

The Riverporter

ST IVES AWARD WINNING NEWSPAPER

Issue 74: II December 2020

A TOTALLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER • UNCONNECTED WITH ANY GROUP OR ORGANISATION

A Merry Christmas & a virus free New Year to all our readers

Good news at last?

Hardly anyone can be sad to see the end of 2020, for it has been an exceptional year. It started quite normally in St Ives with a lot going on, pubs with live music, restaurants busy and a wide range of shops open for business.

As the year progressed, so did the virus - on its spread around the globe and by the end of March it became clear that life might not be the same for a while, even in St Ives. There were a few highs and lows, as promises of a solution came and went. However as I write this we have seen the first injections of a registered vaccine and a ray of hope - a really good news story at last. 2019 had been a tumultuous year politically with arguments about Brexit, which divided the whole country, and it seemed inconceivable that 2020 could not be better. Covid-19 soon challenged that view and, despite some differences of opinion on how to beat the virus, at least our community came together to help those most vulnerable.

So it seems that the social life we once enjoyed may return sometime next year as the vaccines are rolled out. Of course nothing should be taken for granted and to use a well-worn phrase 'There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip' so we can only hope that this will be the case. There is no doubt that St Ives will not be quite the same again. Several of our shops have shut (see p2) and there will have to be a re-think about the future of our town centre. The Prospectus For Growth document produced for HDC and the Combined Authority over a year ago may need a rethink. The plan to spend around £1 million on each of our Market Towns, including St Ives is needed more than ever, however what seemed needed twelve

months ago may not be what is needed now. There should be public consultation around the planned spending, and hopefully that is still the case. There was a fear that the consultation was simply an exercise and that the plans were pretty much agreed, with the public having to take or leave the proposals. Confirmation of the funding for St Ives is due in January, when we should have an idea about what the money will be spent on. Let's hope it takes into account the current state of our town centre and that the proposals will be imaginative and concentrate on measures that will create new opportunities and help those businesses that remain to prosper.



A Christmas message from The Mayor

I just wanted to wish all your readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Putting aside all of the troubles this year has served up, I can genuinely say that seeing the people of St Ives come together in support of family, friends and strangers alike has been truly heart warming.

From myself and the Mayoress, and on behalf of everyone at St Ives Town Council, I want to thank each and every one of you. As we enjoy this festive time, different as it may be, and look ahead to the New Year, I am confident that together we can face whatever it may bring - to share in its joys, to console each other in its dark times, and to perhaps all grow a little closer in the process.

Finally, don't forget to keep an eye out on social media and the Town Council website for the Time Capsule Live Stream on New Year's Eve.

Merry Christmas.

Jonathan

Even more good news . . . Chill Bill returns to his Christmas home



The Snowman Festival team is so pleased to announce that Bill has finally emerged from his summer quarters to wave at us all from Holt Island through the festive season. Our thanks go to his new work party team headed up by Rob Taylor. Rob reports that Bill is looking a little worse for wear from sleeping rough, but he will hopefully soon smarten himself up to face his public. Three cheers for Bill!

Win a £20 Shopping Voucher

Anyway it's good news that he has returned, helped by The 2nd St Ives Sea Scouts and also that children can win a £20 Shopping Voucher by doing the Snowman Elf Trail. Simply find the 18 letters in the shop windows (see map right). The letters will spell out 3 words related to the Christmas season. Children are invited to find these 3 words and ask an adult to private message their answers on the new Facebook page. Just look for:

2020 St Ives 'Recycled' Snowman Festival

Twelve children can win a £20 Voucher supplied by St Ives Town Team and Townrow, that can be spent in Toys at No.9 or in the Townrow store.

Still walkers, Christmas elves and a cycle challenge provided festive joy in Bridge Street. HDC joined forces with One Leisure to provide entertainment, food and drink. There will be more of the same on Dec 13 and 20, at 10.30am and 2.30pm. The public can enjoy hot chestnuts, balloons and Christmas cookies, made by the Zest café team, mulled wine and mince pies, some donated by Morrisons, and the Starlite Roadshow will provide the music.

Photo HDC.



A VERY SPECIAL EDITION

This is the last *Riverporter* for this exceptional year. The past 12 months have seen some fascinating news, the details of which we hope to have brought to you with just a touch of humour. We have created a limited edition that highlights the news of the year, which the Mayor will bury in his time capsule.

See page 4 for more details of how you can get a copy.



Read on-line at www.theriverporter.uk or see our Facebook page. Email: editor@theriverporter.uk

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Time to start looking forward to next year

It's been so sad that the Covid restrictions have taken such a toll on the town's Christmas activities this year, usually held at the Corn Exchange. As with many of the nation's venues and halls the regulations say we can open but the people that would hire or organise events are not allowed to operate normally, so the Corn Exchange has had no choice but to remain closed. Undeterred the directors are already working hard to plan a fantastic new programme of music and art events for the coming year that will be announced as soon as restrictions allow.

Supported by the generous UK Arts Council grant the Corn Exchange is planning a whole new range of regular music and arts events along with planned internal updates, including re-designed bars and new stage lighting and sound systems. We're aiming to place our Corn Exchange at the centre of great entertainment right here in the town centre while of course still retaining our support for the town's groups and our private and commercial hirers.

It's not all bad news!

With the national news this past week carrying ever worse reports about the UK's beleaguered shops, we thought we'd take a walk around town and see just how affected St Ives is. And while it's certainly true that we have a good crop of empty, or soon to be empty shops, there are also signs that our town's spirit of entrepreneurialism is certainly not dead. Have you noticed this lovely new store in the Mews?

Sadly, it is hidden behind the huge scaffolding in Bridge Street. Behind the building works is a new store, dedicated to Gin! ...

Ginstrumental says they are a 'Gin and Spirits Boutique' and they have certainly got an impressive range of stock.

We're hoping Erik can convince them that a tasting session over Christmas would be a good idea.



As we moved around town, we notice that the Broadway 'Forget me not' florist has been re-born as a lovely pop up shop (see left) and in Crown Street the old Antech computer shop has become a useful telephones shop. In Station Road many people have already found the new Courtyard mini shops, behind the auction house.



So while we have an unfortunate crop of empty premises, for the moment at least, St Ives is looking good and we need to support our local stores. Right: Helloz' One of our new stores in Crown Street.



Pictured are some empty stores. A few have been empty for a while but others are perhaps victims of the pandemic.

Oliver Cromwell - The Grinch who stole Christmas?

From our history correspondent Daniel Wiseman



We are all expecting that Christmas is going to be a little different this year, but at least we are going to have one! At the time of Oliver Cromwell's rule, those celebrating Christmas faced being arrested. So was Cromwell the original Scrooge?

In the first half of the 17th century, Christmas had been an important religious festival. December 25th was a public holiday and began twelve days of celebration. Buildings were festively decorated and people enjoyed special meals, drank alcohol, exchanged presents and visited family. They even had mince pies (although in those days, they were savoury rather than sweet).

But a certain group of Protestants, the Puritans, saw the excessive eating, drinking and gambling as sinful and argued that nowhere did the Bible claim followers of Jesus should celebrate his birthday. They saw Christmas as a Catholic tradition not a Protestant one. They wanted a different Christmas, with a different name – Christ-tide – where businesses remained open, there were no special church services and people were expected to fast!

Following the outbreak of civil war in 1642, the Puritan Parliament began to clamp down on Christmas. But experts remind us it was Parliament rather than Cromwell himself who were responsible for this. Cromwell may not have been present when some of the laws were passed, although he didn't necessarily disagree with them.

The banning of Christmas wasn't a success. Some towns saw rioting and many just celebrated Christmas in secret. It wasn't until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 that the humbug laws were overturned and Christmas returned. How ironic that every December, our statue of Cromwell is left staring and pointing at the Christmas tree in the centre of town.

St Ives is truly blessed

When it comes to volunteers and those that help others and this year of Covid 19 has brought out the best in St Ives in so many ways. In past years, the Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre (HVC) has provided Christmas lunch in the Free Church to those in need or being alone at Christmas. This year, due to Covid difficulties the Free Church was

not in a position to offer this again. Instead hampers will be delivered to those people.

However several of our Town Councillors under the support of Mayor Jonathan Pallant have come together through the Town Hub project and with help from the HVC to save the day.

Working with Brandon Bent landlord of the White Hart and 7 Wives, the team have arranged to produce up to 200 Christmas dinners that will be delivered by driver on Christmas Day. If you know of anyone elderly, alone and in genuine need this Christmas, that could benefit from this amazing support please email us here at:

editor@theriverporter.uk and we will pass your information on to the HUB team members and they will help where they can.





having your say ...

The Riverporter

Voted Best local newspaper of the year 2019/20 in the Cambridge Building Society's Community Magazine Awards



Get it off your chest, email Erik at: editor@theriverporter.uk

NEWS UPDATE

We received this Facebook post from Jason Green and thought it needed a reply.

Ref Cromwell Surgery extension

Yes it is horrible but yet again the riverPorter uses this as an excuse to continue its attack on certain councillors - why not just stick to the stories and stop your political campaign???

Dear Jason,

Thank you for your comment. There is often a very fine line between giving an accurate account of an issue and giving the impression of some bias. Ron and I started The Riverporter to give readers news about St Ives, a place we love. Neither of us have political affiliations and we try very hard to be accurate with the facts, whilst getting to the heart of the issues, warts and all. That inevitably results in us commenting on politicians decisions, as our system of government wrests nearly all power in their hands. The Doctors Surgery extension report is a prime example of this.

We first reported on the plans in March 2018 (RP5) and reflected the concerns of many people about the inappropriate use of metal cladding. We attended planning meetings, spoke with the surgery and wrote a critical piece reflecting the views of the Conservation Officer, residents, heritage specialists and the Civic Society. Eventually a decision was made and nearly all the concerns of those groups were ignored in favour of allowing the extension, as it was 'for the greater good' of the community according to planning officers.

Whilst they proposed approval the only people able to make the decision to refuse or allow it were local councillors and we feel, as many others do, that in this instance they got it wrong. It may seem to you that we are regularly more critical of only some councillors and that is true, but it is not because we have a campaign against them. It is because those few councillors are the ones in power and at the planning meeting to determine this application it was the comments of the two District Councillors for St Ives that held sway. In fact hardly any of the other councillors spoke on the issue.

The Surgery did not respond to our questions and our local District Councillors, who regularly seek praise for things they do, will not speak to *The Riverporter*, despite our assurances that we will print their comments verbatim.

We/you elect councillors to make decisions on our behalf and we trust them to do that. District and County Councillors are paid for their work and therefore they should be accountable for their decisions.

Sadly there is little political opposition locally, with one party having a substantial majority. Councillors in power, who run the District and County, mostly refuse to work with councillors from the other parties and often use bullying tactics to stifle any meaningful debate and therefore it is left to *The Riverporter* to raise genuine concerns. We will continue to do that, regardless of who is in power and making the decisions, if we consider that genuine concerns have been ignored. **Ed.**

Dear Erik

The new surgery unveiling has resulted in a number of unanswered questions including, 'How could this happen in our town?' A little digging on the Town Council website reveals a few answers. The Planning Committee of our Town Council recommended approval of the plans on 28 February 2018. Yes, recommended approval. There were very few comments, referring only to the height of the building, the colour of the stonework/brickwork and construction traffic. True to say, our council is merely a Statutory Consultee - it has no planning powers, and so planners at the District Council can heed or disregard our council's comments. But with the plans in front of our elected representatives, why on earth was more fuss not made at that stage, especially in the face of detailed criticisms available to them from our respected Civic Society, plus known objections from most of the neighbours? Perhaps if our council had raised an almighty protest from the beginning and recommended refusal with many detailed arguments, instead of approval with hardly any, the outcome may have been different?

So what can we do? We need to keep an eye on the Planning Committee Agendas, lobby our councillors, and attend the meetings to speak. We have to make sure our feelings are heard and our councillors hear us and pass our comments on. We, and our council, have to shout louder on issues this big and also make sure we are heard at the District Council. Other parish councils do. **A resident**

Dear Erik,

Planners should be forced to pay compensation for bad planning. What a way to treat one of St Ives' long-time residents now in her later life. Shame on them. And as for the surgery, they'll have to move premises to avoid being forever known as Cromwell Carbuncle.

Peter Law, St Ives

From our environmental correspondent Heidi N. de Tries

So dears, as you know I have been stir crazy at home. So when Mr Gasket suggested an amble down the busway path the other weekend I jumped at the chance for some fresh air and who knows what. Off we set and what a busy morning it was - we weren't the only folk out with the same idea. Walkers, bikers, families with children, families with dogs - sometimes both!

Anyway, all were happily avoiding each other politely when suddenly, as we returned towards town near Harrison Way, there was a loud bang, a shriek and the sound of a bike hitting the deck. I turned to see that the leading cyclist of an approaching family of mum, dad and two girls - the older girl - had ridden straight into a galvanized steel upright pole head first. It was in the middle of the pathway! She was doubled up in pain with her bike on top.

She lay unmoving and I was convinced she was

Road resurfaced

A huge clean-up operation took place in London Road, last week after a lorry carrying chemicals caught fire near the Esso garage and witnesses reported hearing loud explosions and seeing flames that were so high they could be seen over roof tops.



Picture: TOMMY JERZYTOMEK

Councillors set the budget for 2021

Wednesday evening was the last full council meeting for 2020. Held over zoom it proved another interesting one. The main items on the agenda were to decide on some grant applications from St Ives and Warboys Cricket Club - (awarded £5,000), Ignite St Ives Radio Project - (awarded £739.20) and the St Ives Dementia Friendly Group. The latter was awarded £9,992.29 after a recorded vote when 9 councillors supported the award and Cllrs Drye and D'Souza voted against the award.

Following this, councillors considered the budget for 2021, which initially would have required an almost 15% increase in the Town Council's portion of the Council tax. It was considered too big an increase and after some discussion councillors agreed to delay work on Warner's Park Pavillion, and with a couple of minor adjustments the precept was set at £821,000 a 5% increase. Whilst any increase may be unwelcome it seems acceptable, considering the support for community groups - deemed vital now and the costs of being carbon neutral by 2030.

GOOD NEWS FOR DEMENTIA FRIENDLY GROUP

The lockdown and restrictions have made things difficult for those in the community living with dementia - and their families and carers. So the DFC volunteers devised and delivered Love to Move, Reminiscence and Riverport Singers choir practice sessions online and by Zoom, and maintained regular contact with everybody affected by this debilitating diseases.

Now there has been some excellent news. The first is that we have received £1,000 from the District Council's Community Chest fund to help cover the cost of the dementia-friendly choir practices for three months - thank you HDC. And the second is that the popular Dementia Café, funded previously by the Alzheimer's Society, is now managed by the DFC Group and is able to continue in the Free Church by special arrangement - thank you Free Church!

STOP PRESS Town Council approved a grant to enable DFC to continue all their activities within the town for at least the following year! Sincere thanks go to the Town Council.

A Granny and a Rapper, both from St Ives have been creative during lockdown

Jennifer Coville, the granny, has published three books, which she describes as great Christmas presents for children of all ages. The books are titled *The doorway to the poems*, *A Green Hairy Thing Wearing Dad's Old Vest* and *Wild Africa*. For details of how to get copies email Jennifer on: jennifer_coville@sky.com or call 01480 465117.

The Rapper, Jack Marriott, also known as Jay-D, released 'Lost My Way' in September. The track, which tells of his struggles with anxiety and self doubt caught the attention of BBC Radio Cambridgeshire and has had more than 20,000 plays on Spotify. To listen to Lost My Way visit: <https://music.apple.com/gb/album/lost-my-way-single/1527484302>.

HEIDI SPOTS A HAZARD

seriously hurt. Darlings, you would have been proud of me. My caring, sharing instincts kicked in and I moved to assist her - but then a voice (my own) said, 'Heidi NO! You can't touch her.' Luckily, her father quickly attended and after some minutes she recovered enough to sit on the verge, but complained of a pain in her chest. After a while the family moved on. But all who had gathered, including me, were very shocked by what had happened.

After a stiff G&T at home I mullied it over. Why was the pole there? Mr Gasket said it was a gate post for use when the bridleway is flooded. Now, I may be a bit muddle-headed sometimes but I ain't stupid. No sensible cyclist would want to go through a flooded section, and an irresponsible one could easily bypass a gate. But if it does have a useful purpose, why is it positioned in the middle of the busy busway path. And why is it not more clearly marked as a hazard? So, after a restless night,

and consulting with our lovely Mayor, I wrote to our County Council Highways Department with my story.

I said that if the posts have a purpose (and by the way what is it?) then for goodness sake make them more visible before somebody gets really hurt. That was two weeks ago - so far no answer.

So my loves, take care and be safe - especially on your bike! Byeeee, Heidi x

STOP PRESS

As we go to print, we understand that the Highways Department at CCC has passed on Heidi's questions to the Guided Busway Management Team ... **ED**



HYPERION

Entries Invited for Our
Next Antiques & Later
Sale on 2nd January 2021
Viewing Thursday 31st December



Sold In Our Last Antiques & Later Sale



Case of 9 Bottles Warre's Vintage Port
1977 Sold £420

Local Interest; Large collection of Local
Slides inc. Hinchingsbrooke, Huntingdon,
Sawtry etc Sold £250



Large collection of Gemini Jets and Corgi
Aircraft's
Sold £220

Hyperion Auctions, The Salerooms, Station Road, St Ives PE27 5BH
www.hyperionauctions.co.uk 01480 464140



The Best of The Riverporter

The Riverporter has created a special edition (Riverporter 75) which includes the main news stories about St Ives over the past twelve months.

This edition was created for the Mayor Jonathan Pallant to put in his Time Capsule. The idea was to give a flavour of what life was like in 2020 in St Ives and something that will be of interest to the people who may dig up the Time Capsule in 2050.

If you would like to get copies of this 12 page limited edition you can order them from us. There will be a small charge to cover the cost of printing and everyone ordering a copy can also get a free copy of The Wit and Wisdom of Erik (subject to availability) which contains some of the cartoons that have appeared in the paper since it started in January 2018.



Remember the 'Highlights' and 'Lowlights' of serious news reporting by ordering your copy at editor@theriverporter.uk or by calling 07900112635

ADVERTORIAL

Light up your property and give it the exposure it deserves this Christmas



Last year, Rightmove saw a 26% increase in web traffic, with over four million of us visiting their website on Boxing Day.

Did you know...

It has been a decade since the last white Christmas, back when the average UK house price was £170,365. The average UK house price now stands at £244,513, a 44% increase.

Online property searches double over the Christmas and New Year period.

On average, there's a 20% increase in people searching online for their next home.

9 pm was cited in last year's prime property-surfing time.

Over 2.3 million people visit Rightmove on the 29th of December.

Over 3.3 million people visit Rightmove on the first day of the year.

Your property could be marketed to a HUGE online audience over the festive period and the New Year. Listing is a sure-fire way of capturing attention from serious buyers and tenants.

Source: Brief your Market, Rightmove, DataLoft

Try and look at things from a buyer's perspective

During the last few months, we've seen a spate of over-valuing by agents only to see those prices slowly reduce in the preceding weeks.

Our advice: be realistic. You'll sell more quickly and won't miss out on the house of your dreams because you couldn't sell in time.

Imagine how buyers feel when they see a property on the market for ages at the wrong price. Where's their incentive to view? We'd rather miss an instruction than put it on the market for an inflated price. There's just no point. If your house has had lots of viewings and it is still not sold... you have a problem! If it's had no viewings... the problem, nine times out of ten, is the price.

Instructing us to sell or let your property now means that you won't miss out on the busiest time of the year for property searches!

ellis&co
winters

