



Maidenhead
Civic Society
Estd. 1960

NEWS

Issue 3/21

August 2021



*At last! The handrail on Guards Club Bridge is now repaired
(Many thanks to RBWM, and to Jacqui Wheeler for the photo)*

Visit our website: www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk

The Chairman's Page

First, a word of thanks to those of you who shared the membership form inserted in our last Newsletter. The results so far have been encouraging. If you haven't yet tried to drum up a new member, please do so. It is of vital importance for our future.

We've been somewhat disappointed to find that elements in the wildlife lobby are wanting to ban public access completely from half of Battlemead Common. Pointing at our proposed route for the Millennium Walk missing link and the Boundary Walk, they have been urging people specifically to "stop the path".

The Civic Society recommended the purchase of the land for Battlemead a) to enable completion of the Millennium and Boundary Walks but b) because the need for public open space in Maidenhead, which is already below the national average, is only going to get greater with an anticipated 45% increase in population, many of them confined to town centre flats. Of course, we want to be kind to wildlife; but we'd like to be fair to humans too.

We are pleased to see the arrival of Andrew Durrant at the town hall as the new "Director of Place". An unusual title but a welcome one that puts placemaking firmly on the agenda. His appointment is timely. For, as we went to press, the examining Inspector, Louise Phillips, had just published her amendments to the Borough Local Plan for public consultation, underlining the need for placemaking.

She has inserted an entirely new section on Maidenhead Town Centre and is insisting that the Council, in partnership with the local community, landowners, developers and other stakeholders, will prepare a Maidenhead Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that will expand on the policy and provide a more detailed framework to guide new development in the town centre. This is just what we've been calling for.

And, along with other amendments, this will seriously improve the criteria for key sites in the town centre – though sadly it cannot undo what's already been done.

Maidenhead town centre in its design, infrastructure and amenity should reflect the success of its residents and its enviable Thames Valley setting. A few things have improved, notably the regeneration at Chapel Arches, but not much else.

We are inclined to moan about the architectural travesties of the 60s. Our concern is that in 40 years' time people will look back at what's happening now and think – "that's when the damage was done". Unless we do something about it.

Bob Dulson

Membership Drive

Our membership drive launched in the last Newsletter has been very encouraging but it's not over yet – so if you have not yet participated it is not too late. Remember that membership is free for new members to May 31st 2022. And don't forget to tell your new recruits to mention who recommended them in order for you to stand a chance of winning a bottle of champagne.

We have also distributed our promotion package to some 1,600 households in targeted areas of Maidenhead. Together, we've been able to welcome a lot of new members who are clearly supportive of the Society's work and who we hope will want to help us in our efforts to secure a better Maidenhead.

Joyce Delasalle

Got a Tale to Tell?

As a regular reader you may have noticed that most of the articles and commentary in the Newsletter are written by the same few people. This is not because of any policy or overwhelming desire on their part!

As well as offering news on planning matters and projects, the Newsletter aims to reflect the views of the membership as a whole. But we can only do this with what we've got. Now that we are steadily building up our membership base again, we thought we'd invite you to put pen to paper – or fingers to keyboard – and tell us what you think of Maidenhead and current developments in the town.

You might have views on traffic, housing or the provision of amenities for adults and younger people; or maybe there's just something you've wanted to get off your chest for a while. Why not draft an article for us to highlight the issue and how you think things could be improved? It could be an aspect of Maidenhead's cultural life and heritage that you find interesting and would like to share with fellow members. Maybe you've got some good ideas that no-one else seems to have thought of!

Don't worry if you've not done something like this before; we'll help get it into shape and assist with any illustrations. All we ask is that you avoid just a list of moans and anything party-political.

Editor

Planning Matters

In the last Newsletter there was considerable focus on the joint venture development proposed by Countryside and RBWM at **St Cloud Way**. These proposals are still in the pipeline and there is nothing further to report. However, it is worth noting that there has been considerable negative feedback to this latest development. Large scale high-rise schemes such as the Landing and Nicholsons Quarter have generated less response than the St Cloud Way proposals. Maybe residents are waking up to the overdevelopment of Maidenhead town centre but rather late in the day.



Belmont House at the corner of Belmont Road and Hargrave Road

The level of significant new applications has been subdued in recent months. There is an application for change of use of **Belmont House** on Belmont Road from offices to residential. This would generate 18 x 1-bed flats, all of which are to be significantly larger than the minimum size standard of 50 m². Such office conversions come under Permitted Development, but we have submitted comments regarding the inadequate provision of parking (unusual for a converted office block) and the lack of amenity space and landscaping required for a residential setting.

There is also an unusual application at **Boulters Riverside** as the restaurant at Boulters Inn is now known. It is proposed to install a floating pontoon restaurant within the boat mooring area downstream from the building. This will be serviced by a pizza kitchen and dispensing bar on dry land linked to the pontoon by steps/walkway. It is difficult to ascertain just how many diners will be on this

floating terrace, but it appears to have about 15 tables. It is also not clear if this innovative approach is a response to the demand for al fresco dining resulting from covid restrictions. Whilst we welcome investment in dining and other leisure facilities at Maidenhead Riverside, there are elements of this proposal that cause concern. The dispensing bar is rudimentary in design and does not reflect the architectural sensitivity of the Riverside Conservation Area. Some improvement in design is required. The pontoon is represented in the submitted plans, but there are no elevations to indicate the nature and visual impact of the superstructure of the pontoon. What safety barriers are around the perimeter of the pontoon to protect clientele and staff? Such an innovative proposal requires more information.

Two applications covered in the last Newsletter require updates. The twice-refused proposal to create 6 x 1-person studios at **Best One, 3a Altwood Road**, has been changed to a scheme of 3 x 1-person studios. The sizes of the living areas are now acceptable, although there are still issues with daylight, amenity space and parking.



The Best One scheme is a “Bad One”!

Devonia, 13 Braywick Road, had been refused permission for a block of 8 flats following demolition. The reasons were the height, bulk and mass of the new building and the failure to address the potential impact on the “Air Quality Management Area.” A subsequent application gives an assessment of the impact of the development on air quality and even suggests that pollution is reduced by not providing adequate parking. The height, bulk and mass of the structure is largely unchanged.

A final application for mention is **The Crown, Wootton Way**. In the past eighteen months there have been two proposals to build a block of flats on surplus car-park space at this under-frequented public house. The pub will be retained with reduced

parking availability but both schemes have been refused. The number of flats has been reduced from 12 to 10, and parking allocation has been realigned. However, it is agreed by the planners that the bulk and mass of the development is too great, and it is located too close to neighbours.

AUTHORITY MONITORING REPORT

Last year we introduced you to the **Authority Monitoring Report** which is published each spring by RBWM. It provides an analysis of planning and housing activity from April 2019 to March 2020. Below is a summary of the most interesting and relevant highlights of the report. The publication of the Report for RBWM for the year ending March 2020 was delayed and eventually took place at the end of April 2021.

Total dwellings/proportion of flats

One of the main statistics of interest has been the number and percentage of flats. You may recall that in the previous year 591 out of a total of 705 dwellings were flats – 84%. This percentage has reduced to 68% in the latest report, which sounds like a move in the right direction. But the total number of completions is well down from 705 to 404. Against a target of 712 units per annum this is a very poor performance – more than 40% below target. Because of this deflated figure only 276 flats were completed against 591 the previous year. A positive trend is the reduction in the proportion of 1-bed flats – down from 41% to 23% of the total, with a corresponding increase in 2- and 3-bed flats.

It is hard to credit that with the current level of planning applications and building activity in the town the reported number of new dwellings is so low, although it is probable that covid-related restrictions had an impact on construction activity. There is a note in the report regarding 72 flats in the Redrow “Loftings” development in Vicus Way. There was a “misunderstanding” and these 72 dwellings were originally included in the data for the 19/20 report. Subsequently, these dwellings were removed and will be carried forward to the figures for 20/21 which will be inflated both in terms of number of dwellings and number of flats. If included in this year’s data the total would be 476 units with 348 flats (73%). It is possible that the issue relating to these “Loftings” completions was a factor in delaying the publication of the report.

Permissions granted and construction in the pipeline

In the last report (2019) the number of permitted applications in the pipeline was more than 1500. This is a very significant figure which represents more than two years of the housing target. No breakdown was provided as to the number of flats/affordable housing etc. It has been suggested to the Lead Member for Planning that the Authority Monitoring Report should have a breakdown of the mix of permitted applications etc. in the pipeline. In the year ending March 2020, 1175 new dwellings were granted permission, with the total outstanding “unimplemented

housing commitments” at 2902 units. This very large figure represents more than four years’ annual housing target, and it is regrettable that there is no analysis of the status of housing mix/type. Within that figure of 2902 units there are 1800 dwellings under construction at end March 2020 – again with no breakdown. How can a Housing Strategy or any similar planning policy be applied when there is no data published for the next four years’ housing supply which is already in the pipeline? We have repeated our request that there should be an analysis of pipeline activity when the next report is published for the year ending March 2021.

Affordable housing

The Borough has consistently under achieved in the delivery of affordable housing under whatever guise. In 2014 which was the best year in recent history, 23.3% affordable dwellings were delivered, with a low of 2.5% in 2016 and 2017. The percentage in the latest report is 17% (70 dwellings out of 404) which is up from 7.2% in 2019. These percentages are of all completed dwellings. However, there is a definition for a qualifying site requiring an element of affordable housing. This is a development of more than 15 net units and/or more than 0.5 hectare. Last year, according to the report, there were 5 such sites totalling 217 dwellings. These delivered 66 affordable homes or 30% of the total on those 5 sites. Of course, the issue is the swathes of town centre developments where affordable housing is deemed to be unviable.

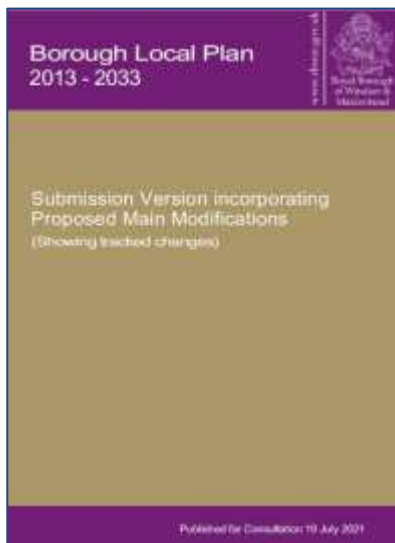
Other points

- The number of dwelling units generated by change of use from offices to residential was down on the year from 216 to 45 (30.6% to 11.1% of total units) and they were of course, all flats.
- Of the total 404 new dwellings, 280 (69.3%) were in unparished Maidenhead as covered by Maidenhead Civic Society and Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum.
- Dwellings completed on the Green Belt peaked in 2018 at 140 units (26.2%) and have subsequently dropped to 33 units (7.6%) for the year to March 2020.
- Garden infilling peaked in 2016 with 238 units (34.7%) and is down to 35 units (8.1%) in the latest report.

This is a summary of the key points in the Housing section of the Authority Monitoring Report for March 2020. The report is essentially an historical analysis of one year – 19/20. Regretfully, any potential value in steering upcoming planning policy is lost by the lack of a statistical breakdown of the four years’ housing supply (2902 units) which is already in the pipeline. The data exists, so why is it not presented it in a manner that can indicate the current direction of travel, rather than see how things turn out in four years’ time?

FINAL CONSULTATION ON LOCAL PLAN

A final consultation on the Borough's long-awaited Local Plan is under way, to consider a comprehensive list of amendments made by the planning inspector in the light of the public examination last year.



There is an entirely new section on Maidenhead Town Centre, which will go a long way to replacing the Town Centre Area Action Plan, and another on the Golf Club. But there are no real shocks in terms of development sites. However, the latest version confirms that Reform Road which had been earmarked for residential is taken off the list, along with the former Hitachi office site at Whitebrook Park and land at Summerleaze Gravel.

An area of land south of Ray Mill Road East, which was recently the subject of an application for a housing estate, is also removed in favour of it becoming a pocket park. And a parcel of land, north of Lutman Lane, known as Spencer's Farm returns to the list with an increased potential for 330 dwellings (previously 300) and a primary school, although the site is curtailed to allow part of it to be used separately for recreational purposes.

The Society will be studying the detail, and we hope members will too, before responding by the deadline of 5th September. More information can be found on the council's website at: <https://consult.rbwm.gov.uk/portal/blp/blpmm/blpmm>

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING

Reform of the planning system as proposed in the government's White Paper has drawn criticism from many quarters, including both sides of the House of Commons.

As a Society, a prime concern is that the proposals, far from encouraging greater local involvement in planning, would severely restrict the opportunity for public engagement and comment on specific planning applications. Our view is shared by many others who also see it as a threat to local democracy.

With a view to maintaining a rapport with our planners, we expressed our concerns at meetings in June with our local MP and Patron, Theresa May, and in July with RBWM's new Director of Place, Andrew Durrant, the Head of Planning, Adrien Waite, and Managing Director, Duncan Sharkey.

Civic Voice, the umbrella body for civic societies in England, has taken up the cause too and a couple of weeks ago held a webinar with Clive Betts MP, chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee which has produced

a wide-ranging critique of the proposals. Working with Reading University, Civic Voice have also been carrying out a survey of the efficacy of Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) in England which local planning authorities (LPAs) are required to produce. SCIs set out how a planning authority will engage with the public about local plans, neighbourhood plans, and development management cases.

Unfortunately, their interim report shows that many, including RBWM, are out of date and inadequate and few, if any, had any measurable principles. A disappointment for us, which we've raised with the town hall, was that the Civic Society is not even specifically mentioned as an RBWM consultee.

In our meeting with Andrew Durrant we learned that as Director of Place he will oversee planning, infrastructure and economic development as well as neighbourhood service standards. As such, he has picked up the baton on Maidenhead's proposed 'vision and charter' from outgoing property boss Barbara Richardson.

Although we told him that, in our view, the vision was nebulous – just a list of nice-to-have things without any real planning ambition or teeth – it seems we're lumbered. And his next steps were to set about recruiting the 'town team' of stakeholders to take it forward.

WINDSOR TOWN COUNCIL

Plans to create a separate Town Council for Windsor have been rejected by RBWM, following a public consultation in May.

Councillors voted 20 – 15 against the proposal for a new council representing the unparished areas of Windsor with 21 councillors in 10 wards. If approved, the first elections would have been held in May 2023. Then, almost certainly, a similar exercise would have been undertaken in Maidenhead.

With that in mind, the Civic Society's executive committee agreed that we should oppose the idea in principle. The essence of our response was as follows:

From their petition and comments, some elements of Windsor's residents clearly feel they are inadequately represented by the Borough Council and there are times when Maidenhead Civic Society feels the same.

But it seems unlikely that a body with little or no autonomy and only limited powers will meet their demands satisfactorily. So, while this is really a matter for Windsor residents to decide, we do not think a Town Council for Windsor is the answer, nor indeed – because it would almost certainly follow – for Maidenhead.

We oppose the notion of another tier of government. We believe it would distance residents still further from the decision-makers and prolong the decision-making process while adding another layer of politics, bureaucracy and costs.

Rather, we would prefer to see a better level of representation on the Borough Council supported by a comprehensive strategy for community engagement, particularly on planning issues.

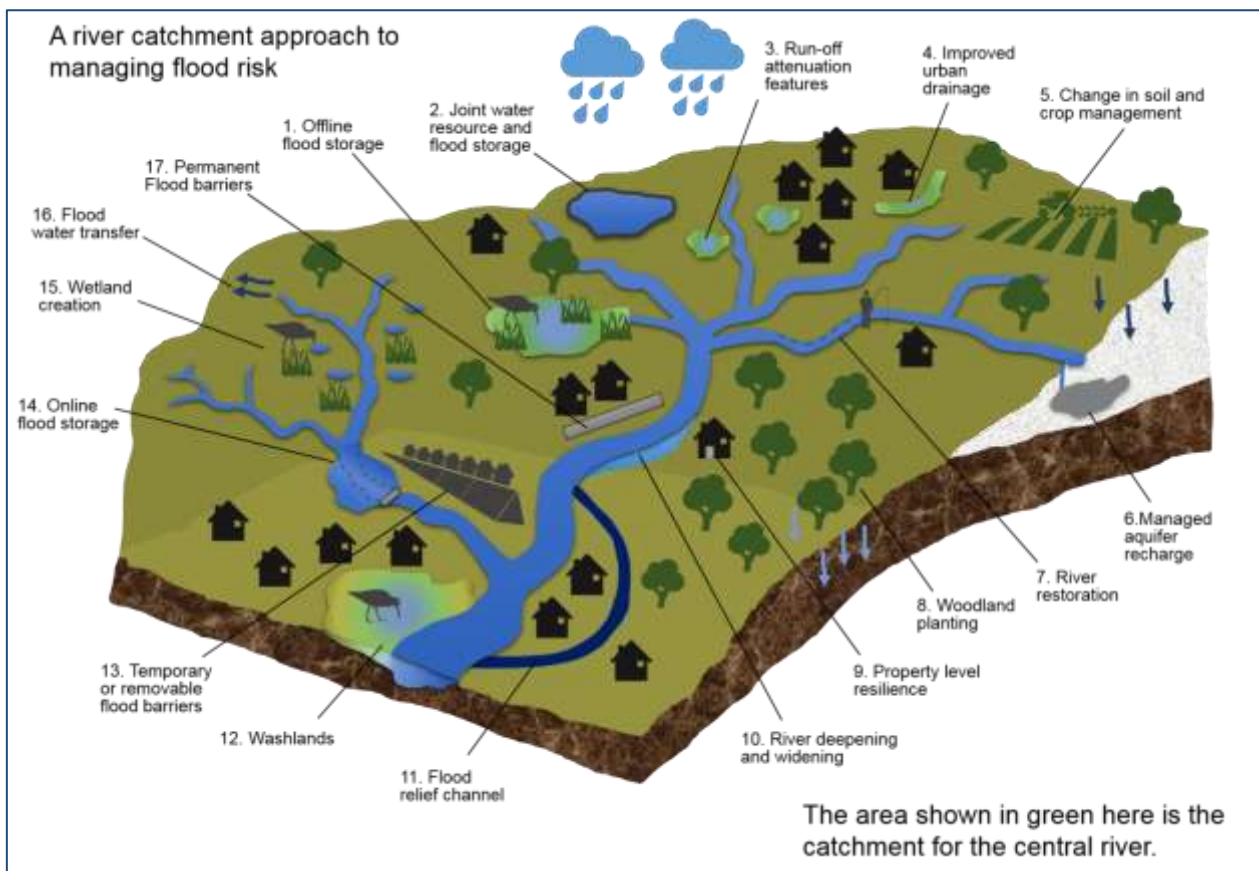
THAMES VALLEY FLOOD SCHEME

The Environment Agency (EA), councils, water companies and others have done much to manage flood risk in the Thames Valley over the last 50 years.

Nowadays, people are better protected than ever before by flood defences, like the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme and the one at Marlow. But the number of properties and businesses continues to grow significantly and many of these are in areas at risk. So the EA is investigating several different approaches to managing flood risk across the area (*see illustration below*). These aim to manage the increasing impacts of climate change and support communities where it has not been possible to provide a local scheme.

You can find out more about the Scheme and offer your views in a consultation which closes on 20th August, at:

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/thames/tvfs-home/>



Martin McNamee and Bob Dulson

Projects

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE!!!

North Town Moor Pond

We have been monitoring this pond for years. Unfortunately, it is now badly silted (those willows have dropped increasing numbers of leaves over the years). Last desilted by the Royal Borough in 2014, it needs doing again. In the meantime, The Green Way Working Group – the Society is a member – arranged for “Good Gym” (in red) with help from “Make Space for Life” (in green), both local conservation groups, to make a start in June by getting rid of some of the reeds.



The Green Way under the A4 Bridge

This section has often been underwater due to a leaking brick wall (why a brick wall and not a flood wall? don't ask!) and the pump not working. Attempts have been made with mixed success to plug the leaks in the wall and the pump is now fixed.



This shows what happens when the pump doesn't work, exacerbated by a brick wall that leaks

However, water is still seeping onto the path from both sides due to unplugged holes in the brick wall and also apparently from seepage under the path, probably related to when Windsor TV put in a cable in 1992. We hope this problem can be resolved.



Left: February 1992, Windsor TV dug a trench in the stream bed and pumped the stream around, in order to lay a cable, long before the current, much deeper, waterway was created. Right: July 2021, water seeping onto the path from both sides; note the feeble sandbags

Maidenhead Waterway and the Byofix Trial

The new waterway has dramatically improved the appearance of the town centre but the water is slow moving and prone to developing blanket weed, or as the Environment Agency (EA) likes to call it, Zygometalean algae. An increase in blanket weed in warmer weather leads to ugly mats of it forming on the surface of the water.

Last year I helped monitor the aquatic fauna when Dyofix (a blue dye) was used to try and control growth. This year Byofix is being used (a bacteria-based treatment). Maidenhead Waterways paid for a better, longer-reach net which I use to monitor three sites (the library bridge, the railway bridge and the boat lift) every two weeks. The Byofix seemed to be working until the hot weather in July. Then, while the Chapel Arches basin was happily not overly affected, near the Railway Bridge and the Boat Lift there was a lot of blanket weed mats on the surface. The EA say when the weed goes yellow it is on its way out. We will see.



Above: The old and the new nets



Left: Chapel Arches basin, and below: Boat Lift and Weir, on 27th July, with a mat of blanket weed between the boom and the weir



Ann Darracott

Events

Visit to Waltham Place – Church Hill, White Waltham Berkshire, SL6 3JH on Tuesday 7th September 2021

We have revived our plan for a private visit to Waltham Place on Tuesday 7th September 2021. The tour includes the Ornamental and Kitchen Garden and costs £12.00/head which covers entry onto the Estate, a guided tour with the gardeners, plus refreshments and biscuits. Numbers are limited so please book early. We will meet in the car park at 10:30am and form smaller groups for the tour, which takes 2-3 hours.

Please note that photography is not permitted.



WALTHAM PLACE
"WORKING WITH NATURE"

Tours of Waltham



Join our gardeners for a walk around the beautiful gardens and woodland of Waltham Place. Designed by Dutch garden designer, Henk Gerritsen, using his principles of natural planting, the gardens reflect his idea that nature is not symmetrical but irregular, free and whimsical. Natural gardening is all about your relationship with the garden and its evolution, using your knowledge of plant systems and families.

...enic and biodynamic husbandry, we have created a haven
undance of insect and animal life, fungi and indigenous
is our legacy; our investment in the future.

...m Place Estate, Church Hill, White Waltham, Berkshire SL6 3JH
01628 825 517 • Email: estateoffice@walthamplace.com
www.walthamplace.com

If you wish to reserve a place on this visit please contact Tina Sell on 01628 628675 or by email to tinasell62@gmail.com and send your cheque, made payable to "Maidenhead Civic Society", to Tina Sell 'Marlborough', River Road, Taplow, Bucks, SL6 0BB. Alternatively, you can pay by online bank transfer: Lloyds Bank, sort code 30-95-36, account No. 00277876. Either way, please include a contact email or phone number. Bookings should be received no later than Friday 20th August 2021.

News from the Heritage Centre

You will have read that the Heritage Centre may be moving to the former SportsAble clubhouse at Braywick. The little word “may” is very important as we have yet to begin discussions with the Royal Borough about the all-important terms and conditions under which we would do some kind of property-swap. What can be said is that the Heritage Centre needs much more space, which the building could provide. Our aim is to continue to be a significant resource for the whole local community from individuals and adult groups to schools, day centres and care homes. You will have read that recordings of our zoom lectures are being made available free of charge to day centres and care homes. The location is very close to M4 Jct 8/9 and 15 minutes’ walk from the station and there is on-site parking for a small number of visitors. We know from surveys that around 90% of our current visitors reach the centre of Maidenhead by car and feel that the new location may actually be more convenient. The extra space and the new location will also allow us to make the centre a “destination attraction”, with the capacity to welcome coach groups etc, all of whom will provide much needed income. We also intend to have a money-making cafe; after all the V&A used to advertise its exhibitions using its cafe as the bait.

The negotiations are about to begin and we hope that they will be concluded by the end of September, pandemic and summer holidays permitting.

Meanwhile, the summer of sport continues with the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, due to begin on July 23rd. An allied exhibition “Maidenhead and the Olympic and Paralympic Games” celebrates our many connections with the Games, starting with Lord Desborough organising the 1908 London Olympics in two years flat after Rome withdrew following a major eruption of Vesuvius in 1906. There are uniforms, Olympic torches and much else on display and we look forward to seeing you.

At the time of writing, our every popular River Thames Cruises will take place on 3 and 7 September. Full details will be on our website by the time this Newsletter is published.



The 1948 Olympic Torch

Dates for your Diary

Tuesday 7th September 2021

Visit

Visit to Waltham Place, White Waltham

10.30 at Waltham Place car park

CIVIC SOCIETY – KEY CONTACTS

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2021

All meetings are online via Zoom until further notice

12th January, 9th February, 9th March, 13th April, 11th May, 8th June, 13th July, 10th August, 14th September, 12th October, 9th November, 14th December

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 17th November 2021 at 8.00 pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 15th October 2021**

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