

Chairman's thoughts, April 2010

As I complete my third year of office as Chairman, it is an appropriate time to review the changes and progress the Society has made in those years.

First, our committee has changed radically, and the new blood brought in seems to have done us a world of good: our new Treasurer, Alastair Stewart, is not only putting us on the straight and narrow financial path, but he has also created a most professional website which, we know from experience, is being visited regularly and with effect; Kit Hitchcock, who has taken on the vital and demanding role of overseeing the control of the town's billposting and shopfront eyesores, has been increasingly active and successful; our Membership Secretaries (first Barbara Hamilton, and now Sue McNaughton), have made great progress in bringing the recording of our enrolments up to technical scratch, while Sue has also taken on some of the work of redesigning our Newsletter (which will bear fruit in our next issue); and, finally, our new Minutes Secretaries (earlier Linda Boatswain, and now Yvette Gibbons) have been speedy and efficient in producing the records of all our meetings. To all these relative newcomers we owe our gratitude and hope that they may serve the Society for many a year.

Second, our old hands have continued to pursue their individual enthusiasms on behalf of the Society: Christopher Napier has been a co-celebrant of the new South Downs National Park (at last, a reality); Vincent Edberg and Tony Struthers are currently engaged on the final stages of the Town Design Statement; John Milman has worked tirelessly on promoting the Society in the town and beyond; and Tony is also constantly involved in planning at District level – soon to be partly superseded by the South Downs National Park Authority remit.

Third, however, I must add a more negative note: I am very disappointed that, after three years, our membership has hardly risen to the level I had hoped for (over 300 members). It is tempting to fear that the public's inertia in joining the Society to protect the town and its environment is due to indifference, but we are determined at all costs to increase our numbers in order to foster a greater democratic say in the way our area is protected and shaped. Surely more than 2% of our population are concerned about the town? Ordinary members, we hope, therefore, can play their part in assisting us in this endeavour. Please do all you can to bring new members along to our meetings.

Finally, the AGM brings with it this year the opportunity for you all to hear and question Tony Burton, the leader of "Civic Voice" – the new national organisation for civic societies like ours which is being launched on April 17th in London. Do come along to hear him speak about their aims and their support for community action throughout the UK.

David Jeffery