



Registered Charity No. SC003089

Newsletter No. 92: September 2018

Coming Events

Wednesday 24th October 2018: “Managing Change to our Built Environment” - a talk by Mike Scott, Senior Casework Officer at Historic Environment Scotland. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7:30 for 8 pm.

Wednesday 28 November 2018: “Waste and the Circular Economy” – a talk by Councillor Philip Bell, Aberdeen City Council. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7:30 for 8 pm.

Wednesday 23 January 2019: “Creating a Vibrant City” – a talk by Sally Moir, SMART Consultants. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7:30 for 8 pm.

Wednesday 27 February 2019: “Aberdeen Performing Arts – An Update” – a talk by Jane Spiers, Chief Executive Officer, Aberdeen Performing Arts. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7:30 for 8 pm.

Friday 8 March 2019: Annual Dinner at the Royal Northern & University Club. This will include the presentations to recipients of our Annual Awards. At the Royal Northern & University Club, No. 9 Albyn Place, at 7pm for 7:30pm.

Planning Matters

We continue to comment on planning applications when we see ones that may make the built environment less attractive. Recently this has included applications made for turning part of the pavement in front of cafes into an

extension of the café space and applications for converting front gardens into private car parking spaces.

We expressed our concern about the revised proposal for the Broadford Works, which will, unfortunately (as the council has now approved it), result in the demolition of most of the historic Grey Mill building. The Grey Mill building lies at the very heart of the works and is one of only a very limited number of iron framed buildings that still exist. It is known to be the oldest in Scotland and amongst the oldest of its type in the world. It is supposed to be protected by being listed. We objected to the revised proposals which would mean that all but one gable, of this historic building is demolished.

It is disappointing that the owners of some of Aberdeen's most significant buildings allow them to fall into disrepair, so much so that they are then able to argue that the only cost-effective solution is demolition. Providing evidence to the council as part of a planning application that the cost of carrying out work to the building would put the whole of the wider development in jeopardy seems to be a loophole in the planning process. If an owner or developer can convince the council (and others) to approve a planning application for a new replacement building, then this enhances the value of their site. There is a big incentive for an owner to follow this course of action, and this is wrong.

Surely, if the owner of a significant building lets it fail, there should be a way to enforce an obligation to repair. If a lack of routine maintenance means destruction, soon a lot of the heritage that we all recognise and value as being Aberdeen, will disappear.

The system is giving out the wrong messages. If the owner of a listed building looks after their building, why, if they ask for permission to make alterations, does the planning process often make it so hard for them to get approval. Perhaps, next time, they would be better off letting their building fall into disrepair and then get whatever permission they want. The incentives are not operating in the right way – the system needs to change.

Annual Awards Ceremony 2017 and Plans for 2018/19

At the Awards Ceremony in October 2017 we made two Principal Awards, one for the NuArt Festival which has encouraged us to look differently at our built environment and the second to the private work of conservation and restoration done to an ancient armorial panel in the Chanonry, Old Aberdeen.

Other projects to receive recognition included:

- the Aberdeen Community Energy Hydro Project at Tillydrone on the River Don,
- flats in Netherkirkgate,
- the interior work done so far to the Tivoli Theatre,
- the flats at Forbes Place, Bucksburn,
- the Spektra Lighting Festival,
- the replacement leadwork to The Town House.

Going forward, we are going to change how we run the awards process. This has come about due to several reasons that were discussed at the AGM in April 2018 and are summarised here.

Running the awards process is, by quite some way, the Civic Society's single biggest annual expense. This has been made worse recently by the fact that Aberdeen City Council no longer grant us the privilege of using the Town & County Hall without having to pay.

You would have hoped, as we did, that many of those who received an award would subsequently sign up for membership of Aberdeen Civic Society. In the past this did happen, but we have not had a new member join us as a direct result of the Awards Ceremony for a good number of years.

This is coupled with the fact that the number of our members attending the Awards Ceremony has declined. Getting to the Town & County Hall on Awards night and finding suitable parking nearby, makes attending it quite an effort.

Every year we try to get some mention of the awards in the press. However, the granting of an award is not terribly newsworthy these days (unless it is a carbuncle award), and so although there is some coverage, it tends to be photographs of people attending the ceremony printed in the Saturday edition of the Press & Journal rather than the substance of the evening, which is what is receiving an award.

Preparing for the ceremony takes some time, whether this is for the secretary of the awards committee, who chases up attendance from those companies and individuals receiving the awards, or the person making the presentation.

So, how is the awards process changing? We will still go through the process of calling for and looking at nominations. We will still go through the process of judging each one. However, the number of awards being made will be cut down to just two (a single Award and a single Commendation), meaning that receiving an award will be a little more prestigious. In addition, the ceremony itself will not be held at the Town & County Hall in October, instead we will invite the award winners to our annual dinner and present the awards at the dinner, which takes place in March.

There are a few consequences. Firstly, there will no longer be a speaker at the Annual Dinner, because the time will be taken up with making the award presentations. Secondly, there is an additional slot in October for another talk, which will take place this year on Wednesday 24th October 2018 at the Royal Northern & University Club. And thirdly, there will be no separate evening talk on the fourth Wednesday in March 2019.

These changes are all shown on the programme for the coming year.

Contributed by Dominic Fairlie.

We welcome contributions from guest writers to our newsletter. Please send them to info@aberdeencivicsociety.org.