



# Tonbridge Civic Society

## April & May 2024

### APRIL & MAY 2024 NEWSLETTER



TCS Chair  
Tom Freke

The council has big ideas about Tonbridge town centre, and – in principle – the Civic Society agrees that much more could be done with the large swathe of land to the east of the High Street currently dominated by single-level car parking.

First, let's get up to speed on where we are. A couple of years ago, the Council employed consultants to review the land it owns in Tonbridge. That first report suggested the area to the east of the High Street was the most suitable for development (echoing similar reports and efforts from previous decades). The consultants then conducted more detailed studies ("phase 2") published in early March 2024.

These reports were discussed at a committee meeting on March 12 and councillors approved moving forward with the programme. No decisions were made about the potential mix of things that might end up being proposed on the site and no decision was made about the Angel Centre – that's pending another consultant's report in June – beyond a vague 'in principle' decision to replace it.

What we do know is there are a number of potential uses for the site. In the mix are residential properties, with the steer that demand points toward these being low rise and family-orientated rather than more flats, as well as a public plaza, some retail – though it would have to not be in competition with the High Street – a hotel, a new leisure centre, as well as a new site for Warders Medical Centre. According to the documents, Warders have been seeking a new, larger location for some years now and want to stay close to the town centre.

So what's next? We await the consultants' report on the Angel Centre with intense interest, not least because of



John MacKenzie on Facebook notes "if you look inside the red triangle, Tonbridge town centre appears from above to be one great big car park".

the vocal campaign against any changes. There is widespread concern that any proposal will see a replacement Centre sited in an unsuitable location, and/or lack the community facilities that have been so well used over the decades. And then we will look to a wider consultation on the appropriate mix of uses for the site. We can expect to see that maybe over the summer.

## SOCIETY NEWS & EVENTS

The Civic Society has published its first new booklet for a decade, a 16-page guide to design award winners in Tonbridge town centre, including a suggested walk.



A printed version will be available to members at the upcoming AGM and an online version will be added to the Society's website in the coming weeks. To mark the launch of the booklet members on

April 21 joined us on a short walk around some of the award winners, led by myself and Mark Ansdell.



## TCS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please do join us for our AGM on May 7 at the Angel Centre's Riverside Rooms, from 7:30pm (starting at 8pm).

We will try to keep the formalities to a minimum and have invited Sally Pearce, who has been leading the 'Tonbridge Needs Access to Cash' campaign, to speak. If time, we will also give a short presentation on this year's design awards and what we know about the council's plans for the town centre overhaul. Wine will be on offer!

## TCS VISIT TO LONG BARN GARDENS

We'd also like to remind members of our upcoming trip to Long Barn Gardens on June 26, 2-4pm.

Here we'll be given a private tour of the gardens, as laid out by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson before they moved to Sissinghurst Castle.

Contact [info@tonbridgecivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@tonbridgecivicsociety.org.uk) for a form.

## CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

May 7	AGM & Speaker Sally Pearce, Tonbridge Needs Access to Cash
June 26	Visit to Long Barn Gardens
July 21	Summer party and Design Award

## NEWS

Following the council's consultation on car parking across the borough, local opposition focused on the proposal to extend the **Upper Castle Fields car park**.

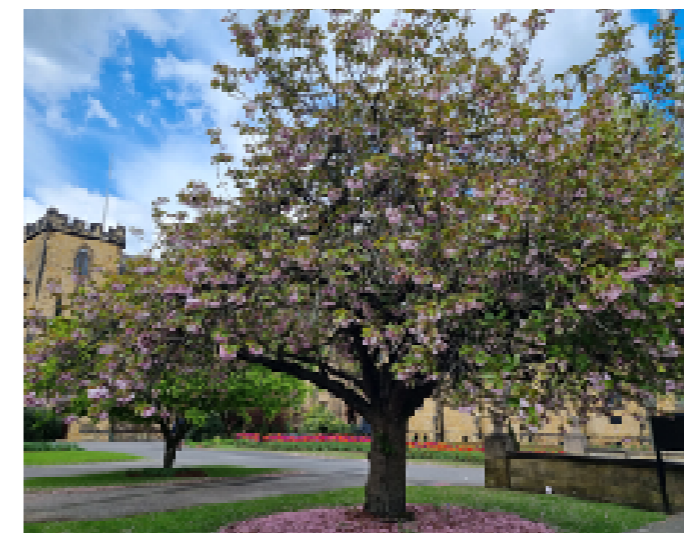
Campaigners – supported by the Civic Society – objected to the loss of green space, the impact on the setting of the castle and the detrimental effect of more traffic for residents of the Slade, the primary school and the adjacent retirement homes. Council committees are meeting to reconsider the proposal after it was called in by local councillors.



Some members of the Civic Society committee were invited to see inside **Tonbridge School's Cawthorn House** (known to some as the Old Chapel). The prominent building has been very sensitively converted from a lecture theatre into a modern common room. We will talk to the School to see if other members of the Society can also see inside the building sometime soon.



The council is asking for ideas about how it can improve **the Sportsground Racecourse**. Every five years the Sportsground has a management plan and the council is consulting on what should be included in the next plan. Do we want more trees? A new wild area? Improved toilet facilities? A cycle path inside the Sportsground? Feedback can be provided [here](#), with the deadline of May 10.



Judd Ward Green Party provided [an update on seemingly abandoned site](#) on the corner of **Avebury Avenue and River Lawn Road**. New contractors are now likely to be at the property in the coming weeks ahead of contracts being signed allowing completion of the long-stalled work.

The **cherry tree on the High Street** has once again been in full bloom but, sadly, we learned last year that this magnificent sight might come to an end sometime. The head gardener told us the tree is diseased and at some point will have to be removed. We hope it lasts a few more years!

The **Swan on the Green** in West Peckham held a launch meeting earlier this month for its community project, presenting the business plan and financial forecast.

## PLANNING

Planning approval has been granted for the development on the site of the **River Centre Car Park**. The design of the residential development, which will become one of the largest buildings in the town, comprises a mix of 7, 8 and 9 storeys. A significant factor in the [approval process](#) was a previous approval on the site for a larger development. The scheme was criticised for having only 37 car parking spaces compared with 118 units but without a response from Kent County Council there was no evidential basis for a rejection on these grounds, or concerns about Medway Wharf Road. Details of the plans can be found on the TMBC planning website, reference 22/02694/FL.

An application has been placed to demolish the former **Stags Head pub in The Slade** and replace it with six houses. Details of the plans can be found on the TMBC planning website, reference 24/00201/PA.

Applications have been lodged with the council for change of use for two shop spaces by the **station**. One application is for a tanning salon, the other a tattoo parlour.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES...

Forty years ago the Civic Society was concerned about council proposals for the Upper Castle Fields. How times (don't) change!

## SPRING '84 Tonbridge Civic Society Newsletter

### THE UPPER CASTLE PLAYING FIELDS

It is now exactly 84 years since Tonbridge Urban District Council bought the Castle and Upper Castle Playing Field. It was then planned that the Castle would be used for offices and a museum, and the grounds opened to the public while a fire station should be built in the north west corner.

Over the years the residents of Tonbridge have appreciated the amenity provided, though resenting the encroachment on the green space by 'temporary' huts for offices, but have felt that this special area of the town was protected from greedy developers by being in public ownership.

The Society is therefore very deeply concerned about the proposals put forward by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council in the form of a development brief. In this the three-acre area of the Upper Castle Field is offered for development for either offices or a hotel, while provision should be made for car parking and recreation.

The Society has opposed the development of yet more offices in the town since the allocation of office space specified in the Kent Structure Plan (up to 1991) has already been enormously exceeded, and office space remains unlet.

This is probably the most sensitive development site in the town and one where the motives of financial gain should not take precedence over consideration of the amenity and the historic association of the site.

It is accepted that the Slade Depot site should be redeveloped, but any building should be restricted to this lower ground where it will not be in visual competition with the Castle.

At present the grassed area provides a well used and much appreciated recreational facility and gives a beneficial separation of the Castle from surrounding buildings.

The Society does not oppose the option of a hotel, since this could provide a much needed additional facility for the town, but suggests that housing for the elderly and other public amenity uses should be included.

Tonbridge Civic Society 2023  
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