

THE BERWICKSHIRE CIVIC SOCIETY



Mouth Bridge

Newsletter No 32

2011/2012

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www.berwickshirecivicsociety.com

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

May I once more extend both my and the Society's thanks to Alexander and Aileen Hay for kindly allowing us to hold our 2011 Annual General Meeting at Duns Castle last October, they were very generous hosts and made us feel most welcome.

Also thank you to Denise Walton who delivered such an interesting talk on James Hutton, who is not only considered to be the father of modern geology, but as we now know was also an early agricultural improver and a contemporary of many of the leading figures of the Enlightenment.

The Society has had a busy year and we have made progress on a number of fronts.

In July we had a successful launch of our free accompanied entrance scheme, held at Thirlestane Castle. On production of their membership card members should now be granted free entrance to a number of Berwickshire's principle buildings, when accompanied by an entrance fee paying guest. Presently they are:

Thirlestane Castle
Gunsgreen House
Manderston House
Paxton House

In the forthcoming year we hope to enroll one or two extra buildings into the scheme.

I would like to thank Captain Maitland-Carew and Ian Garner for our tour of Thirlestane Castle last July. We were all impressed at how much had been done to restore the building despite the odds.

We now have a website: berwickshirecivicsociety.com which is proving a useful way of making our presence known and we shall continue to add to it during the coming year. Especial thanks to Sir John Swinton for the preparation of a very interesting account of the Society's involvement with the battle to save Mouth Bridge. His article is also featured in this year's magazine.

There is a gallery on the website which has a few scenes of Berwickshire but could do with more. If anyone has any images that might be appropriate please do send them in jpeg format to enquiries@berwickshirecivicsociety.com and we shall select some for display on the website.

Since September 2010, we have reviewed 110 planning applications for changes to Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings, a similar number to the previous 12 months. We are pleased that many of our suggestions have been adopted.

The Society is consulted on wind turbine installations by both SBC and developers so we have formed a sub-committee to debate their impact on Berwickshire, to which we invited other local wind turbine action groups to attend. Please read featured article by R J Morris. Also 'Stop Press' article.

Since the formation of the Society there has not been a more important time for the 'look' of Berwickshire - not since the march of the 'pylons' across the countryside have there been such dramatic changes in so short a space of time, nor so many proposals for changes that affect our landscape.

We remain in touch with the Scottish Civic Trust and attended this year's conference, at which we made new contacts with other like-minded groups. We are encouraging the Trust to become more involved with co-ordinating different Civic groups that face similar concerns, in the first instance the proliferation of wind turbines. By voicing those concerns we became involved in Communities Against Turbines and attended their conference in Ayr, which led to the debate in Scottish Parliament on December 1st.

On a smaller and more local scale, the Society has taken initial steps to persuade the SBC to consult with us on the placement, style and quantity of street furniture, initially in Conservation Areas. At the moment no or very little consultation takes place regarding these items, beyond internal Council department level but it is something to which we are seeking to contribute in the future.

As part of that first step the Society has been encouraged by SBC in our plan to survey the traditional street furniture of Berwickshire, and it is

expected that with the help of Robin Kent, the Society Honorary Architect, we will shortly be briefing one or two students to undertake this task on an internship basis. The results will be instrumental in helping us and the Council decide what items should be protected or enhanced and will be published on our website. Any information that would help in the compilation of the survey would be most welcome. We particularly wish to locate Victorian or George VI post boxes, mile markers, fingerposts, stock or human drinking fountains and all other aged items of use to the road user.

Spottiswood Lodge clockfaces. This is something that the Society last gave a grant to undertake, over 20 years ago. After some protracted correspondence we have now had quotes from the same firm who last did the job and shortly we will be considering what contribution we can offer.

We have seen a small number of new members this year, and following suggestions at last year's AGM, we have drawn up a recruiting list which we are in the process of acting upon, and as a consequence we hope to see a gradual increase in the size of the Society this year.

However, whilst new members are extremely welcome it is the existing members that we look to for help and support in the first instance. In order not to overburden welcome voluntary help we are happy to restrict any jobs to very limited and precise roles. We hope that even the busiest member might have just a small amount of time to offer the Society.

John Marjoribanks and Keith Renton both resigned from the Committee at the AGM. John has been a valued committee member for many years, latterly serving as Vice-Chairman. Once more may I thank them both on behalf of myself, the Committee and the Society.

Robin Kent will replace Keith as our Hon Architect. Many of you will recall that Robin has been our hon architect on a previous occasion and has extensive knowledge of architectural conservation. We are delighted to welcome him back to the Committee. Gregory Lauder-Frost has been nominated as our new Vice-Chair and we also welcome Mark Rowley onto the Committee. I am also delighted to report that Judy Torrance has joined us as Committee Secretary.

Matthew Gibb
Chairman

Honorary Planning Adviser's Report for 2011

In the last 12 months, we have endeavoured to carry out the Society's main aims:

To encourage high standards of architecture and town and country planning in Berwickshire and comment on plans of the Local Authority.

We reviewed 110 planning applications, a similar number to the previous year. Many were for changes to Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. We are pleased that most of our suggested changes have been adopted.

There has been a slow down in the unfortunate trend to replace wooden vertical sliding sash windows with non-sustainable uPVC windows of inappropriate design, and a notable reinstatement of wooden vertical sliding sashes in Greenlaw. We hope that Scottish Borders Council (SBC) will enforce their new draft guidelines on Replacement Windows so that many more original windows, and shutters, will be refurbished. If repair is not possible then windows should be replaced exactly like-for-like in terms of astragals and mouldings (incorporating double-glazing if desired). This will help to preserve the historical integrity of our urban and rural buildings and contribute significantly to that important sense of place.

Not every planning issue has a happy ending. Crates and waste material still obstruct the pavement illegally outside the Co-op in Newtown Street Duns. The Society has continued to press for exploiting underused space within the upper storey of the existing building for managing deliveries and waste. However, the Council has recently approved an application to construct a small wooden store within the car park. This does not seem to be an appropriate solution to the problem because access will be through a constricted public area. On the positive side, a condition of approval is that all storage is taken off the Newtown Street frontage.

The economic downturn has meant that approval has not been finalised

on several interesting proposals for a substantial number of new houses at Reston Auction Mart (111) and Bogangreen Coldingham (87), both with economical district heating systems.

Photovoltaic solar panels to generate electricity (under the feed-in tariff) have begun to appear on roofs. Planners are advising that where Listed Buildings are concerned, the panels should be located, where possible, out of public view.

To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest

The recent re-opening of Greenlaw Town Hall is cause for great celebration. The Society contributed to the cost of the splendid lantern in the vestibule and we were pleased that the architect took up our suggestion of making the disabled access ramps less obtrusive than in the original design.

It is good news too that the conversion of Houndwood Church to a crematorium has an expected completion date in April 2012. It will be also be available once again for church services. The original plan was to box in many of the interesting original features, including the fine Corinthian pilasters of the chancel arch and the plaster cornices and ceiling rose. Following our objection, these features will now be restored and open to public view.

It is also good to see sensitive upgrading of a fishing bothy at St Abbs to form a marine research laboratory and of large houses and/or their surrounding landscapes at Milne Graden, Cruxfield, Bughtrig, Kaimes and Swinton.

Some "Buildings at Risk" have come off Historic Scotland's register, including four cottages at Blackadder West where approval has been given to create a single dwelling. On the other hand, it is sad that permission has been granted, on safety grounds, to demolish part of the 18th century stable block at Mid-Edrom. A condition of the demolition is that the stones are numbered and stored for possible future use.

We were also disturbed that a planning official approved the erection of two 100Kw wind turbines 47.5m (156ft) high inside the 2km area of "significant restraint" near Hume Castle under "delegated powers". This is a process

invoked when fewer than five objections are received. Unfortunately, very few members of the public were either aware of the exact location of the proposed site, inaccurately described in the application, or able to visit the area during the period of severe weather. In spite of these problems, no extension of the 21-day consultation period was allowed.

To stimulate public interest in, and care for the beauty, history and character of the County of Berwickshire

We participated in a number of conferences this year where we heard about some very interesting developments and also gained a broad perspective on issues similar to our own, which are being faced in other parts of Scotland. Meetings included the Built Environment Forum Scotland and the Scottish Civic Trust (to which BCS is affiliated).

At the Scottish Borders Design Forum, Legars Farm near Hume received the Scottish Borders Council's Design Award for Rural New Build. Their judging panel said "the new house was a modern interpretation of a traditional Borders farm house, facing south towards the Cheviots. The restrained colour palette and understated external detailing help to make the building recede into the landscape from a distance. The internal open plan arrangement flows through the ground floor and the windows are designed to maximise the views to the south and to Hume Castle to the north." Our Chairman decided Legars was also a worthy recipient of the Berwickshire Civic Society Award. Plans and elevations of the house can be seen online at the Scottish Borders Council planning website Ref. 09/00413/REM.

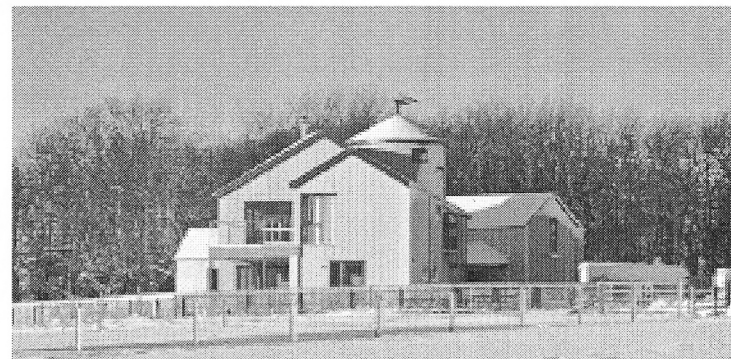
We also went to a well-attended meeting organised by Communities Against Wind Turbines Scotland (CATS). Speakers included MSPs representing Southern Scotland, the MEP for all of Scotland, doctors, engineers, conservationists and civic societies, as well as farmers from Ayrshire who are already closely overlooked by turbines emitting up to 70 decibels day and night (at least when the wind is blowing). CATS is set to become a national pressure group which has already resulted in a debate being held in the Scottish Parliament on 1 December 2011. Our response to the recent acceleration in windfarm proposals in Berwickshire is given in a separate report.

If you feel strongly about a particular planning application, you can object

to it as a member of the public within 21 days of its being advertised in the local press or the Council's web site. We would encourage you to do so by letter or online. Alternatively, you can contact us by email (barbara.morris@ireland.com) to discuss your concerns. Please also contact us if you hear about any potentially inappropriate developments before they become formal applications so that we can take early action. If, on the other hand, you particularly like a recent development or a refurbishment of an older property, then please let us know so that it can be considered for a future Berwickshire Civic Society award.

*Barbara Morris
Honorary Planning Adviser*

Keith Renton is standing down after 3 years as our Honorary Architect. The Society would like to thank him for his help, and also to congratulate him on winning a Scottish Borders Council Design Award Commendation for Rural New Build with his innovative design for a house at Thistlegorm, Buskins Farm near Coldingham.



Thistlegorm, Buskins Farm

Robin Kent has taken over from Keith as Honorary Architect and we welcome him back to the Committee.