

Address to members on 5th Sept 2002

How nice to see you all! I think that this is the first proper meeting since Covid left us!

I am sorry if the publicity wasn't as good as it used to be but the loss of both Cheryl Allen and Susan Leveritt is proving hard to overcome.

However, the resumption of Heritage Days is a welcome sign of things going back to normal and in particular I am delighted to welcome both Lucy Quinnell and Cathy Brett as our speakers this evening. They will cheer us up with reminding us about the interesting and attractive side of Leatherhead.

Meanwhile, in present day Leatherhead there are sights we would much rather not see and, with determination plus effort, should be eliminated. You will remember that in June, in the Bulletin, I asked for comments on where improvements should be sited in Leatherhead. I was looking for small, local alterations that could be achieved without disturbing the plans of the preferred developers, costing no more than £100,000 (and mostly a lot less) but where the money could come from some of the funds I have heard about from MV. I had plenty of responses.

I will start with the High Street because I had more complaints about that than anything else. People want an **in depth jet wash of both pavements and road**, properly done, both sides and middles of the road, and stretching from the traffic lights at the bottom of the Crescent to the Waterless Feature, then along North Street as far as Lidl's and finishing at the top of the High Street outside the Institute. Chewing gum, spittle and other stains should be eliminated. If that were done with the planters moved or removed so that the underneath could be inspected, then there would be no need for a litter pick.

The next complaints offer a sad contrast with our Heritage celebration. Firstly, the Santander building has been bought and the new owner is seeking permission to turn the upper floors into 3 flats. This may well be, eventually, possible, but meanwhile all the roof tiles at the back **have been stripped off leaving the building open to the elements**. Also, work inside, upstairs, has rendered the undercroft (a short, narrow passage used by neighbouring staff) quite dangerous from falling debris, and **the windows** on the first and second storeys have been left wide open. This is a very old building (16C or 17C), in a declared Conservation area and is very vulnerable to any damage caused by the weather. It is also on a **prime site** and orchestrates the visitor's view and evaluation of our town.

Another building against which similar accusations should be levied is the former "Building Supplies" shop. Although not as old as the "Santander" building, being only roughly 100 years old, it has some features worthy of being retained, notably its glazed tiles. But at GROUND floor level we have enormous, dirty, windows which reveal an interior devoid of anything except a carpet of ivy and other weeds **all over** the floor. Nor is this the result of an unfortunate few months. This building has been in this state for at least 10 years. How can one take pride in a High Street where this ugliness is allowed to continue unchecked?

Who is going to want to invest here? Surely there is some sort of by-law which could be invoked

A further example of the perverted sense of humour which some people have regarding our town is the graffiti written on the highest point of the building above Max Barbers and the Cancer Charity shop. Clearly, it will be very difficult and expensive to remove.

Do not think that the subject of the Planters is going to remain unmentioned. It is not, but here I must exempt certain shop owners who do take pride in maintaining a colourful, neat appearance in front of their premises. However, the fact remains that many of the planters are simply wooden boxes filled with earth (plus a few plants earlier on) and very efficient at taking space away from either potential car parking or, possibly, helping people maintain a certain distance during covid. We would like fewer, high quality planters with colourful flowers. I agree that the question of how their content should be financed and how they should be maintained is one of considerable financial worry. I understand that there are several Funds which could perhaps help with the capital cost, but maintenance is problematic.

I will finish the town area by repeating the comment made by some that the lime trees outside the theatre should be pruned much earlier in the year. You cannot sit under them now and the ground under them is becoming discoloured.

One person wrote in to me with a **wonderful idea**. He offered to contribute to the repair of our town clock! I went to see our Town Centre Manager, Mr. Richard Keel, about this one and he promised to bring it up to at the Town Chamber meeting this morning. I have yet to hear the result.

Another idea which may or may not take off is to “re-wild” some of our verges and roundabouts. I have a couple of pictures and a very short video to show you which might inspire those of us with power in such matters to do a little experimentation. Leatherhead has at least 6 roundabouts and as for verges, I wonder if those at the start of Leret Way would be suitable for a little experiment. Of course, it is not just a question of throwing the seed on the ground. The current tall grass would have to be cut and the earth tilled to allow air and moisture to penetrate. Also a low cut around the edge must be maintained for safety reasons. Meanwhile, I am sure we are grateful to Lucy Quinnell for her efforts to improve the Tesco/B&Q roundabout.

I will finish my tirade about poor Leatherhead with 5 further complaints: 1. The Riverside path down to Common Meadow needs a good sort out: graffiti on the bridge needs removing, the bins need re-positioning and litter also needs disposal. 2. Another area suffering the same poor treatment is the path from Copthorne Road adjacent to the A243 and leading to the pedestrian bridge over the road. It is used principally by schoolchildren going to the three schools on the other side. I did a litter pick there a couple of days ago but did not manage to get to the end of it. I found a fair amount of rubbish behind Cressall Mead, but, further along, another of our members found some really heavy items which

would be too big for the general public. We do request that some strong men plus trailers go up there and try hard! Also, people must telephone to report such items. 3. Another member felt that the long path and the nearby steps in the Mansion house gardens all needed a rail here and there as the garden is steep. 4. One member complained that members of his family could not sleep properly because of the noise from Beluga going on until about 4 a.m. I am sure the town must have rules about that sort of thing.

My next topic is still Leatherhead but it is about the Local Plan and our input into some aspects of it. FOLLOWING OUR SUBMISSION TO THE INSPECTOR AT THE END OF LAST YEAR WE HAVE BEEN INVITED TO ATTEND AND SPEAK AT TWO OF THE HEARINGS THAT THE INSPECTOR WILL BE HOLDING DURING THIS MONTH AND NEXT. ON THE MORNING OF FRIDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER IT WILL BE THE HEARING INTO THE PLANS STRATEGIC POLICIES (MATTER 5) AND, ON THE MORNING OF WEDNESDAY 26TH OCTOBER, IT WILL BE SITE ALLOCATIONS IN LEATHERHEAD (MATTER 10). THE HEARINGS ARE TO TAKE PLACE AT PIPPBROOK AND BOTH START AT 9.30. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE, APPARENTLY, ABLE TO ATTEND FROM THE PUBLIC GALLERY.

I did have 4 other things which I would like to tell you, but think that they could just as easily go into our Bulletin which will again come out rather early. But now, I want to leave the stage vacant for our two speakers: Lucy Quinnell whom I am sure you all know and who lives in (I believe) the oldest house in Leatherhead, called "Rowhurst" in Teazle Wood just off the Oxshott Road. Lucy is ultra-modern in her designs for the FIRE AND IRON Gallery but has always had a strong interest in the historic aspects of Leatherhead. With Lucy we are lucky enough to have Cathy Brett, a well-known illustrator, author, comics creator and visual story teller. She has also accepted the post of Local History Museum Curator here in Leatherhead.

Now, I think that is quite enough from me so I will pass you over to Lucy and Cathy.