

# Stoneygate Conservation Area Society AGM

## Annual Report 2021-22

### 1. Newsletters issued in August, December and April

Newsletter production continued uninterrupted throughout the year. The three issues were edited and produced by Nita Foale and Nick Knight. Feature articles were written by Nick and Jill Reville with other items by Nick and photographs from Matt Matthew, Neil Crutchley, Kavi Pujara and others. Distribution was organised by Gordon Hamylton with help from Aubrey Stevenson, Andy Bent, Sarah Measures, Bill and Jan Walker, Janet Bliss, Paul Griffiths, Alan Christopher and other committee members.

Please send us your suggestions for articles or comments about ones you've read. Social history, your own house history, your family links with the area; whatever your ideas, we'll always be happy to discuss them. We also welcome help with deliveries from anyone who can make a regular commitment in the third week of August, first week of December and the second week of April.

### 2. Website and social media

The project to restore the SCAS website is underway. The committee has agreed on a design and arrangements for regular maintenance, a budget has been set, a preferred developer selected and we are in the process of starting to build the site. Once again, we appreciate your patience and forbearance. We are still looking to appoint a permanent webmaster familiar with Wordpress who can oversee the creation of web content. If that sounds like a challenge you would enjoy, please let us know.

We are maintaining our digital presence via Twitter ([www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc](https://www.twitter.com/StoneygateCASoc)) and Nick continues to 'tweet' regularly, engaging with groups and individuals who share our interests/concerns.

### 3. Events for Members

Despite the successful rollout of the national vaccination programme in 2021 and the gradual relaxation of Covid restrictions, continuing uncertainties meant that we decided not to resume our normal social events until late Spring/Summer 2022. We are still seeking a successor to our Events Organiser, Arthur Stafford and would warmly welcome any interest from members.

### 4. Planning

Committee member Matt Matthew checks the City Council's weekly list of planning applications and identifies those within the conservation area or (close to it). Our planning team - Matt, Jill, Nick and David - then discuss applications that warrant closer examination.

2021-22 saw 106 applications (*compared to 148 in 2020-21*), 65 (88) relating to trees and 3 (10) seeking to discharge/vary conditions attached to planning permissions or make 'non-material amendments'. We commented on 13. One that we had previously commented on went to appeal.

#### *Appeals*

Probably the most significant event of the year was the Planning Inspectorate's dismissal of an appeal by Gladman Retirement Living against refusal of consent to build a 100-apartment care complex on the **Mary Gee Houses site in Ratcliffe Road**. While recognising the public benefits of the proposal, the inspector was extremely critical of the buildings' appearance and strongly supported the City Council's reasons for refusal. The outcome wholly vindicated its decision to challenge such a major project on grounds of poor design. It also highlighted the capability of its Conservation and Planning Officers.

We hope that the developers will now return with more sensitively designed proposals from an architect who can better understand and respond to the setting. One obstacle may be the City Council's current allocation of 100 dwellings to the site in its Housing Strategy and we have formally requested that it be reduced.

#### *Welcome developments*

Building work in the conservation area slowed down noticeably during the year; more than in 2020/21 following the first national lockdown, when it actually rose. That said, several notable projects got

underway, both to renovate and build. We were pleased to see work starting at **the vacant site between 12 and 16 Southernhay Road**. At **4 Knighton Road** Matt and Nick were invited to make a site visit where the owners and their architect outlined their plans and explained the reasons for removing the front hedge. We were especially pleased to see scaffolding erected at **169 Ratcliffe Road** which had been empty and neglected for months. Elsewhere in **Ratcliffe Road**; amended plans for a modern extension to the coachman's lodge at 'Knighton Hayes' were approved; an unsympathetic rear extension at No54 which would have impacted negatively on a neighbouring listed building was refused and an unauthorised front porch canopy at No8 finally removed.

Following its grade two listing by Historic England in January 2021, we are delighted that a sympathetic plan has finally been agreed to convert **the ex-Home for Penitent Females at 58 Stoneygate Road** into 15 apartments which will result in no visible changes to the front elevations and only minimal changes to the Aber Road side. We think this is an excellent scheme which will give the building a sustainable long-term future and should be a valuable addition to the neighbourhood.

Finally, in February Nick and Neil attended a Leicester Heritage Partnership meeting at **Brookfield on London Road**, now the home to the University of Leicester's Business School, and were unanimous in their praise of its meticulous refurbishment and imaginative repurposing.

### ***Objections and amendments***

We objected to applications at;

**8 Knighton Road** - 1<sup>st</sup> storey side extension, 2 rear rooflights; alterations  
**Mary Gee Halls of Residence, 101-107 Ratcliffe Road** – Demolish existing buildings; construction of apartments with care, communal facilities, parking and associated amenity space/landscaping  
**54 Ratcliffe Rd** - Demolish side/rear outbuildings; 1- and 2-storey side extension, 1-storey rear extension.  
**6 Knighton Rd** - 2m gated entrances; extend vehicle access at front  
**9B St Johns Rd** - Change of use to 9 bed HMO. Replace timber doors and windows; alterations

We sought amendments to (or clarification of) applications at;

**Melbourne Home, 263 London Road** - Replacement windows, timber at front, uPVC at side/rear  
**12 Toller Road** - Single-storey rear extension and pergola, rooflights  
**2 Ratcliffe Road** - Demolish garage and conservatory; 2 storey rear extension.  
**2 Springfield Road, Springfield House** - CoU from dwelling house to residential care home; internal and external alterations  
**2 Springfield Road, Springfield House** - Internal and external alterations to Grade 2 listed building  
**19 East Ave** - Change of use from 10-bed HMO to 7 flats (6x 1-bed, 1x 2-bed); demolish outbuilding  
**28 Knighton Drive** - Alterations, partial demolition and construction of single storey extension and replacement dormer at rear; front and rear rooflights; replacement of sash windows with double glazed windows; refurbishment of front door; demolition of front boundary wall and hardsurfacing of forecourt and formation of vehicle access to create off-street car parking at front of house  
**5 Pendene Road** - Construction of stairs at front of annexe; solar panels at side roof of house and annexe; alterations

### ***Outstanding concerns***

We await the implementation of agreed front landscaping plans at **26 Southernhay Road** and **271 London Road** where frontages are currently entirely given over to car-standing.

Planning consent is not currently required to convert family homes into small HMOs of 6 or fewer unrelated residents. Where properties are close and intimate, the existing atmosphere can easily be radically altered by new residents who do not see the house as a permanent home and we welcome the City Council's efforts to manage these changes through the use of Article 4 Directions. The 2013 Clarendon Park A4D has been largely successful and we support plans to duplicate it in nearby areas but we note that there are still streets within the Conservation Area (the final section of **Avenue Road**, for instance) where the A4D does not apply and the loss of family homes to small HMOs is still a very real possibility. This omission really needs to be remedied.

For yet another year, we remain concerned by the deteriorating exterior timberwork at several of the larger Victorian houses in East Stoneygate (including the **Leicester Islamic Academy** on London Road) and the adverse visual impact of half-completed alterations at properties that have effectively become permanent 'works in progress' in **Southernhay Road**. Finally, we have passed on concerns relating to building safety issues at **14 Springfield Road** and **34 Springfield Road** where falling rooftiles, guttering and masonry had been reported by nearby residents.

### ***Enforcement & planning breaches***

We appreciate the work done by planning officers to ensure that remedial work at **7a Stanley Road, formerly `Eastfield`** has addressed the harm done to the Grade Two listed building by an earlier unauthorised conversion into 12 flats but we still have serious concerns about the boundary on Stanley Road which does not comply with the listed planning consent. The design of both fencing and gates is excessively ornamental and has a negative impact on the listed building. We are frustrated that, like their predecessors, new owners seem not to fully appreciate the heritage significance of their property.

We were pleased by a decision to finally refuse retrospective consent for the prefabricated `slot-in` panel fencing and concrete posts and gravel boards which replaced an attractive hedge at **263 London Road** but are disappointed by the lack of action taken against a similar fence at **12 Ashfield Road**. Having reported them in October and received an acknowledgement in February, we also await action on the uPVC front windows fitted without consent at **1 Woodland Avenue**.

### ***Trees***

In 2020/21 we expressed our concerns about the growing number of applications to fell healthy TPO protected trees on the grounds of safety and/or insurance risk. This year **at the corner of Shirley and Ridgeway Roads** we saw a much more serious threat to TPO trees; very hard pruning carried out by tradesmen who have either not understood or have chosen to ignore the approved planning consent.

While the damage to the tree may not be terminal, the resulting loss of public amenity and adverse impact on the conservation area streetscene are irreversible. Whatever the excuses, this is simply unacceptable. Government guidance makes it clear that non-compliance with TPOs is a serious matter and may be an offence under Section 210(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 with a maximum fine of up to £20,000. Preventative action needs to be taken urgently and if it fails, the City Council needs to make clear that there will be consequences for tradesmen and owners.

Local authorities have no statutory duty to notify neighbours about work to TPO trees, even though they seem to rely on members of the public to ensure that it has been carried out correctly. Bearing this in mind, we have urged the City Council to instigate a `rapid response` system by which SCAS members would report breaches and officers would be despatched (or phone calls made to tradesmen) quickly so that work stops and permanent loss is avoided. This would require a degree of flexibility and could be problematic at weekends but it would also have very significant benefits.

### ***Amenity***

Unretrieved and overloaded wheelie bins at tenanted properties remain a problem, with **330a London Road** remaining a highly visible example. Local councillors tell us that this issue has been raised at a full City Council meeting but there has been no noticeable change or evidence of enforcement action. **Elmfield Avenue** is the latest street where bins on frontages are becoming a permanent visual blight.

### ***Road safety***

Although the means for doing so are very unsightly, we are pleased that measures have been taken to deter rat-running along **Knighton Drive**

## **5. Partnership and community involvement**

We continue to maintain active working relationships with the **Friends of Clarendon Park**, the **Leicester Civic Society** and the **Leicester Group of the Victorian Society**; co-operating on planning and heritage matters and promoting each others' talks, walks and other events. We also co-operate when appropriate with **Knighton Neighbourhood Forum's** Housing & Conservation Working Group. We remain actively involved with the City Mayor's **Leicester Heritage Partnership** and attend meetings of the **University of Leicester's** Community Liaison Group, formed to improve communication with local community groups, police and city wardens.

### ***Sir Robert Burgess***

We noted the passing of Sir Robert Burgess, Vice- Chancellor of the University of Leicester 1999-2014, with sadness. Sir Robert's was the longest chancellorship in the University's history and was marked by a close engagement with the local non-academic community. Grade Two listed College Hall in Knighton Road and `Brookfield` were both acquired, sympathetically restored and repurposed under his watch and his fondness for such projects had led to him being affectionately nicknamed `Bob the Builder`.

## **6. Committee News**

All six committee members are prepared to stand for re-election in 2022-23. Nick Knight and Gordon Hamylton are willing to continue as Acting Chair and Acting Treasurer respectively.

The committee urgently needs new members, particularly anyone with web management, social

media and trip organising skills. Volunteers wouldn't necessarily need to become full committee members and would only need to devote modest amounts of time but they would need to be active e-mail users. If you think you have the aptitude and would be interested in a new challenge, please have a word with an existing committee member, either at the end of the AGM or later.

## **7. Membership**

Encouragingly, membership rose very slightly on the previous year and we ended 2021-22 with 211 member households, 162 memberships being paid by standing order.

## **8. Standing Order changes**

In 2021 our bank advised us that we needed to close our existing account and open a new one. Unfortunately, they also told us they could not transfer standing order payments automatically so the committee's greatest challenge of the year has been to encourage members who pay their annual subscription by standing order to set up a new standing order. We first mentioned this in our April 2021 Newsletter, repeated it in August and then finally enclosed instructions and a form with the December Newsletter. In March we delivered nearly 100 reminders.

Since then we have been informed by a significant number of members that their banks have written to say that they 'don't recognise' the SCAS bank account details on the form. We have checked carefully and our details are all correct so this is mystifying.

Do some banks suspect a fraud or no longer accept instructions in writing? We have no idea and they are clearly reluctant to explain. We will be checking the payments we received in April and contacting members who believe they have paid but whose SO instructions have not, in fact, been actioned by their banks. If you have been affected, you will need to set up a new SO using internet banking or ask your bank directly for detailed guidance; probably by visiting your branch in person. Please set up the SO to begin **1<sup>st</sup> April 2023** and, in the meantime, to keep your membership active for 2022/23, post or deliver £8 by cheque or cash to Nita at the address given on the back page of the April 2022 Newsletter, together with the attached slip.

We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience this has caused and hope you will bear with us.

## **9. Get in touch and/or lend a hand!**

Please tell us if you notice any building works in the area which you think may not have planning consent. Whether you want to celebrate or help safeguard Stonegate, we also welcome any offers of help to the Society, big or small. Just buttonhole a committee member or contact us by phone, email or via the website (once it is up and running again).