



coventrysociety

Annual Report 2024 - 2025

February 2024 – January 2025

Introduction

This is the annual report of the Coventry Society for the year from February 2024 – January 2025. The Society is a registered charity and this report sets out our achievements during the year for the benefit of members and the wider Coventry community.

Theme for the Year

Our focus this year has been cycling. We had a talk from the Council's cycling manager, erected a plaque to celebrate Eileen Sheridan and participated in two heritage cycle rides and created maps for these. Cycling was a main theme for our annual heritage conference and we had a talk about cycling and had a number of old Coventry manufactured bikes on display there.

Listing and Celebrating

This year we did not put forward any buildings for listing ourselves. However, we celebrated the reconstruction of the Summer houses at the Stoney Road Allotments and assisted and supported council proposals for the local listing of Hearsall Baptist Church and the Blacker Bombard Spigot Mortar in Keresley. We also supported local councillors putting forward a local listing proposal for the former Albany Cinema, now known as Nexus. We paid a lot of attention to the future of the former Cable and Wireless Training Centre. We could not find a way of getting this building listed, but we pursued the issue with the Twentieth Century Society and the City Council.



Some of the committee members meeting Mary Creagh CBE MP.

Campaigning

The Coventry Society is a campaigning organisation and we pursue our campaigns through a range of different channels.

To pursue our objectives, during the year we held meetings with a range of local change makers. Perhaps the most important was Mary Creagh CBE MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Council's Chief Executive spoke at our October meeting. We also met the City Council's Head of Housing, the Director of Street Services (twice), the Head of Culture and Creative Economy, the Council's Culture and Creativity Manager, the Active Travel Innovation Manager and the new operators at Drapers' Hall.

One of the biggest developments in the city at present is the City Centre South development. We held meetings with the architects and commented on the scheme as it has developed and were vocal in preserving the public art affected.

We objected to the scheme when it included no affordable housing, but we are heartened that this is now a key part of the scheme.

For the future we are keeping a close watch on the City Centre North scheme. This is currently at concept stage without any plans for detailed proposals.

We have taken a keen interest in the growth of POPS in the city. These are privately owned public spaces. They look as though they are public, but are privately owned and the owners can impose their own rules on their use. We have brought this issue to public attention through our news blog.



Britannia Hotel area

One area of POPS has been causing significant problems for the city. The open space in front of the Britannia Hotel had been taken over by parked cars.

A former Chair of the Society wrote to the local press and the Society contacted the council. We are pleased to say that the Council has solved the problem with Britannia Hotel with the careful placement of bollards.



As well as POPS, we have become concerned about the way that the covered walkways in the city centre have been taken over by outdoor seating areas, removing the possibility of using them for their original purpose.



We have been increasingly concerned about the unconstrained growth of purpose-built student accommodation, particularly in the city centre. We have proved that there is an over-provision of such accommodation and we are engaging with the council to try to bring it back under control through the review of the local plan.

As a charity, the Society does not participate in party-political activity, but our campaigns do demand political action. With the general election taking place in summer 2024, we collaborated with Civic Voice to set out a manifesto for civic living. We put this on our website and also wrote to all the candidates standing in Coventry, receiving a reply from three of them.

Consultations

During the year the society responded to the following consultations:

- Additional Houses in Multiple Occupation licensing scheme
- Warwick University Supplementary Planning Document
- National Planning Policy Framework (in conjunction with Civic Voice)
- Rough sleeping and homelessness strategy
- Local Plan – Regulation 19 proposed submission (comments submitted in 2025/26)



Other matters that we engaged with over the year included:

- The Palmer Lane scheme
- The failing roof of the Old Grammar School
- Meter Rooms - Artists studios in Corporation Street
- The Oak Inn in Gosford Street
- Building close to the River Sherbourne
- Rubbish bins placed under the windows of the Guildhall

Design

We were consulted about a proposal to build a huge tower block on the site of the Royal Warwicks Club on Tower Street. The proposal did not comply with the requirement to safeguard views of the three spires and has not proceeded.



The Society also made comments on the design of City Centre South.

Education

The Society has a close working relationship with Coventry University. One committee member is a part time lecturer in Architecture. During the year another committee member organised two tours for students and was subsequently involved in the assessment of their work.



Blue Plaques



This year the Society erected a blue plaque to celebrate Coventry cycling heroine Eileen Sheridan, in partnership with Coventry Cycling Club and Coventry Rugby Club. The plaque was erected in October at the Butts Stadium, Eileen's former cycle track and now the home of Coventry Rugby Club.



We also attended the erection of a council plaque at the birthplace of Alice Arnold in Short Street, Coventry's first female Mayor.



Planning Applications

During the year we continued to publish on our website a weekly list of the most significant planning application in the city. We looked in more detail at 78 applications and made responses to 18 of these.

We are finding that planning applications are taking up too much time on our committee agenda, so this January we set up an online planning sub group. Hopefully this will enable us to be more systematic about our input into the planning process and we will monitor it over the coming year.



Partnerships

The Coventry Society is a member of Civic Voice. One of our committee members sits on their Expert Panel on Planning and Housing. We attended their AGM in London in November.



One of our members represents the society on the Coventry Canal Advisory Board and we have close working relationships with the Coventry Green New Deal team.



Heritage

The Society has taken possession of ten boxes of booklets from the Warwickshire Historical Association, which was active from the 1960s to 2009. It has been agreed that the Society would sell these at at CovSoc events such as Heritage Open Days, the Heritage Conference and at meetings.

Heritage Open Days

Unfortunately, we weren't able to organise an event for Heritage Open Days this year. We had planned to open Drapers' Hall for a second community heritage showcase, but this was not possible as there was a new operator for the building. We did however put up a stall at the Sherbourne River Festival at Fargo Village and supported two heritage cycle rides, producing heritage maps and participating.



Heritage Network

The Heritage Network was set up last year and comprises a shared weekly email about heritage matters in the city. At the end of the year there were 142 members.



Heritage Conference

Our fourth heritage conference was held in October at the Priory Visitor Centre, attended by 80 people. We published a full report on the event. <https://www.coventrysociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Heritage-Conference-2024-Final.pdf>

Visits, Meetings, Events and a Conference



Our visit to Maxstoke Castle, the Lady of the house came out to meet us

Meetings this year were again held at St. John the Baptist Church, Fleet Street. Our thanks to Fr Dexter Bracey for his support.

During the year we had the following talks:

- February - Mark Johnson – Jewish Watchmakers
- March - Aidan Ridyard and Chris Kennedy - Twentyman Churches
- April – Our AGM - Taiwo Owatemi MP
- September - Richard Grindal - Farming
- October - Dr. Julie Nugent, Chief Executive, Coventry City Council
- November - Tim Bridges - Victorian and Edwardian Society
- December - Quiz and film show
- January - Andrew Saffrey - Coventry's Cycling Infrastructure

During the year we had a number of visits:

- May - St Barbara's Church
- June - Pershore and Warwick University
- July - Maxstoke Castle
- August - Finham Sewage Works and Coundon Wedge

In addition, there were two committee visits:

- February - Sherbourne Recycling, Coventry
- June - Spon End redevelopment, courtesy of Citizen Housing

As well as making visits, the Society has also hosted two visits:

- October - Leamington Society and Friends of Leamington Art Gallery
- January – study tour of Palmer Lane and the Priory visitor centre for visitors from Sheffield



Our visitors from the Leamington Society and Friends of Leamington Art Gallery, in St. Mary's Guildhall

Communications

During the year we rebuilt our website and moved it to a new server. We hope that you like it.

We published 158 news blogs articles during the year. We also published twelve paper updates for our remaining members who do not have internet access or email.

We continue to use social media channels and now also have a presence on Blue Sky.

Membership and Finance

At the end of the year we had 143 members, including five life members and one honorary member.

Over the year we had an income of £3,572.70 and expenditure of £3,424.77 and the balance of our assets at the end of the year stood at £4,228.03. During the year we made a donation to Carriers of Hope in acknowledgement of the talk by Mark Johnson.

Coventry Society Committee 2024-25

Chair: Trevor Cornfoot
Vice Chair: Peter Walters
Treasurer: Jim Passmore
Secretary: John Payne

Members: David Fry, Aaron Law, John Goodman, Paul Maddocks, Tim Brown, John Prevc, David Porter

Members retiring during the year: Mary Courtney.
Our thanks also to our Auditor Mike Newton.

We currently have two sub committees, a heritage subcommittee, which organises our annual heritage conference and now a planning application subcommittee.

Contact Details and Social Media

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BlueSky: [@covsoc.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/@covsoc.bsky.social)

Registered Charity Number: 500229