placing Ripon in an early medieval realm*** – Alex Harvey
- **September 12th – 21st - Heritage Open Days – see page 5**
- **October 2nd – *REDESIGNING THE NORTHERN LANDSCAPE: Thomas White (c.1736-1811), landscape designer and tree planter*** – Louise Wickham
- **November 6th – AGM – plus *an update on the MILITARY HERITAGE TRUST*** – *Jane Furse / Guy Wilson*

Ripon Military Heritage Trust

- **December 4th - *SCIENCE AND SAND – the remarkable life and career of Ripon resident Charles Piazzi Smyth*** – David Winpenny



Winter at Eavestone Lake

- **January 8th 2026–EAVESTONE LAKE, SPA GILL AND CHINESE WOODS – *revelations arising from Skell Valley project research*** – Mark Newman



Allhallowgate, Ripon, has many listed cottages

- **February 5th – 'I'VE GOT A LITTLE LIST …….' – taking stock of historic buildings. What is a listed building, when did the system start and what's now included in the national list? –** Richard Taylor
- **March 5th – MANAGING LAND-BASED BUSINESSES IN AN EVER-CHANGING POLICY LANDSCAPE** – Harriet Ranson, Country Land and Business Association
- **April 2nd – DESIGN AWARDS EVENING**
- **May 7th – HARROGATE'S SAVIOUR: Edward Wilson Dixon and the Roundhill Reservoir–** Graham Seel

RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 517434

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THIS YEAR'S COMMITTEE

President - Nigel Rawlinson
Co-Chairs - Richard Taylor and David Winpenny
Treasurer - David Wilson
Membership - Alison Brayshaw
Planning Lead - Rachel Wigginton
Website, Talks & Visits, Awards - David Hall
Heritage Open Days - Andrew Curtis
Uredale Community Partnership, Ripon ReViewed, Ripon Together - Mandy Whitehead
Plaques - Richard Willis
Members - Rachel Greenwood and Ed Jagger
Communications - David Winpenny
Newsletters and External Relations - Richard Taylor and David Winpenny