



putting Chesham first

Chairman's report 2018

It is a pleasure to be writing my seventh report to the Society's AGM, especially as it covers a milestone in that 2017 marked the 60th anniversary of the Chesham Society. On 12 November 1957 its newly formed committee under its Chairman, Peter Walker, held its very first meeting, a tradition I have had the privilege to maintain.

In last year's report I said we had two major tasks ahead of us for 2017, namely submitting our response to the consultation on the draft new Local Plan and secondly progressing the Society's "Vision of Chesham". In balance our efforts on these may be viewed as successful, at least in part.

It is disappointing to report that consultation on the new Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan has been delayed by about twelve months and we are now informed this should commence in late July, just in time for the summer holidays. Chiltern District Council (CDC) did not approve this delay until November which was after the consultation was due to commence. There are three causes for concerns: the first is that following the non-statutory consultation (June 2017), the proposal to build 900 new homes on 57 hectares of Green Belt land northeast of Chesham has not been dismissed despite very high opposition from residents. Secondly, we still do not know how many houses will be built in Chesham but it appears it may still be in the range of 1,500 to 2,000. And finally there are no firm proposals for future location of employment sites and, in the meantime, several have been lost to housing.

The good news is that the "Vision of Chesham" is being progressed. The decision was made that a small charity like the Chesham Society could not progress such an ambitious project and this led to the Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company (CRCIC) being formed in May 2017. This is a separate legal entity to the Chesham Society and, of course, is independent of all local councils. This company structure will ensure that assets generated will be passed to the Chesham Community when the CRCIC has completed its task and is dissolved. The CRCIC has commissioned a Masterplan for Chesham and this is currently being subjected to public consultation and, it is hoped, all Chesham Society members will respond to the questionnaire.

Other activities for the Society in 2017 have included those aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of HS2 both during construction and when the line is opened. It is proving difficult to locally engage with HS2 despite the company appointing staff to enable this process. Whilst it would appear to be a *fait accompli* there are substantial issues to be addressed before the line can be approved. Jim Conboy is working closely with the Chiltern Society, Chesham Town Council and other local organisations – this I fear is likely to be a long-term commitment.

Finally the Society has continued to organise monthly members' meetings which continue to be popular; the highlights, to me at least, were the visit to Kevin Meayers' Organ Workshop in June and our annual Question Time Panel meeting in September, both of which were very well attended.

In 2018 the committee of the Chesham Society will need to consider carefully where it should direct its resources in the future. CRCIC will be operating as a separate legal entity and there will be no direct involvement by our committee required, although some committee members may hold executive positions in the CRCIC. This will release significant resource to pursue other projects to meet the objectives in our constitution. Indeed, I expect the Chesham Masterplan will create new opportunities for the Chesham Society to pursue. The committee will be meeting soon to agree its new strategy and will undoubtedly be looking to the members for suggestions.

I have decided not to seek re-election as Chairman this year. I have enjoyed a very exciting and stimulating seven years but now feel it is time for a fresh approach as the Society redirects its future efforts. I also have concerns about potential conflict of interest being Chairman of both the Chesham Society and CRCIC and, indeed, there have already been instances of this. Inevitably the activities of the two organisations will move further apart and there may be times when the Society may object to the more commercially led activities of the CRCIC. Finally, to be frank, I have too much work as Chairman of CRCIC and the Society as well as with other local organisations. I do not want this to be to the detriment of the Chesham Society.

In conclusion I wish to thank the committee and the members of the Society for their support during 2017 and throughout the tenure of my Chairmanship. I will refrain from naming individuals as all have contributed in many ways. I believe we have been successful in raising the profile of the Chesham Society and its influence in the community. I see no reason why this should not continue the years ahead.

Tony Molesworth
Chairman, Chesham Society
3 January 2018