



HYTHE CIVIC SOCIETY

Item 5.3 Report to the AGM ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 2023/24 YEAR

As a Civic Society our aims are to protect and celebrate Hythe's heritage, respond to relevant local activities and to play our part in building Hythe's future so that residents and visitors alike can appreciate the best of our area.

The progress made over the past year against our aims - detailed in the Forward Plan (FP) approved by the last AGM, is set out below and is grouped under each of the Society's four charitable objects.

Charitable Objective 1 - Promoting High Standards of Planning and Architecture in Hythe

1.1 Planning Applications

The Society comments on applications that significantly affect Hythe, that affect the Conservation area, or are likely to create a precedent in a particular location. The District Council takes account of National Planning Policy guidance and its own local planning policies when considering applications. Inevitably, at times, the Society finds itself at odds with both statutory national and local policies!

Previous Annual Reports have reported on the progress of the major Otterpool development. Although outside the Society's "area of benefit" (the civil parish of Hythe) the development would have major impacts for Hythe. Its timing is now uncertain as the new District Council, while still committed to the scheme, has decided to pause and conduct a strategic review of the development's funding and delivery. The outcomes from this review are eagerly awaited, whereupon we will once again consider its impacts. Given the development's scale and very long timescale there will be many planning applications over a long period to consider.

Last year, the new District Council also decided to halt the Princes Parade scheme and undertake a review of future uses for the site, though the approved planning consent was not rescinded. Outcomes from this review are also eagerly awaited. Meanwhile, the Council is in the process of having the controversial site hoardings removed and replaced with more appropriate fencing.

Meanwhile, attention was drawn to the other half of Princes Parade, when in October the Imperial Hotel's owners launched a public consultation about their plans to develop the Golf Course site. This caused much alarm. The Society Chair and committee representatives held a meeting with the owner's representatives prior to their public consultation; this was a useful and informative session. Members were advised of this meeting the Winter Newsletter. We await the developer's detailed plans as part of an anticipated planning application.

Another sensitive site is that of the former Aldi town centre supermarket. The Society reacted to the developer's first drawings for a mixed use development on this site as being unsuitable in design terms for the conservation area. Since then, there have been two further design iterations, with the most recent showing the High Street elevation as more sympathetic to the architecture of adjoining properties. Although concerns remain for certain aspects of this scheme, not least the impacts for local parking, it seems that our points relating to sensitive design are understood.

We also supported local residents' concerns for development proposals on important open space land adjacent to Spanton Crescent (proposed holiday lettings site) and for a large residential apartment development on the Ebor House site. We were pleased that in both instances the applications were turned down by the District Council.

1.2 Hythe Civic Award

Regretfully there were no nominations for outstanding design submitted this year.

Charitable Objective 2 - Informing the Public of the Geography, Heritage, History, Natural History and Architecture of Hythe

2.1 Talks

The monthly talks programme is now in its second year and runs from September through to June, with nine talks arranged in all. This year's programme, once again, has proved to be popular, with average attendances of 60 members and non-members each month. This was despite the inclement weather on several occasions. Only one cancellation by a speaker occurred (Gehad Homsey for the 12th March – *Mercy Ships*), but a substitute speaker, Andrew Ashton, stepped in at relatively short notice and gave an interesting talk – *Kill or Cure*). Unfortunately, sound system issues occurred at a number of talks, despite best efforts to resolve the problems. This issue will receive further attention ahead of the programme for 2024-2025.

We must give thanks to the Talks Team (Betty Black, Evelyn Joyce, Jill Ayling and Richard Holme). Between them they arrange the year's programme and ensure each talk evening runs smoothly. They will be pleased to receive your feedback and suggestions for subjects or speakers that you would like covered, or to hear.

2.3 The May 'Through the Lens' Photographic Exhibition at the Hythe Library

At this time last year our photographic exhibition at the Hythe Library- *Through the Lens*-was underway. It proved to be very popular with many pages of positive comments from visitors. Library staff also commented that it had proved popular with regular library users. Given its popularity and the feedback *Through the Lens* has returned with more images from our vast digital archive and is running at the Library throughout May 2024.

2.4 Guided Walks

The past year saw another drop in the number of people attending the guided walks on Thursdays between June and September. There were just 92 walkers on Thursdays, but more encouragingly there were three group walks conducted with a total attendance of 60 walkers. Once more, walkers were mainly visitors to Hythe. The attendance is the lowest in many years. Accordingly, ahead of this year's guided walks season, a review will be conducted. As ever, a big thank you to the Town Guides Team for their great work.

2.5 Blue Plaques

A lot of effort went into our "Blue Plaque Project" over the year, particularly from Roger Neaves our Vice President, and we are pleased to say that we are now close to having the first plaque installed. This commemorates Gerald Holtom, who lived at 5 Hillside Street (now restyled Hillside Manor). He was an artist and designer, and was responsible for designing the symbol adopted by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) back in 1958. We are extremely grateful for the contributions received from the owner of Hillside Manor and Councillor Martin (ward councillor grant) for the financial contributions that have helped make this possible.

2.6 Publications

“A Walk Around Historic Hythe”, an important addition to the Society’s publication list, continued to be popular during the year when a reprint was arranged. Copies are still available from ‘Best Wishes’ and 101 High-Street, Open-Door Project, both in the High Street.

We published a limited edition of a booklet prepared by Anne Petrie, titled ‘The Hortons of Cold Harbour house’ to coincide with last May’s photographic exhibition, as part of the display was devoted to photographs taken by one of the Horton family during the 1890s.

Anne is currently preparing a book that will contain short histories of 80 locations in Hythe to coincide with the Society’s 80th anniversary next year. The Society is to fund the printing costs. The book will be on sale towards the end of this year.

2.7 Hythe Walking Routes Project

In support of the 2023-2024 Town Mayor, Councillor Anita Jones, with a project to develop a set of new walking routes across the Hythe parish, fabulous progress was made with mapping and testing six walk routes. The project is nearing its completion and should be launched soon, with online routes information accompanied with heritage information available for general public access. All routes commence and finish at the Portland Road car park and vary in length. It is hoped the walks are enjoyed by many people, whether keen or simply casual walkers looking to enjoy what our wonderful and varied area offers. The project is supported with advice from the Elham Valley Walkers group.

Charitable Objective 3 - Securing the Preservation, Protection, Development and Improvement of Features of Historic or Public Interest in Hythe

3.1 Conservation Area

A small group of Society volunteers continued last summer with the painting, in Hythe blue, of street furniture (bollards etc) in the High Street and beyond. A project undertaken in conjunction with the Town Mayors in 2022 and 2023 respectively, the results have certainly added a fresh look to the town. Having caught-the-bug so to speak, the group is keen not to put the paint brushes down and will continue with the painting effort this summer. It was clarified with the District Council that the Society is responsible for non-structural maintenance of the two wooden bus shelters either side of Red Lion Square. The Society was instrumental in their provision some years ago. Whether this year, or next we will be calling for volunteers to help with this project as the shelters need a fresh coat of preservative.

3.2 Local History

The current local history group, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in April with a lunch at the Red Lion, is supported by the Society and continues to thrive. It has met regularly and continues to research Hythe’s past and receive presentations from speakers. Building on a former project, the Group has recommenced an Oral Histories project which involves one-to-one interviews with volunteer residents and records conversations of their recollections and time in the area. Some of the recordings are posted on the History Group section of the Society’s website with more planned. The website also contains many interesting other topics of local relevance. So, if you have an interest in Hythe’s history, do take a look at the History Group’s section of the website.

Its chairman of ten years, Anne Petrie, stepped down in 2023 as she is anticipating moving away from Hythe later this year. Group members gathered to say a big thank you to Anne for her leadership and dedication over the years. Iris Pearce has taken over the chairmanship.

Reasonably frequently, the Group receives requests from far and wide for help with house and family research. Group members are willing to assist and provide useful local information to help people with their research. Recently, an online donations facility was added to the Group's website to allow people to make a financial contribution to show appreciation for the group's work.

Finally, the group held a successful and very enjoyable tour of several Romney Marsh churches last summer, followed by an excellent lunch at the White Horse pub in Bilisington. More recently, the Group celebrated its 10th Anniversary, with a buffet lunch at the Red Lion.

3.3 Archives

Re-ordering of the archives continues as the small archives room in the Town Council offices at Oaklands is brimming with material of all sorts. It will take a little while longer to complete the work, whereupon the archive room will hopefully be made more accessible.

3.4 Digitisation of photographic negatives

Over 2023, the Kent Photo Archive continued to assist us with the conversion to digital format of photographic material from the archive. The KPA is a small voluntary group, to whom we made a donation to acknowledge the support. Furthermore, with funds provided from generous donations (by Society members Conrad Blakey and Ron Greenwood) we were able to purchase a document and photographic scanner to allow us to handle more scanning work ourselves.

3.5 Amenity Award

No nominations to report as yet.

Charitable Objective 4 - Promoting Civic Pride in Hythe

4.1 Hythe in Bloom and the Tuesday Volunteers

The floral displays again looked wonderful in Prospect Road and throughout the High Street adding colour to the town. The High Street displays are made possible by the fantastic and dedicated group of volunteers who see to the planting and watering throughout the display period. Furthermore, we are lucky to have a wonderful group of volunteer gardeners (the Tuesday Gardeners) who devote time every Tuesday morning to tending flowerbeds across the town. Last year, Wakefield Walk, the wide borders by the War Memorial, the area adjacent to Blue Shield Insurance, the Oaklands Sensory Garden and Mackeson Square received splendid attention from the Group. The small triangle of land at the junction of Mill Road and Seabrook Road has recently been the subject of a bid for a local grant to allow an updated and improved planting scheme to be undertaken.

4.2 Eaton Lands

The Community Orchard on Eaton Lands, a joint project between Hythe Civic Society and the Hythe Environmental Community Group, continues to thrive. We are still awaiting the designs for the interpretation / information panels being developed by the Brockhill Academy pupils.

4.3 Siren Corner

A small but locally significant piece of unregistered and unmaintained piece of land on Hillcrest Road has received attention from Society volunteers and local residents too. It is given the name Siren Corner, because the town siren once stood there. The base of the column on which the siren post stood is still in situ. After consulting local residents and much inconclusive research into land ownership, some tidying up and basic maintenance work was undertaken. However, without more routine attention this area could revert back to its former unkempt condition. The Executive Committee will review this during the year ahead.

Objective 5 - Delivering Effective Operations and Governance - Valued Communications with Members and the Wider Public

5.1 Newsletter

We continued to publish our Newsletter quarterly, supplemented by more features on our updated website, along with more frequent email information. These improved channels of communication all helped to keep members more up to date. The survey results showed that both the newsletter and website are valued by most members. A common feature from the survey responses is a request for more local heritage and historical features within the newsletter. These types of features are posted reasonably frequently as part of the new website. However, the four-page format for the Newsletter, given that a significant volume of members prefer to receive a hard copy version, means there are space and cost constraints on the number of articles each newsletter can carry.

Nevertheless, we will always do our best and welcome input and suggestions, including queries and information that may be of interest to you all. Please feel free to contact us with any ideas or facts you think our readers would like to hear about. We have a large archive that we can draw from to aid in research that often leads to fascinating articles and they could start with you.

5.2 Facebook

The Society's Facebook page, now with some followers, continues to be a learning curve. Our preference is to use the Facebook page to act as a signpost for greater topic information on the website. However, this does not work for everyone. Achieving the right balance between features for the Facebook page and signposting to the website is a matter of ongoing review. As the Facebook page is open to all, a priority for us is to encourage users (Followers) who are non-members to become full members with complete access to the Society.

5.3 Website

We are very fortunate in having the support of our excellent webmaster, Bob Bruce. Over the year, Bob has continued to make a huge contribution to the Society and the History Group through the overhaul of both websites and the introduction of new website functionality. We realise that accessing the website, or any website for that matter, is not a matter of preference or routine for all our members. The survey responses tell us this and also that we need to promote further the Members Only section of the website, where a large amount of material is reserved for members' access only.

5.1.4 – Leaflet

The current Society leaflet is now in need of revision. An update and new supply is required.

5.5 Membership

At 31 March 2024 the Society had a paid up membership of 6xx members from 4xx households. This compares to 667 members 12 months previously. Roughly 5% of Hythe's households are represented by Society members.

5.6 Survey

For the first time in many years a survey of members took place between late February and early April. Copies of the questionnaire were emailed to all registered addresses (just over 300) and 50 hard copies made available at the March Talk. At the survey close, 66 responses were received, as response of 16.4%. An analysis of responses will appear on the website.

In summary the key points were:

- Overall, the absolute number of responses was reasonable, although below the target level of 30%.
- Most members value the work of the Society and the range of activities provided or undertaken and consider it good value.
- There was a high level of satisfaction with the use of email, but equally a preference from members who receive hard copies of the newsletter for this facility to be retained.
- The website is well used, but we need to do more to encourage members to review the Members Only facility as this is less well used.
- Support for cashless payment as an option for the Talks.
- Talks programme is generally welcomed, though some would like to see more locally based topics and greater opportunity for socialising.
- The sound system requires attention.
- The newsletter content and format is generally welcomed, though more local history, photographs, planning information and local events/project information are requested

Objective 6 - Effective Promotion

6.1 Publicity

The occasional local press/social media article relating to the work of the society or comment from the society appeared. HCS Facebook used to promote activities. Membership level held steady.

Objective 7 - Sound Finances

7.1 Financial Position

The outcome for the year shows an overall surplus of £3,305, including net Boot Fair takings of approximately £2,000.

The examined annual financial statement is attached and includes analysis.

See Attached Examined Financial Statement and Summary Analysis

Objective 8 - Effective Policies and Governance Measures

8.1 Working Policies

The Society has commenced work on this issue. Governance remains an area of particular focus for the coming year in order to develop the suite of policies recommended by the Charity Commission.

Our Active Supporters

The Society thanks all the sponsors of its activities, newsletter distributors, planters, waterers, painters, town guides and crypt stewards, and all organisations that work with the Society to make Hythe a better place for us all. We held a well-attended 'Thank You' party for helpers and volunteers last November and will do so again next year. In March a Quiz was held at the Sports Pavilion and enjoyed by approximately 60 people. We plan to make this an annual event.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This has been my first year as Chair, a year that has passed remarkably quickly. A lot of ground was covered, as highlighted in the Annual Report. There is much to look forward to once again this coming year.

Looking back, it was with deep sadness that Mike Umbers, our President from May 2023, passed away last November. He and I were appointed to our respective positions at the same meeting. Mike was a longstanding and a most active Society member, a hugely respected local historian and an inspiration to many. He was a great help to me and I particularly enjoyed working with him on his 'Forgotten Histories' pieces for the website, they are well worth a read. He is missed by us and his many friends locally and beyond.

I personally thank my colleagues on the Executive Committee who give their time regularly to supporting Society work throughout the year. I pay a particular thanks to Betty Black for her support on the Committee and for the tremendous work Betty does with arranging the Talks programme. Betty has decided to stand down from her committee work after many years service, but will continue to manage and support the Talks Team. Also, I give my thanks and support to the large number of volunteers who help in a variety of ways to maintain the Society's reputation, and above all help to make Hythe an interesting and pleasant town in which to live or visit.

There are challenges ahead which will need our attention and focus. Hythe's heritage must not be lost though this comes under pressure each time there are major physical developments affecting the town. I must emphasise that the Society does not resist unreasonable development, we are not a 'Nimby' organisation as some may perceive. For any location with an important and significant heritage, it is about getting the right balance between preserving our heritage and building for the future. Examples of where we seek to achieve this are the comments made and seemingly taken on board by the developers of the former Aldi site in the town centre. Similarly, we took the initiative to discuss our points of view with representatives of the Hotel Imperial prior to the first public consultation on the future of the Golf Course site last year. Constructive dialogue rather than via social media is important and I hope more of this will continue as Hythe moves on.

The Society enjoys working in partnership with other organisations including Hythe Town Council, Folkestone and Hythe District Council and several local groups. One partnership project nearing its completion is the launch of a set of new Hythe Walking Routes in conjunction with the Town Mayor. This is an exciting project which has the potential for a large number of people from near and far to enjoy what this area has to offer.

Finally, 2025 is the Society's 80th anniversary year. Already, we have a number of ideas to make this a celebratory year. One event already booked, is a music concert at St Leonard's Church for September 2025, featuring the Hythe Town Band. A quiz and social are planned for February 23025. Other events are also under consideration.

Thank you for your continued support, and my best wishes to all.

Paul Naylor (Chair)

Officers at 31 March 2024

Patron: Vacant

President: Vacant

Vice President: Roger Neaves

Chair: Paul Naylor
Hon Secretary: Robin Bhar (co-opted)

Vice Chair: Betty Black
Hon Treasurer: Alan Joyce

Executive Committee:

Jill Ayling	Crispin Davies	Sally Chesters	Keith Miles
Kim Murton	Mary Hunter	Jo Scott	Michael Tubman

Hythe Civic Society is a registered charity (number 283177)

Hythe Civic Society is on Facebook

www.hythecivicsociety.org

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