



PETERBOROUGH CIVIC SOCIETY

PETERBOROUGH PROMOTES –

SEIZE THE TIME!

Peterborough Civic Society Chairman **David Turnock** and Vice Chairman **Toby Wood** go head-to-head on the latest issues affecting the city...

Toby Something's got to change! Seize the time! Citizens of Peterborough unite! Change is now!

David For goodness sake, Toby, what are you on about?

Toby I'm just trying to think of a slogan that best represents what the Civic Society's about. It's time for Peterborough to have a stronger identity and feeling of self-worth. For too long the city has not really had a conversation about who we are, what we are, and where we want to be in ten years' time.

David I'm not sure what you mean. Explain further.

Toby Well, a few years ago there were a couple of jokes on the local comedy club circuit which weren't exactly complimentary about Peterborough.

David For example?

Toby Here's one: Peterborough is a bit of a one-horse town – without the horse.

David And what's the other one?

Toby One bloke stops another and asks, "Where is Peterborough?". The chap scratches his head and replies, "Peterborough is north of the south, south of the north, west of the east, east of the west but not really in the Midlands or East Anglia. I hope that's quite clear."

David There's an element of truth in that. We don't have strong regional identity. Perhaps

that's part of the problem, particularly now that a store like John Lewis has decided to move out. That was quite a blow because shoppers would visit the city from a forty-mile radius. There's a great deal of resentment about that. The Development Corporation spent such a lot of time and effort in the 1970s persuading John Lewis to come to Peterborough.

Toby That's my point David – Peterborough now has to do more to attract people from outside to spend a day or even longer in the city.

David But we already have so much to offer. I can list quite a few attractions off the top of my head – the Cathedral with its best West Front in Europe, Ferry Meadows, Flag Fen, John Clare Cottage, the Langdyke Trust, the Lido. I could go on.

Toby Fair enough, all those attractions are fine in their own right but many people who live in Peterborough haven't been to some of those, or perhaps haven't even heard of them. John Clare Cottage, for instance – how many Peterborough people know that Clare was one of the most famous and influential poets that this country has ever produced? The problem is that no one cares about him and what he stood for.

David Then perhaps it's up to us as a city to do something about that. Perhaps, as we leave the Covid-19 pandemic behind, now is the time for the city to come together to

make a concerted effort to promote itself in a coordinated way. We've just had the City Council and Cambridgeshire/Peterborough mayoral elections – the new regimes can make a concerted effort to promote Peterborough and what it has to offer. The local MPs could also throw their weight behind any plan of action.

Toby Right, let's give the politicians and those in power a few suggestions and see what happens.

David Good idea. Let's give them suggestions, throw down the gauntlet so to speak.

Toby I'll start – there needs to be a federation of the top organisations and attractions in the city. They all agree to promote one another and give members a higher profile. In fact it could be called 'Peterborough Promotes' – that could have a nice tie-in with Posh! For example,

"Peterborough is clearly trying hard to attract and cater for people of different backgrounds and different experiences."



“...Clare was one of the most famous and influential poets that this country has ever produced.”

Peterborough United could make sure that there was a page in every programme advertising Peterborough Promotes activities and John Clare Cottage, and other local participating venues could do the same, making sure that any events at the Posh ground were encouraged.

David There could be some sort of Peterborough Promotes loyalty discount scheme, whereby residents get discounts to member attractions.

Toby What I would like to see is some sort of physical tie-in between attractions,

“It’s a big question and one that divides opinion.”

perhaps a circular bus service that connects various parts of the city, making it easy for visitors to get from one place to another.

David Toby, I wouldn’t disagree with any of what you say, but there is however one overriding issue, and a very pressing issue that Peterborough needs to deal with at the moment.

Toby What’s that?

David The future of the Embankment. We at the Civic Society are still insisting on the need for a Master Plan to guide all development and enhancement works on the Embankment site. Various Town Hall promises have been made with no real outcome apart from piecemeal proposals for the Anglia Ruskin University, which have resulted in building work underway on site with Phase 1 and a very recent planning application for Phase 2. These two significant buildings do not appear to be part of a coherent plan for the University campus itself. As far as we can see

there has been little ‘joined-up thinking’ so far.

Toby So, what should happen from now on? Undoubtedly we should embark on local democratic processes which involve the widest range of participants. Ask the people what they would love to see on the Embankment. Ask people - what is your VISION of a future Embankment? How do you think people should be consulted? Should change happen at all?

David Well, people should be asked the following. What is your vision for the place? Should it be an open space which is quiet, natural, wild, tranquil? Should it have more trees and shrubs, be more of an urban park with small scale leisure activities? Must it provide at least one open area ideal for events, festivals, concerts and other performances? Should part of the Embankment be given over to a new football stadium?

Toby Ah, the football stadium. I wondered how long it would be before we got round to talking about that.

David It’s a big question and one that divides opinion. But the people of Peterborough can’t make up their minds until, they have seen all the evidence and weighed up all the pros and cons. That’s why we need an Embankment Masterplan.

Toby The way you describe it, it is rather obvious and straightforward. Surely a Masterplan has to happen, otherwise people are just going to think that anything that is proposed by the Council is a ‘done deal’?

David As part of any Masterplan the City Council needs to commission a detailed Technical Study by a multi-disciplinary team of Council staff and consultants to find out what is on and under the Embankment and what are the opportunities and challenges. They need to ascertain what are the capacities and limitations - traffic, parking, cycling and walking access and public transport.

Toby Then I suppose any findings should be published and consultation conducted with the public through meetings, known contacts, local press, radio and social media.

David That’s right. The Masterplan would then contain a number of feasible options for real action and follow up with a round of public consultation. The agreed plan of action should be put in place and carried out so that the citizens of Peterborough can have a stake in and give it their enthusiastic support. The process may take a little longer, probably ten to twelve months, but it will be worth it. The future direction of the Embankment is crucial to the future vitality and viability of the city centre as a whole, and it is of paramount importance to get it right with the public’s approval.

Toby So there we have it! David - you’ve provided the rationale, I’ve provided the slogans. Seize the time! Citizens of Peterborough unite! Change is now! Now all we’ve got to do is get it done!



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