



# PETERBOROUGH

## 2022? Peterborough Civic Society Chairman **David Turnock** and Vice Chairman **Toby Wood** look back on an eventful year...

**D**avid Well, here we are – right at the end of 2022, so much has happened, not just in the country but in our city as well.

**Toby** That's true. My beloved Peterborough United were demoted from the Championship to League One – I suppose that was the most important thing that happened this year.

**David** That wasn't actually what I was thinking of. There have been a number of things, both large and small, that have happened in our city this year. Let's start with some of the small things. Those things that people can actually see; those things that have started to make an improvement.

**Toby** Give me some examples...

**David** Well, there's the relocation of the market for one. Although that wasn't a popular move, it has to be said, the addition of the market stalls in Bridge Street certainly improves the look and feel of one of our city's main thoroughfares. The new market stalls, although they've got a rather temporary look, seem reasonably fit for purpose. And let's not forget that the fish and meat market has been relocated into a couple of the shop units on Bridge Street. Surely that is a good move?

**Toby** Let's hope that more Peterborians actually use this new facility. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, so to speak. It's a matter of 'use it or lose it'!

**David** I notice that D'Arcys in Westgate, one of the city's

oldest shops, closed down earlier in the year. Thankfully it seems to have reopened as a café. It certainly has a marvellous old frontage. Thank goodness that's been kept.

**Toby** Yes, earlier this year David D'Arcy, the last owner of the famous Peterborough jewellers, gave us a history of the shop and his family. He told us that records show that the building itself dates from 1791. It's had quite an interesting history. In 1844 the shop was purchased by Dr William Gaches for £300. Then, in 1855, it was bought by William Sawyers and soon afterwards James D'Arcy, David's great-great grandfather who first leased, then bought the shop. Apparently, the jewellers business passed down through the family, including John (known as Jack) D'Arcy who married Lena Zimmerman in 1923. They had two children, Michael (David's father) and Ray. The successful business expanded and a branch in Whittlesey was opened in 1949.

**David** It's amazing that the business stayed in family hands for so long. I suppose that's why we know so much about it.

**Toby** You can still see the lovely original shop front, as well as the iconic clock that stands on the wall above the shop window. It's a Longine clock and was installed in 1960. In the 1980s, the family won a legal battle with the Development Corporation, preventing compulsory purchase of the shop.

**David** How fascinating. So how come the shop is no longer in existence?





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**Toby** In 2001 Michael D’Arcy died and gradually, mainly due to the change of shopping habits, the business became unviable. In 2016 the business was closed and the property sold, sadly seven years short of its centenary.

**David** How sad. D’Arcy’s shop was unique in Peterborough and its passing certainly marks the end of an era in city centre locally-owned shops. Thanks to the new owners for retaining the impressive frontage now that the shop itself has reopened as a café. Let’s wish the new business the best of luck!

**Toby** Of course, we are living through the most difficult economic time. There really isn’t much expansion happening in the city at the moment.

**David** Well you say that, but just look at the area around the river Nene bridge. We have the new government offices, and of course there’s the large new Hilton Garden hotel that towers over the bridge; it’s going to have a rooftop bar with superb views over the city.

**Toby** An ideal opportunity for photographers to look out over the city centre?

**David** I thought you might say that! Anyway it’s a great opportunity for the city to look at that whole Embankment area.

**Toby** You’re right. There’s such a lot that could happen there. It’s a much-underused resource. I was down there just the other day and, apart from loads of geese and the

occasional dog walker, there wasn’t anyone down there. Now that Fletton Quays has been built, there are surely hundreds of new city centre residents just waiting for improved city centre facilities. Those people living in the new flats and apartments would surely benefit from a range of new leisure facilities.

**David** That’s right. Just think how lively and vibrant the Embankment area could be if there was a proper new walkway complete with cafés, restaurants and other smaller outlets.

**Toby** Not only that – Peterborough people would be more likely to visit, have a walk and soak up the atmosphere next to the river.

**David** And let’s not forget the new ARU Peterborough university. Just think how attractive that whole riverside area could be for the students and visitors alike.

**Toby** So, developing the Embankment and riverside area is a ‘no brainer’?

**David** Exactly that. We in Peterborough Civic Society have been saying for years that the area is ripe for smartening up. All it would take is political will, a few ideas, people with the courage of their convictions and, of course, some money!

Of course the proposed improvements as a result of the Towns Fund could make some difference as well. Funding has already been approved for the new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the river Nene. It looks as if that will be built fairly close to the Key Theatre and will link the existing north side of the river to the new Fletton Quays development. Hopefully that will make the area seem more of a whole.

**Toby** I’m really surprised that Peterborough people don’t use parts of Fletton Quays already. When there’s a Peterborough United home match, my wife and I park in the new multi-storey car park at Fletton Quays. It’s new, bright, clean, close to the London Road ground, yet hardly used. We park there, walk to the Bewitched café for a coffee and cake, then go to watch Posh win yet again! I’m really surprised that more home supporters haven’t discovered it.

**David** Perhaps they will now that you’ve told them in *The Moment* magazine! And talking of football, that brings us to the discussion around the proposal to relocate the football stadium to the Embankment.

**Toby** The Civic Society has thought about this long and hard and, after much consideration, has decided that a new stadium on the Embankment is just not appropriate.

**David** That’s right. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, there’s just not enough space; a new stadium would be far too close to ARU Peterborough, and the two are not compatible. Secondly, there’s not adequate access to the site – just imagine people trying to get to, and park at, that part of the Embankment. Thirdly, the stadium would dominate the city centre skyline and seriously affect Cathedral views. And this doesn’t take into account the business arguments. Can the city really sustain a football club that only attracts an average attendance of well under 10,000? We know that the club’s current owners have plans for the stadium facility to be used for up to 200 days a year as an entertainment venue, but we’re not convinced of the feasibility of this.

**Toby** There are many supporters that feel that the way forward for the club could be to redevelop the current ground and to improve facilities by building and developing the existing area between the London Road end and London Road itself. There is actually very little wrong with the club’s current location. Posh are in League One and until such time that support improves significantly, there really isn’t a pressing need to move.

**David** Of course, in time, there may be opportunities for the Club to move to a more out-of-city location. Middleholme has been mentioned in the past, that's the area to the east of the Frank Perkins Parkway, but it may well be used for housing instead. We mustn't forget that there is an Embankment Masterplan that is a framework for possible future growth and development. The problem is that there's no money!

**Toby** That's true, but there are other elements of the Towns Fund that may well happen. The Towns Fund is a Government-funded scheme for economic regeneration of towns through investment in urban regeneration, land use planning and infrastructure, skills and enterprise and connectivity.

**David** Sounds a bit of a mouthful!

**Toby** Certainly does, but basically it means that local authorities can bid for Government funds, as long as they are able to justify any suggested projects and attract additional funding from other sources. In short, just because a local authority suggests something, that doesn't mean it will actually happen.

**David** As far as I am aware, £1.5m has been agreed for the new climbing wall/Activity Centre at Ferry Meadows. This should attract people from all over the region, not just Peterborough.

**Toby** And another of the projects that has been approved is the pedestrian/cycle bridge over the Nene that we've already mentioned.

**David** There are still quite a few Towns Fund projects that have either not been allocated funds or have been shelved for the moment. There was supposed to be an extension to Peterborough Museum to house some of the city's valuable Bronze Age assets, but that is currently unlikely to go ahead. There is also a major plan to transform the old Woolworths/TK Maxx building on Bridge Street into a new library, culture and community hub. However, this project is being described as "ongoing" and the Council is submitting a business case to the Government in January 2023 to secure funding. In short, it may not happen.

However, one of the Towns Fund elements that is going to happen is the Lincoln Road upgrade. This element will focus on the Millfield area of Lincoln Road, between Searjeant Street and Windmill Street. £2.5m has been allocated for this project although, in truth, you don't get a

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lot for the money so the public won't see huge changes, just a few changes and alterations.

One of the largest elements of the Towns Fund is the Station Quarter. In the online Ask The Leader session back in October I asked Cllr Fitzgerald all about this and he told me that £1.5m from the Towns Fund Bid was for improving links from the station to the city centre; the larger Levelling Up Fund Bid of £48m is for the redevelopment of the station quarter itself. If we manage to get those funds for the city, expect lots of work to improve the station capacity and access - it could be a great scheme for the city!

**Toby** So things are happening in Peterborough, even though there is very little money and the immediate future economic prospects don't look too rosy.

**David** Despite everything we must stay positive for our city. We both know that we want the best for our city, and we've got to work together to make sure the new proposals are the best we can achieve.

**Toby** Agreed. We've talked about the city's economic situation before - and no doubt we'll do so again! So what else is on your mind, David?

**David** Well I have to say that there are some significant improvements in the city centre, particularly in the southern part. I've already mentioned the new Bridge Street market stalls, but the café culture is certainly improving and seeing the street more vibrant again with 'pop-up' stalls is fantastic. The relocated fish and meat market stalls into one of the Bridge Street shop units seems to have worked well.

**Toby** Yes, there are signs that Peterborough is recovering from the dreadful Covid-19 pandemic. I also note that there have been significant attempts to ensure that the city centre is once again an attractive place to wander round. Enforcement officers have had a higher profile recently and the Police have been taking more action on anti-social behaviour and street drinkers. Those efforts need to be maintained over the coming months.

**David** Let's hope that the winter is not too severe, and that people still have cash to spend in the city centre. And let's also hope that, when you and I sit down to discuss our dear Peterborough again, there's much to be cheerful about.

**Toby** I'll drink to that. Cheers!

## Funding worth £6million approved by Government for three more Towns Fund projects

Three more Towns Fund projects have been successful in bringing millions of Government funding to Peterborough. The Pedestrian Bridge project, Station Quarter project and Lincoln Road improvements project have all had their business cases signed off by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) - with £6million now on its way to Peterborough to help fund them.

### Towns Fund general update

This is just the latest success for Peterborough in securing Government Towns Fund cash. There are eight projects in total:

1. **Embankment Masterplan** - £200k secured from Towns Fund - Complete
2. **Digital Incubator** - £120k secured from the Towns Fund - Complete
3. **Green Technology Centre** - £2million secured from Towns Fund - Ongoing (business case successful)
4. **Activity Centre** - £1.5million secured from Towns Fund - Ongoing (business case successful)

5. **The Vine** - Asking for £13million from the Towns Fund, £4million of which has already been received - Ongoing (business case due to be submitted in January 2023)
6. **River Nene Pedestrian Bridge** - £2million secured from Towns Fund - Ongoing (business case successful)
7. **Lincoln Road upgrade** - £2.5million secured from Towns Fund - Ongoing (business case successful)
8. **Station Quarter upgrade** - £1.5million secured from Towns Fund - Ongoing (business case successful)



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