



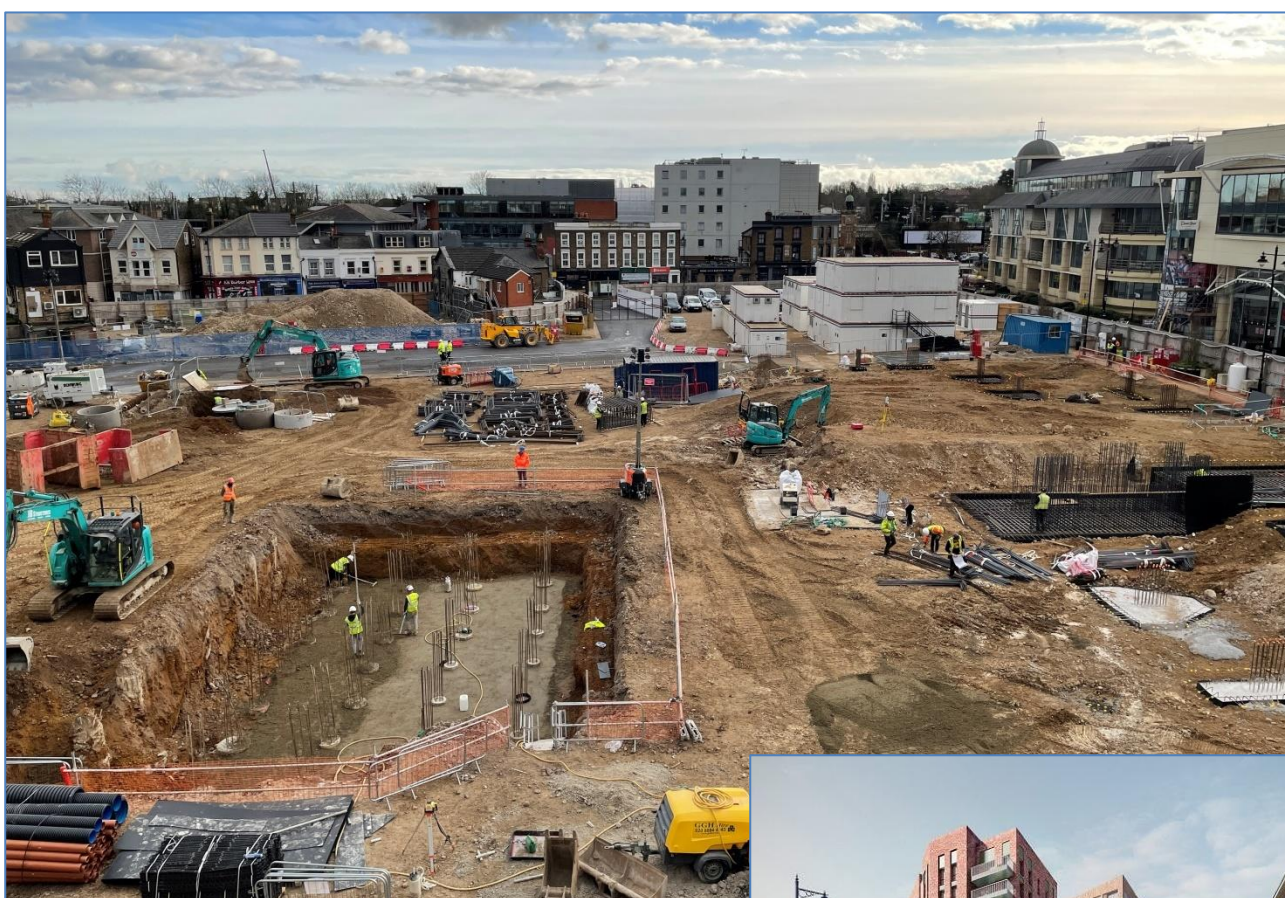
Maidenhead Civic Society

Estd. 1960

NEWS

Issue 1/22

February 2022



*Looking south from Nicholson's carpark:
work is now under way at the "Landing" site –
will it ever look like this? ➔*



Visit our website: www.maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk

The Chairman's Page

The gentrification of Chapel Arches continues. “Swanky”, someone said. I wouldn’t go quite that far but another two new trendy eating establishments have opened recently and two more are preparing to join them. What’s more, I hear that parents of pupils from two Windsor schools are now buying their uniforms in Bridge Street. So even residents from Datchet are among the diners – while, of course, parking at Waitrose! Consequently, though office workers have not yet returned to work in numbers, footfall in the High Street is up 29% on this time last year.

This is encouraging news, especially for the new town manager, Robyn Bunyan, who’s just completed her first six months at the town hall. But sustaining a decent level of footfall will be a serious challenge for Robyn and for Maidenhead as major redevelopment causes serious upheaval in the rest of the town centre for at least the next five years. One issue she’s tackling is the lack of comprehensive information on town centre regeneration. She plans to launch a one-stop shop of facts online, providing impartial information about who’s doing what and what’s planned where. Unfortunately, it won’t include an overall plan because there still isn’t one. I know I go on about this; but when are we going to see a plan for the town centre?

It’s four years since the Council decided that the Area Action Plan (2011), which sets out specific policies for the Town Centre, should be replaced by a broad-brush Borough-wide Local Plan (BLP) with a view to accommodating more homes.

With others we were swift to point out that while homes may be the priority, the diggers and cranes had arrived, regeneration was under way, and a holistic plan town plan was essential. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to determine together what kind of place Maidenhead should be. Otherwise, uncoordinated piecemeal planning would prevail. Two years later we got the first draft of a Vision & Charter for Maidenhead. The resulting document, we hoped, would be a blueprint for the future that everyone could sign up to. But it was not to be.

Then last May, during the examination of the emerging BLP, the inspector seemingly answered our prayers when she decreed that the BLP should be accompanied by a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the town centre, drawn up with residents and stakeholders. And she was chasing its progress at the hearings in December. So how’s it going?

Well, as we go to press, the Inspector has submitted her report declaring that the BLP, with modifications, is sound and the council are likely to adopt it at a meeting on 8th February; but work hasn’t even started on a town centre SPD. Perhaps the BLP is destined to be a plan-to-have-a-plan.

Bob Dulson

Planning Matters

Planning application activity levels have been subdued over the past three months. Of course the most contentious scheme was already in the pipeline and came before the Development and Control Panel in mid-December. The redevelopment of the **Magnet Leisure Centre site** on St Cloud Way has been approved. The re-submitted plans reduced the total number of dwelling units from 439 to 434 because Block C has a reduced height of one storey – down to 7. However, the number of affordable homes was reduced from 130 units to 87. Considering the RBWM's continuing failure to deliver affordable housing it is regrettable that this development in which the Royal Borough are Joint Venture partners only delivers 22% affordable against the target of 30%. The modified scheme also addressed flood related issues, an east/west cycle route through the site and minor adjustments to car and cycle parking arrangements, including the designation of five parking spaces for use by Maidenhead Mosque and Islamic Centre. The issue relating to the lack of parking for the two doctors' surgeries and pharmacy was not addressed. This new development is in the same style as the recently completed Countryside blocks – Cooper Court and Trinity Place – which are located either side of the junction of St Ives Road and York Road. The architecture of these blocks has been received with lukewarm enthusiasm. The Magnet scheme is more of the same. The main difference is that the new development is up to 11 storeys in height – an additional four floors. The application was approved by just 5 votes to 4, with the panel split on party lines. Disappointing. The detail of the scheme was delegated to the Head of Planning. It really is time that the Royal Borough required developments of this scale to have more eco-friendly heating systems than individual gas boilers for each dwelling unit.

We have commented favourably on the proposal to build a development of 44 senior living apartments on the northern section of **De Beers** off Gringer Hill. The



developers euphemistically refer to the dwellings as “later living” but there will be a continuing demand for such accommodation as our population ages remorselessly. The office space above the defunct Barclays Bank at **129 Bridge Road** (left) is proposed for change of use into 3 flats: 2 x 1-bed and 1 x 2-bed. Unfortunately, only one of the

flats meets the minimum Nationally Described Space Standard and the space needs to be reconfigured into 3 x 1-bed or 2 x 2-bed of adequate size. One parking space per flat is provided, but because of the location there is no possibility of leisure amenity space. The intended use of the former bank on the ground floor is unknown.

The change of use of **Hanson House** on Castle Hill roundabout from offices to residential has passed - in fact as Permitted Development: the file shows “Prior Approval Not Required”. The demolition of the Hitachi building at **Whitebrook Park** on Lower Cookham Road continues, and it is to be hoped that once the site has been tidied up the RBWM will properly designate the site for residential development (not flats) alongside the site of the former **Stiefel Labs** which is located immediately to the east. This latter block is yet to be demolished. Subject to flood remediation, the combined site offers a fine opportunity to create a substantial development of much needed family homes.



Hitachi: now you see it (above); now you don't (below)



We continue to scan the weekly application lists for extension proposals, but are mainly concerned with locations within the flood plain or Conservation Areas. Although still not meeting in person because of the pandemic, the Planning Group are asked for feedback on all applications of potential interest, which are reflected in comments/objections as required.

Sadly, since our last Newsletter Rudi Sheldon has passed away. Rudi was long-established on the Planning Group before I joined in 2007. For many years before everything went online, Rudi would identify applications of interest and collect the hard copy planning files from the Town Hall on the afternoon of our meetings. He would then diligently return them first thing next morning to the Planning Department. We thank him for his service and dedication. A fuller tribute to Rudi appears elsewhere in the Newsletter.

Martin McNamee

What do The Athenaeum Hotel, Birmingham New Street Station and Bosco Vertical Milan have in common with Maidenhead?

Shops certainly, and a few other things no doubt. But the destinations mentioned benefit from a variety of vertical urban greenery, either vertical forests (Milan), a living wall (Birmingham), or a vertical garden (Athenaeum). As well as the wow factor created by these vertical urban plantings, they help reduce air and noise pollution, strengthen the sense of intimacy of a place while invoking the presence of nature and increase biodiversity. Masking the unimpressive aesthetic of some buildings is an added bonus. Maidenhead could benefit from all these aspects of vertical plantings.

Maidenhead Civic Society published *Making Maidenhead a Better Place* in November 2021. Here the Society is clear that much more needs to be done to the built environment to reflect the Thames Valley setting and add to the sense of place and wellbeing in Maidenhead. The “Better Place” document has a photo of a vertical forest as an illustration of what can be achieved with forward thinking urban planning. As Maidenhead pushes ahead with a new car park, and new tower blocks, is greening of the facades being required as part of planning permission? We know that as with all build projects, careful assessment of requirements and budgets for maintenance is essential – vertical planting may not be ideal on single storey restaurants for example. In common with many exteriors, vertical planting mostly requires professional maintenance. Given the advantages they provide, could Maidenhead aim to be a leader in town development incorporating greater swathes of green through vertical planting, that would be attractive to people, highlight the uniqueness of the town, adding to the sense of place Maidenhead is seeking?



Maidonians are concerned by developments that would reduce Maidenhead’s environmental credentials, both developments with planning permission already granted and potential developments which are still at discussion stage. Greening the town centre seems a worthwhile focus of attention.

The picture on the *left* is from the website of Nicholson Centre Master Plan. There is a distinct lack of greenery, and any green seems to be at ground level or roof top only. Could Areli, the UK-based urban regeneration specialist

managing the Nicholsons Shopping Centre project on behalf of the owner, Tikehau Capital, be persuaded to include vertical gardens if they are not already included? Areli has the expertise. Vertical gardens are a way of making the tower blocks more appealing, bringing environmental benefits as a bonus. Suburban ennui around the town centre is understandable, but we know that where we live affects all aspects of our lives. We are told by government that Maidenhead needs the housing unit density the tower blocks will provide. Can we provide accommodation that helps people thrive in tower blocks? One of the ways to do this, apart from making accommodation in Maidenhead actually affordable instead of just being labelled affordable, is to make housing feel desirable through nature.

The photo to the *right* is one from The Athenaeum Hotel, London, where the living wall has been in situ since 2009. The hotel feels that the wall quickly became a desirable symbol for them, with environmental benefits. An example of the environmental benefit given on their website explains that the plants purify the air by soaking up greenhouse gases and converting CO₂ into oxygen. The photo is included as contrast to the starkness of tower blocks in the Maidenhead picture.



Maidenhead is seeking to improve its credentials as a place to “live work and play”. Leveraging the benefits of vertical greening could make Maidenhead an exemplifier of a town seeking to put the interests of its inhabitants at its heart, reflecting many of the ideals espoused by the Society. We could have our own desirable symbol of thoughtful environmental management, becoming a place to visit to experience vertical garden living walls benefits. What do readers think?

Kathy Murphy

[Ed: This is an occasional contribution from one of our members. We welcome similar pieces from members for future publication.]

Rudi Sheldon

A former Royal Borough councillor and long-time Maidenhead resident and member of the Civic Society passed away at the age of 97 after decades of service to education, politics and community groups. Ralph ‘Rudi’ Sheldon died at Wexham Park Hospital on 24th November after complications from a fractured hip.



Born in what was then known as Breslau, Germany, in the 1920s (now Wroclaw, Poland), Rudi moved to the UK in 1936 just before the Second World War. He joined the RAF towards the end of the conflict but the war ended before he was required to carry out any active duties. Rudi went into teaching at East Barnet Grammar School where he met his late wife, Adrienne, whom he married in her home country of France in 1953. They had three sons and moved to Maidenhead in 1966, staying in the town

for the rest of their lives. His earlier career in education saw him advance from a geography teacher to a headmaster role.

Rudi was also very much involved in politics, taking on the role of a councillor, deputy mayor and mayor’s escort in the 1980s and 1990s, representing the Democrats, as did his wife. Rudi spent 50 years with the Maidenhead Music Society and was a founding member of the Windsor and Maidenhead Symphony Orchestra and a founding trustee of the Norden Farm arts centre. Rudi represented Maidenhead Arts on the Carnival Committee for many years, and for the 2000 Carnival Concert he was a member of the Windsor and Maidenhead Symphony Orchestra which performed that millennium year.

As mentioned earlier, he was also – until very recently – part of Maidenhead Civic Society’s planning group.

Society member and former editor of the *Advertiser*, Martin Trepte, recalls “I knew Rudi for many years as he wore a variety of hats, from being a hard-working local councillor, to a spokesman for Maidenhead Music Society and a member of the carnival committee. When I think of him I recall a lovely man filled with energy and passion for everything he did, driven by high moral principles to do what was best for the people of Maidenhead. A true public servant whose dedication was matched by his immense kindness; the town is poorer for his loss.”

On Friday 28 January 2022, a classical music concert at Norden Farm, presented by the Maidenhead Music Society and featuring the Endymion Ensemble, was held in memory of Rudi.

Projects

Update on Battlemead Common

The good news: the fence alongside the causeway path across the East Field on Battlemead has been put up. This path will be opened at the start of April and will remain open for walkers until after the Rotary Club's Boundary Walk at the start of October. It is closed during the winter to protect migratory overwintering birds. This path, a vital part of the missing link in the Millennium Walk, will also allow a circular walk on the new common in the months the path is open.

The bad news: is that in the interests of screening the path from the wetland about 60 willow slips have recently been planted along the causeway path, in some places in double rows. The species planted is the goat willow (*Salix caprea*) that grows to 10m. Alder may also have been planted.



The causeway path with new fence and ca. 60 willows!!!

This number of trees will have an impact on the ecology of the wetland which relies on overspill of water from the White Brook (its banks were poached by cattle in the past) and rainfall to keep it wet. Water will be lost via transpiration from the trees and their leaves, dropped into the wetland, will decay, thereby increasing siltation. In 2019 the north wetland had dried out completely by the late summer so water is an issue.

The trees will also affect the flora that had been developing on the banks as the habitat changes. The water itself is dominated by blanket weed (filamentous algae) in the warmer months. In the long term the willows could obscure views of Cliveden from across the north wetland.



Willow slips planted in the north wetland with Cliveden on the horizon



Willow slips planted in the south wetland that is already drier as the flora developed.



A stand of bulrushes in October 2021, now flanked by willow slips. You may be able to see in the lower RH corner the wire indicating where later the fence was placed.



Bankside flora in the north wetland in August 2021, before the fence was erected and willow slips planted; note the blanket weed in the water

There is also the question of what impact 60 willows and two fences will have on any flood flows across the site, of particular concern to Cookham residents. Apparently, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Royal Borough's flood consultant have said that the willows will not have an impact on flooding.

The Royal Borough's Natural Environment Manager, Jason Mills, says "The wetlands are in a process of recovery after decades of impact from cattle grazing and poaching so the botanical diversity is relatively low, therefore the addition of native willow and/or alder (and the various invertebrates associated with those species) will improve the overall biodiversity of the wetlands." He also says the screen is to provide cover for species less resilient to the presence of people and dogs including birds such as reed bunting, reed warbler, water rail and mammals such as roe deer. Interestingly, of the birds, only the reed warbler was cited in a 2019 report about birds present on the site, noting only "a single bird singing in the reeds along the stream on multiple occasions" so these birds are evidently relatively rare. Most of the wildfowl using the wetland are common and widespread species dominated unfortunately by the Canada Goose.

Apparently the planting has been discussed with both the EA's flood and biodiversity officers and they are in agreement. Let's hope they are right! If not, anyone reading this some years down the line will know that flooding and other impacts on the wetland had been pointed out to the Royal Borough by the local amenity societies.

The Green Way – Path Improvements



The pandemic has resulted in more walkers using the Green Way paths with consequent effects on them in the winter. In May last year the Society raised concerns about the poor condition of many sections of the paths at the Green Way Working Group meeting. We also met Peter Prior, Managing Director of Summerleaze Gravel, who kindly offered to supply strategically

placed piles of hoggin-like material. Subsequently Jacqui Wheeler of the RBWM liaised with the Conservation Volunteers (TCV) to carry out improvements, a process that is ongoing.

The photos show paths at the junction of Green Way West and East just north of North Town Moor before (*above*) and after improvement (*right*).



The Statue “Maidenhead Boy” – its trials and tribulations!



In 1995 this bronze statue by Lydia Parker (née Karpinska) was placed at the top of the pedestrian section of the High Street as part of its improvements, after a campaign by the Society. The statue, modelled on Lydia’s son, had been a failed planning gain that had been left in the foundry for many years. As noted in the September 1995 Newsletter, it bears the coat of arms of the Royal Borough and the Godayn Seal of Maidenhead and as predicted has improved the visual appeal of this part of the High Street.

In 2003 the “Boy” was vandalised by a drunken idiot swinging on its arm while pretending to be King Kong. I know this as Lydia, myself and the town centre manager, had to meet the offender as part of a restorative justice programme to say what effect his actions would have on us. The statue, now missing an arm, was retrieved. The Society campaigned to have it repaired.



In 2004 the “legless” statue featured in a Newsletter article on the “Eyesores of Maidenhead.”

In 2005 Lydia, who happily had a resin copy of the statue, was able to repair the bronze (with a new and strengthened arm) and the repaired statue was unveiled by the then Mayor, Cllr Emrys Richards, in February.

The April 2005 Newsletter described the repair process and detailed how the statue came to be available in the first place.

A new addition was a plaque on the statue's plinth that listed the organisations donating funds for the repair, including this Society.



2022 Over three years ago the plaque came unstuck from the underlying brass plate and it languished under a desk in the Town Hall. We campaigned to have it re-fixed. Eventually our chairman, Bob Dulson, asked the Town Centre Manager if she could find it. She did and handed it over to him at a meeting, watched by local developer Michael Shanly who said: "Give it to me." And very shortly afterwards it was back in place! We are very grateful to him for making it happen.

Let's hope the statue creates no more alarms for a while!

Ann Darracott

Events

Sadly, there is very little to report due to the restrictions with which we are still living. The Society's committee has managed to continue to function by making good use of Zoom, and, indeed, we again held our AGM last November in this way. It all worked well technically and a lively session was attended by some 30 people. The formal abbreviated minutes of the proceedings of our AGMs are normally printed with the agenda for the following meeting – a year later. By then everyone's probably forgotten what went on, anyway!

For our recent meeting we were pleased to be able to welcome Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, who has been in post since March 2021 as our guest speaker. Since we weren't able to record the proceedings for a wider audience, we thought members would appreciate this short resume of Andrew's talk.

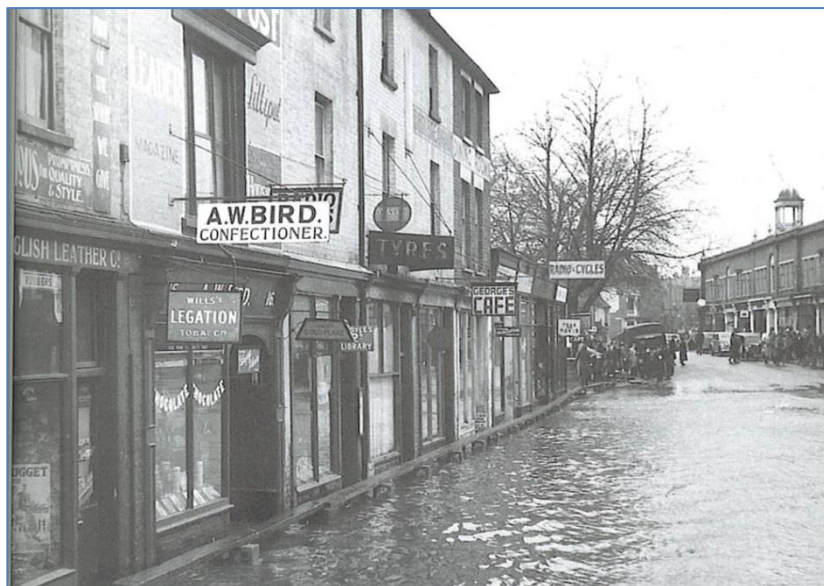
He came across as young, energetic and had slides to accompany his talk which gave a broad overview of what "Place" is all about. In short, it is dedicated to providing professional, high quality local services creating inspiring places for residents, visitors, and businesses in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. 120 RBWM staff work in Place services and are involved in planting trees, devising and implementing a climate strategy, infrastructures, highways, environmental services, walks, bus services, Vision Charter, Town Team delivery and service delivery. It is a vast brief. The Director is unfazed by this, claiming that there has been communication between him and Duncan Sharkey, Chief Executive of RBWM since January. He participated in a Question and Answer session after his talk and claimed that Housing not being part of Place was not a problem because the connections are all there between housing strategy people and Place. Place employees are agile!

The Council is ready for the financial demands imposed by the Environmental Bill. The Council is aiming for carbon net zero which it anticipates the public will demand. When asked whether there was overdevelopment in the Borough leading to bad effects on air and water quality he promised to look into the smell emanating from the Town Tip or the sewage works, agreeing that green open spaces are essential for young children. He was pleased that the Civic Society participates in Community Engagement attempts by the Council. RBWM need to use its network and to strike a balance between those who can reach out and those newcomers who will receive a welcome pack.

Andrew Durrant is the father of three young children and as such he is optimistic and upbeat about the direction Maidenhead is going in. His attitude underlines the overarching message from our Chairman, Bob Dulson, that our Society desperately needs new blood. The average age of our Executive Committee does not bear thinking about. We need the energy, optimism and vision Andrew displayed if we are to fulfil our desire to preserve the best and improve the rest.

News from the Heritage Centre

The Heritage Centre is hoping that with the ending of Covid restrictions we will all get out and about again and that visitor numbers will recover strongly.



A special exhibition to mark the 75th anniversary of the disastrous flood of 1947 opened on 1st February and will run until mid-March, which is when the 1947 flood was at its height. We would be pleased to hear from anybody who has family photos or memories of the 1947 or any subsequent flood events.

The 1947 flooding at Bridge Street

We are looking for additional volunteers for our front of house team now that business is picking up again. If you are interested, please contact Richard Poad at the centre or via email on info@maidenheadheritage.org.uk.

Consider joining the Committee

We were very encouraged by the response to our 2021 membership drive, resulting as it did in an increase of more than 10% in our numbers, and we hope that members will continue to explain to friends and contacts how joining the Society can help our efforts to improve Maidenhead.

We feel that it is now time to recruit additional Committee members to better represent that increased membership, and to ensure that the Society is adequately stewarded as older Committee members retire. The Committee meets monthly, usually on the second Tuesday of the month and currently online via Zoom until such time as we can return to meeting in person. We follow an agenda but our meetings are quite informal.

So if you are minded to join the conversation we'd be delighted to hear from you. Call our Chairman, Bob Dulson, on 01628 627130 or email info@maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk and we'll be happy to explain more of what's involved. Don't be hesitant: we all once started from scratch!

Dates for your Diary

Saturday 14th May 2022
Society display

Cox Green Fayre

Saturday 23rd / Sunday 24th July 2022
Society display

Maidenhead Festival

MAIDENHEAD CIVIC SOCIETY

Patron The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

KEY CONTACTS

Executive Chairman	Bob Dulson	01628 627130
Hon. Secretary	Eileen Goford	01628 638238
Hon. Treasurer	Peter Child	01628 632300
Planning Group	Martin McNamee	01628 623203
Projects	Ann Darracott	01628 620280
Newsletter & Website	Brian Darracott	01628 620280
Events		
Membership Sec.	Joyce Delasalle	01628 637342
Newsletter Distribution	Sue Ross	01628 626849



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2022

All meetings are online via Zoom until further notice

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

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 16th November 2022 at 8.00 pm

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 15th April 2022**

News Editor: **Brian Darracott**
 editor@maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk

General Enquiries: **info@maidenheadcivicsoc.org.uk**

Printed by: **Denwal Press, Unit 1, Maidenhead Trade Park, Prior's Way, Maidenhead, SL6 2GQ**
 www.denwalpress.co.uk