



Newsletter

December 2015

With Season's Greetings to All Our Readers

The Society's AGM took place on 24 November. Our existing officers and several members of the Society's Council were re-elected - including Peter Brown as Chairman.

The Society is in good heart; it will continue to monitor and make representations about the physical planning of our city and its surrounding region and will comment upon political and cultural developments which do and should affect the quality of life here.

This is the first of a series of regular newsletters that will inform MCS members about the Society's work and is also distributed to civic, education and business leaders concerned with the quality of life in the area.

Andrew Pearce, Issue Editor

MCS meets Conservation Areas Wirral

The principal committee members of Conservation Areas Wirral (CAW) addressed Merseyside Civic Society in Liverpool Central Library on 29 October 2015. CAW, formerly known as Wirral Conservation Areas Forum, exists to bring together representatives of the 26 conservation areas in the borough. The majority of all of the conservation areas currently participate.

CAW has a regular printed newsletter and holds meetings of residents of the various areas, frequently with local Councillors also present.

CAW is aware that many who live in conservation areas do not realise that they are inside one and perhaps first become aware of the fact when the local Council forbids some alteration to their property which they wish to make. It is acknowledged that people are pleased to live in the pleasant environment which conservation area status helps to provide (and the enhanced value of their property which goes along with this!) but are sometimes reluctant themselves to follow the rules. (*A variant of Nimbyism, one might say!*)

CAW reported that it has found that few local estate agents have much knowledge of what being in a conservation area involves, especially its effect on maintaining good property values in attractive areas.

CAW takes the initiative to pool skills and experience among local conservation area residents and acts directly on projects such as replacing assorted lampposts which are out of sympathy with the architecture of an area. It promotes visits to conservation areas, which can be of interest to tourists.

While CAW itself obviously does not have statutory powers to enforce good practice (such as banning television dishes on the front of heritage buildings) it maintains close relations with Council staff who do have such powers (though not always, in present circumstances, the finance to make use of them on a large scale!).

CAW is financed through donations from the



majority of the individual conservation area committees and they have successfully obtained a grant from the Wirral Society. The search for adequate funds for its work is ongoing.

Further information on CAW can be viewed at: www.CAWirral.org.uk

The new City Region

The approval of the 'Devolution Deal' proposals to extend the powers of the Liverpool City Region with an elected mayor and Combined Authority made up of the heads of the six local councils plus a representative of the business sector may seem like something of a bureaucrat's folly, but in reality it offers the best chance to accelerate Merseyside's economic growth which has been presented for years – if local politicians make full and constructive use of it. It will give local people, through the elected mayor and Combined Authority, more say in how public money is spent in our area, instead of everything being decided by London civil servants, and will bring in extra funds.

For people interested in Merseyside's townscape and future employment possibilities, this 'Devolution Deal' offers new prospects for debating what our future should hold and for our views to be listened to. This depends upon our understanding the issues properly and coming up with practical proposals.

As a contribution, MCS circulated a Briefing Paper in October about the existing arrangements and the new scheme. With the demise of the *Daily Post*, opportunities to discuss heavyweight issues affecting our

region are not plentiful and we welcome the new opportunities given through Bay TV.

Among issues confronting us are the need to create new jobs and housing without wrecking the amenity of the area, how to improve the environment - electric buses and cars, more public transport - training more suited to local employment needs, HS2 connections, etc..

It has also to be recognised that there is a measure of reasoned opposition to what is taking place and that steps are necessary to deal with the points which cause concern.

Merseyside Civic Society and other local bodies should be considering the solutions they will put forward to these problems.

Bringing older buildings back to life

Several MCS Members had the pleasure of attending the Liverpool Branch of the Victorian Society's 50th anniversary dinner held in the former Royal Insurance Building in North John Street (now the 'Aloft Hotel') not only for the quality of the event, but also to see the inside of one of Liverpool's structurally unique Grade II* listed buildings by J. Francis Doyle from the late Victorian/early Edwardian period.

It was a reminder that the city's architecture is surely one its attractions to the blossoming tourist trade. The more tourists visiting the area; potentially more jobs here: to attract tourists to come, there have to be things for them to do and see...

One building which the MCS has been urging should be brought back to life is the Wellington Rooms in Mount Pleasant, at one time a social centre for some of the city's



wealthier residents, more recently an Irish club, now vacant and deteriorating. It has been noted by the MCS that the Merseyside Building Preservation Trust is exploring new opportunities, including applying for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund with a view to working with both of the City's principal universities. The estimated cost according to recent press reports is in the region of £6-£8 million.

Lime Street

MCS are supporting the campaign by SAVE Britain's Heritage to preserve the historic Georgian frontage between the Crown and Vines hotels, the centre-piece of which is the Futurist Cinema of 1912. SAVE are pressing for a Court date in relation to requesting permission for Judicial Review of their claim Liverpool Council did not consult adequately on impacts on the World Heritage Site. MCS submitted a spot listing request of the block back in 2004, and again this year. As with the initial application, the latter was also rejected by Historic England.

Companies' "house style" architecture

In times gone by, a number of companies had their buildings designed in a manner that adopted a "house style". We can today easily recognise the buildings which used to be 'Burtons' clothing stores or 'Odeon' cinemas; noting that London's 1930s tube stations are also very distinctive.

This is a fashion which is seen much less often nowadays, but Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service have in recent years erected a number a suite of distinctive angular buildings

throughout Merseyside with large red façades. One can have different views about whether the designs are pleasing or not, but at least the Service has given some thought to how its buildings should look.

Lawrence Road, Wavertree

The splendid, but long-neglected Methodist Chapel on Lawrence Road was the subject of an application for demolition for student flats. When informed of the application by the Victorian Society and Florence Gersten, MCS entered an objection the day before the Committee.

On the 21st October 2015 the City Planning Committee, the application (14F/1223) was deferred following strong objections from local residents, councillors, the Victorian Society, Merseyside Civic Society and SAVE Britain's Heritage. An application for spot listing has been drafted and submitted to Historic England for consideration.

An Architecture Biennial for Liverpool

Liverpool already has an Arts Biennial. Merseyside Civic Society is working on plans for a Liverpool Architectural Biennial on the model of Venice where the Art and Architectural Biennials follow each other in alternate years. It would be a large scale event held in venues across the region.

Liverpool is a most apt site for an architecture biennial. Although various cities have built fine buildings and districts, only two have fostered *schools* – locales not just of occasional bright ideas and talent but where institutions, policies and practice conduced to critical traditions that underwrote continuities



of distinctive quality. An Architectural Biennial would engage cooperation from agencies and institutions across the Liverpool City Region.

Liverpool's role in World War II

A project put forward by an MCS Member is to make greater use of the Museum of the Western Approaches. It can be argued that the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II, which was directed from Liverpool, was every bit as vital for the nation's survival as the Battle of Britain, yet there appears to be little in Liverpool to commemorate it.

Stop Press 1 : The Turner Prize 2015

MCS is pleased to report that four surviving terraced streets by Richard Owens, the same architect as those in the Welsh Streets, are now under renovation in nearby Granby. Ten homes have been transferred to a Community Land Trust, whose innovative and creative approach with architects 'Assemble' has landed them with the Turner Prize - cue global publicity! Working with SAVE, MCS has played a key role behind the scenes, helping persuade ministers to scrap demolition and introducing the social investors backing the Land Trust.

Stop Press 2 : Welsh Streets, L8

MCS welcomes the long-overdue decision of Liverpool Council to withdraw its futile legal challenge to the Secretary of State's decision to prevent compulsory purchase and demolition of almost 500 Victorian terraced homes in Liverpool 8, following SAVE's victory at last year's Public Inquiry. Such a climb-down marks an 'era-defining triumph' on the highest-profile battlefield in the twelve year

campaign against Housing Market Renewal 'Pathfinder' demolitions, which MCS opposed from the start. MCS Council Members have played a key role in this story, co-ordinating the campaign with SAVE and appearing as witnesses.

Forthcoming Events 2016

18-00hrs at Liverpool Central Library,
William Brown Street, Liverpool, L3 8EW

Tuesday 19 January 2016

Local groups present and discuss their experience of preparing Neighbourhood Plans.

Tuesday 16 February 2016

'Tranmere Deep Underground Air Raid Shelter'

Speaker: Ian Weir

Ian Weir of Blackett-Ord Conservation Engineering Ltd, based in Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria, is the Project Manager and Conservation Engineer who has led recent investigations into the presence, extent and condition of the Birkenhead tunnels. Ian will report on the initial findings so far, which have been undertaken on behalf of Tranmere Tunnels Volunteers Ltd.

