

Power to the People?

There won't be many of you who haven't heard about the Localism Bill. The Bill – a cornerstone of the 'Big Society' - aims to devolve power from central to local government and promote 'grass roots' decision-making. Introduced into parliament in December, it looks set to be in the news throughout the coming year. Planning reforms are included. According to the Minister for Decentralisation, Greg Clark, they will result in a 'move away from a system with significant elements of imposition from above, to one with participation and involvement at its heart...one which enables mature debate at local level".

This all sounds very interesting but what exactly will change? And what impact will the Bill actually have on the Conservation Area?

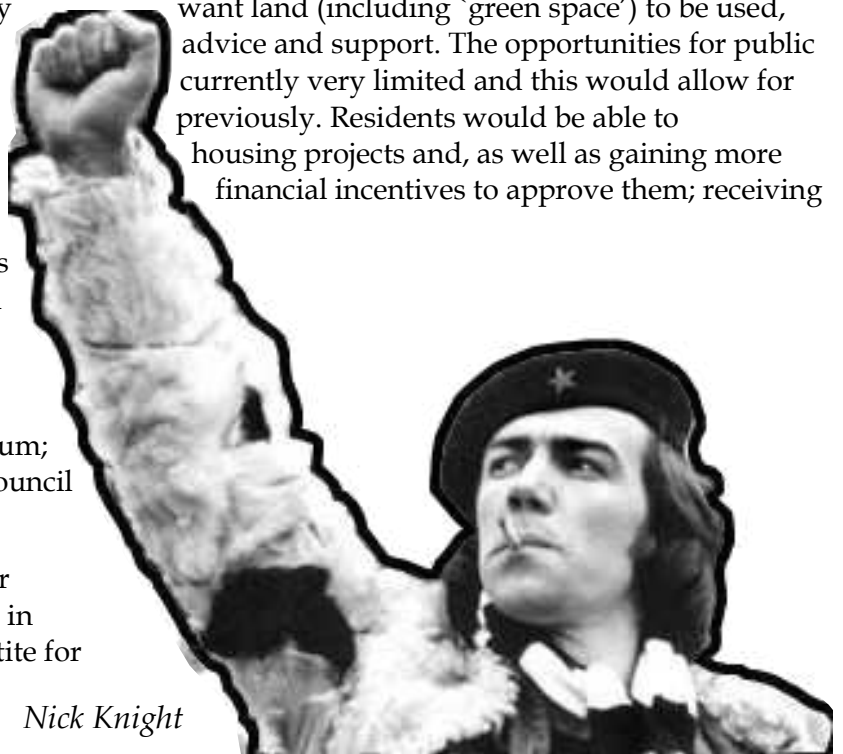
The message is 'evolution rather than revolution'. Decisions won't be handed over to the popular committees much loved by '70s sitcom character Citizen Smith. Local government professionals will administer the planning system, as they do now, based on a simplified National Planning Policy Framework and with the 'Local Plan' (or 'Local development Framework') becoming more important.

The outlook is good for the law-abiding. Protection for conservation areas and listed buildings will be unchanged and safeguards such as Article 4 will remain. It is not so good for those who breach or 'bend' planning controls. There are measures to prevent developers from making time-wasting appeals against enforcement action or halting it by submitting a new application. Higher fees may be charged for retrospective applications where development has taken place without planning consent.

By far the most radical proposal is the idea of empowering 'neighbourhood forums' to create their own 'neighbourhood development plan'. Essentially, residents would specify how they want their neighbourhood to develop and how they want land (including 'green space') to be used, with the Council providing technical advice and support. The opportunities for public input into local planning policy are currently very limited and this would allow for far greater participation than previously. Residents would be able to collaborate in the design of large housing projects and, as well as gaining more powers to block schemes, would gain financial incentives to approve them; receiving a proportion of the levy currently paid to the Council by developers. As long as a 'neighbourhood plan' conformed with national planning policy, the Council's strategic vision for the wider area and other legal requirements, local people would be able to vote on it in a referendum; a majority in favour would oblige the Council to bring it into force.

It will become clear during 2011 whether 'neighbourhood plans' could be feasible in Leicester and whether there is any appetite for them. We would like to hear members' views on the subject.

Nick Knight



PROFILE: Jenny Timothy

Jenny Timothy is the City Council's Senior Building Conservation Officer and will be the guest speaker at our AGM in May. We thought members might like to meet her.



Where did you grow up?

Just outside of Liverpool and just outside of Birmingham. I'm a true child of the suburbs.

What attracted you to conservation as a career?

I was dragged round National Trust properties and various pretty villages by my parents from the year dot, something must have sunk in. Now it's me dragging my parents round!

Where did you train?

I did my undergraduate degree in Architectural History at De Montfort University and my Masters degree in Building Conservation at the College of Estate Management in Reading. However the vast majority of "training" is actually done on the job, working with other people involved in the Heritage sector.

What drew you to Leicester?

The sheer breadth of architectural history in the City, everything from the timber framing of the Guildhall to the impressive modern architects working at the University. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to come back and work with it all. I'd also never worked in a City before and wanted a different set of challenges.

What does your job involve? Do you work alone?

Everything and anything, I work closely with Jeremy Crooks, who is a massive asset to the heritage of the City. If I've got any questions about a particular street or building he knows exactly where it is and what's happened to it over the years. Our work ranges from

advising people on replacement windows and extensions to dealing with multi-million pound projects. The former is pure building conservation; the latter involves balancing conservation with other needs to create sustainable, high quality developments. Gone are the days of just needing to know about lime mortar and brick bonds. Also I'm not entirely sure how I functioned before the internet!

What do you like most about it?

The range of work we undertake and building types and materials we deal with. One day I'm at the records office researching model farms the next I'm at the top of the Charles Wilson building discussing concrete repairs. We're incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to stretch all of our heritage and conservation brain cells in such a small area. It makes a lovely change from working in areas where there is a predominant building type. I used to work in Sussex and timber framing is extremely pretty but when you're dealing with it day in and day out it can become a bit monotonous!

And least?

The sheer amount of work. Unfortunately we just don't have the time or resources to do as much as we would like. No matter how much we do it just feels like we're scratching the surface. We rely on interested individuals and groups to let us know what's happening. Into the future we're looking at building up relationships so that we can harness the wealth of knowledge out there.

What are the greatest challenges you face?

Increased responsibility with dwindling resources, but that's the same for everybody. Since I've been working in building conservation our remit has increased exponentially. We no longer just look at the buildings, but landscape, streetscape, context, setting, values, the list goes on. In short what we deal with is the historic environment and if you take that to its logical conclusion that means pretty much everything! Our work includes disciplines ranging from engineering, to construction, to social and political history, to psychology, to urban design, to architectural design. However hard we try it's impossible to know everything about all of them so I do tend to ask a lot of questions.

Do you think people are becoming less interested in historical buildings, conservation and architecture?

I could write a whole essay on this. If you ask people whether they value their historic environment, the answer is invariably "yes". If you ask them whether they would rather spend money on restoring a listed building or on equipment for a local hospital then the hospital will always come out on top. People do value it but no-one is quite sure why and any attempt to quantify it is always a struggle. It has an ephemeral value; its how your surroundings make you feel on a day to basis and it goes beyond "well that building's quite nice". It's also very personal; a derelict building to one is a romantic ruin to another (this is where the psychology comes in!).

How well do you know Stoneygate?

Not as well as I'd like, although I do drive home through it everyday. It tends to be a fairly stable historic environment, compared to other parts of the City, so my visits are disappointingly few and far between. Either that or Jeremy takes all the best cases there, I must have words!

Do you have a favourite building in Stoneygate? In Leicester? Elsewhere?

What I love about Stoneygate is the streetscapes, its character and charm goes so much beyond the individual buildings. Although I must admit a bit of a pang every time I look through books and see "lost buildings of Stoneygate". Elmsleigh Hall with its lantern tower and The Cedars with its beautifully understated Arts and Crafts influences are particularly sad losses.

In Leicester I am slowly falling in love with College Hall. The interior spaces are stunning and the way it responds to its landscape is remarkable. I feel extremely privileged to be working with it. The building presents a very particular set of challenges from the poor construction to the spaces which really do not lend themselves to modern day expectations. Saying that I always find that the buildings that seem to be the most difficult to deal with end up finding the most exciting solutions.

My favourite building is Upton House in Worcestershire, again it's the combination of the house and its setting with the most amazing gardens which compliment the house perfectly. It was heavily renovated in the 1920s and they've recently restored the Art Deco bathroom (which is not to everyone's taste). This is the point where I probably have to admit to being a bit of a Deco devotee! Plus it was one of the first places my husband took me when we started going out so I'm a little biased.

CIVIL WAR A Guided Walk by Stuart Bailey



Saturday 30th April 2010 at 10.30am
Hawthorne Building Steps, The Newarke

Tickets: £3.00 Advance Booking Essential to:
Stuart Bailey, 48 Meadow Avenue,
Loughborough, LE11 1JT.

Cheques Payable to "Leicester Civic Society"

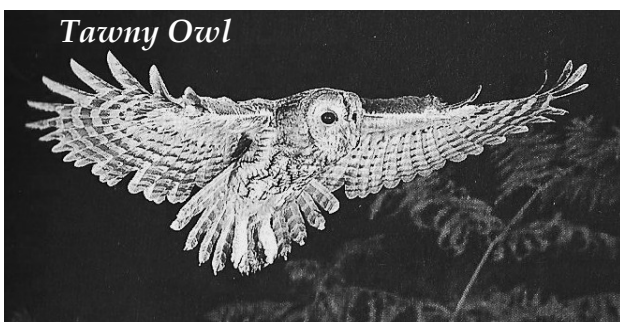
The Wildlife on our Doorstep

The idea of 'home' is very important to us human beings and most SCAS members will probably, at one time or another, have found themselves thinking that Stoneygate is a pretty good place to call 'home'. What is it we like about it? Well, there are the buildings, of course; representing nearly two hundred years of architectural design and development. But I'd guess that almost everyone – and particularly those of us lucky enough to have largish gardens – would also mention Stoneygate's green spaces and the wildlife they support. The parts of our conservation area that have deliberately been left undeveloped are also home – to a diverse range of creatures and other living things. Knowing that we co-exist with them gives us pleasure and some even become our friends.

In the first of what we hope will be a series of contributions from members on the subject, Jenny Westmoreland describes her own experiences.

One of my first conversations with the new people moving in next door went thus: 'How do you like the area?' 'Well – we've certainly noticed the wildlife; it's amazing!' It was then that I realised I take the creatures that visit our gardens as part of my everyday life. I have come to expect the ravages of the fox cubs that romp around in the shrubs (though I was annoyed when they chewed up my gardening shoes), I have long since stopped minding that the squirrels raid the bird table and dig holes in the lawn. I live in hope that one day a hedgehog family will return and I fill the hanging bird feeders daily and do my BTO bird-count religiously.

Although I myself live close to but outside the conservation area, I have been asking members what wildlife they notice. What is seen on a regular basis is unsurprising, and yet most people are pleased that it's around. Squirrels, foxes, birds and frogs are commonplace but there are some creatures that we might not expect to see. I didn't believe the professional naturalist who told me that a fox was unlikely to eat a hedgehog, but that a badger would. That week, on successive days I had found several sets of empty prickles on my lawn, and was mourning the hedgehog family. Then early this summer across the road from my house on the grass verge we found a dead badger. I obviously have mixed feelings about badgers, considering the fate of the hedgehogs, but nevertheless they are about. I don't know how many members have a resident hedgehog but those of you who do – cherish it!

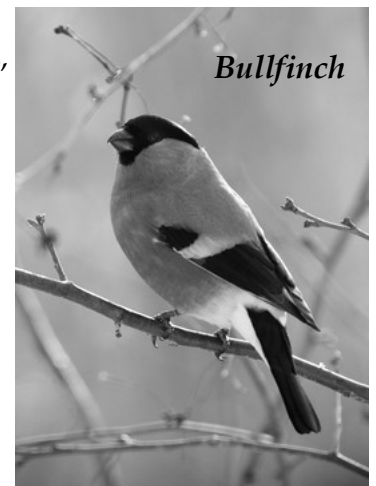


Tawny Owl

Stoneygate certainly supports some interesting birdlife. Members can list around two dozen different birds that are regular garden visitors. The usual suspects include blue tits, great tits, coal tits, long-tailed tits, chaffinches, greenfinches, goldfinches, bullfinches, dunnocks, robins and wrens. Among the rarer ones are redpolls and blackcaps, and, a real one off, an eastern rosella (an Australian species) attracted by prunus blossom last spring. Among larger

birds are collared doves, blackbirds, thrushes, fieldfares, redwings, tawny owls and woodpeckers (all welcome), also starlings, herons, crows, magpies, pigeons and sparrow hawks (less welcome). I was also amazed to see a largish raptor wheeling overhead recently. A local bird expert thought it might be a buzzard.

There are some successes – large flocks of goldfinches and growing numbers of bullfinches (still positioned at 25.9 in the BTO reporting rate for garden birds) – and some worries, such as the dwindling numbers of greenfinches and chaffinches due to trichomonosis. Sparrowhawks (27 on the list) seem to be on the increase, and tawny owls, a mostly dwindling species elsewhere (35.1) can be heard all over the area. I'm sorry to report that the common sparrow is now rarely to be heard doing its communal chuntering. As I move about I hear fewer and fewer. This is a bit



Bullfinch

surprising because in a conservation area, while the hedges and bushes favoured by sparrows are not themselves protected, permission is often required to replace them with walls and fences and replacing front hedges and gardens with block paving to provide car standing always requires planning permission. Still- I try not to spray anything in the garden, hoping to encourage the insect life that sparrows need. My own little flock of around fifteen left within a week or two of a neighbour felling several small and ancient conifers which were their staging post (a direct consequence of living outside the conservation area where treework requires no planning permission). Sometimes, especially if I put out bread scraps, one or two will appear. Then they vanish again for months .



Silver-washed Fritillary

On the subject of insects: we are told that there is a shortage of bees but, as far as I can see, they are still foraging in large numbers in Stoneygate's flowerbeds . The number of butterflies this year seems lower than usual, though. The variety has dwindled, too, but I hope one day to see another silver-washed fritillary in a local garden, like the one that astonished me two summers ago. I do like beetles when they appear and I try to identify them. I'm quite proud to have found another lesser stag beetle this year- I wonder if the larger one will appear some day. There are others I'm not so

pleased about such as the bright scarlet voracious lily beetle and the harlequin ladybird which scoffs our native species. These monsters are everywhere in Leicester, I'm afraid, including our patch.

Stories of local wildlife in its many forms are often stories of small, personal triumphs. It would be interesting to record a few of these, if members are willing to share them. Conservation isn't, after all, just about architecture!

Jenny Westmoreland



Forthcoming Events of Possible Interest

Springtime in the Garden

Sunday 20th March, 12.00pm – 3.30pm

Newarke Houses Museum & Gardens

Celebrate springtime in our historic gardens. Take part in activities including badge making, pot decorating and face painting. Join the gardener on a guided tour and discover scented shrubs, woodland bulbs and some of the historic secrets of the garden. Free tours at 1.00pm, 2.00pm and 3.00pm. £2.00 for activities.

Evening Talk: Food for Thought

Tuesday 29th March, 7.00pm

Belgrave Hall & Gardens

Join local historian Cynthia Brown as she discusses the history of food in the East Midlands. Discover cheese riots, pig clubs, unusual 'Second World War vegetables and a 19th century 'plague of garlic'. Share some of your own food memories with her. Booking essential. (0116-2666590) £3.00

Afternoon Talk: Famous Villains

Sunday 27th March, 2.00pm

The Guildhall

Talk by Robert Gregory. Learn about well-known rogues from Leicester's past, including notorious highwayman George Davenport, scurrilous scullery maid Alice Grimbold and the last man to be gibbeted in England, James Cook. £3.00 (including refreshments).

New Walk Museum Tours

Wednesday 2nd, 23rd & 30th March

New Walk Museum & Art Gallery

Find out more about the history of New Walk Museum & Art Gallery on our guided tours. Please contact the museum for further details including times. Booking recommended. (0116-2254900) £2.00

Curator's Talk: The Victorian Lady Undressed

Thursday 24th March, 10.00am – 12.00pm

New Walk Museum & Art Gallery

Explore the mysterious world of corsets, crinolines, poisonous stockings and some very draughty drawers.

In Search of the Saxons



Join the Friends Of Jewry Wall Museum in

Saxon Ledecestre

Sunday 17th April 2011

Jewry Wall Museum, Leicester

11.30 - 3.30pm. Admission free

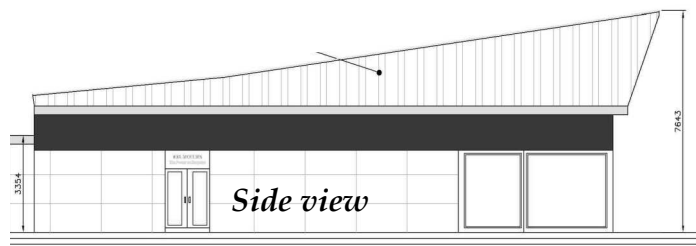
Wulfingas

Anglo-Saxon re-enactors battle it out!

**2.00pm: "Hidden Beasts, Animals in Anglo-Saxon Art"
Plus Saxon Arts & Crafts, Jewellery, Weaving and Poetry.**

Planning Matters (December 2010 to February 2011)

Following the withdrawal of an application to build a student residential complex in October, most of the Sandiccliffe garage site at **230 London Road** has been cleared and levelled. New proposals have been made to add a single-storey car sales showroom to the remaining building at the Ripon Street end of the site. Landscaping and car parking are included. Previous objections concerning overdevelopment and dominance do not



apply in this case and the showroom's unashamedly modern design and London Road frontage echo the distinctive inter-war modernity of its predecessor. A residential development granted outline planning permission in 2001 was probably unlikely to materialize and we believe this could be a good solution for a very difficult site.

Front view



As we anticipated, Thomas Fielding Johnson's family home, **Brookfield** which was featured on the front page of the December Newsletter has been put up for sale by De Montfort University, together with its seven acres of grounds. A development brief approved by the city council provides for the retention of the main house and the construction of a series of two and three-storey homes at the rear of the site on land which is currently a car park

Despite its great historical significance to the City, 'Brookfield' is not listed; its only statutory protection comes from being inside a conservation area. Development of the site was always likely at some stage. Our principal concerns are that the house should be preserved and that the view of it from London Road, across landscaped gardens, should remain uninterrupted. According to the 'Leicester Mercury', a number of parties have already registered an interest. We look forward to seeing their proposals.



Amended plans to build a 3-storey 5-bed house on the **spinney opposite 349-353 London Road** were withdrawn before they could be heard by the Planning Committee in January. We welcomed the case officer's recommendation to refuse the application but were worried by his acceptance of the 'principle of development' on the site - despite the fact that the Council's adoption of the new Core Strategy in November 2010 has removed its previous designation as an 'area for residential development'. The Council hopes to establish a 'Green Network' in Leicester and the Core Strategy says that green space like the spinney should only be disposed of 'in areas where there is an over supply of a type of green space. The green space would be low quality, low value and have little potential for improvement'. Far from there being an oversupply of such woodland sites in Stoneygate, the spinney is a rarity. Moreover, the Planning Inspector who overheard the owner's appeal in 2008 made clear that it is high-quality, high-value and has great potential for improvement, rather than the opposite.

We are seriously concerned that, while the refusal may have been enough to deter this application, it will not deter future applications for a differently designed property. A permanent means of safeguarding the spinney from speculative residential development is needed. We hope that we have found a way. Between November and the end of January, the City Council invited submissions from individuals and organisations for sites to be included in a process that, when complete, will form part of the Leicester Local Development Framework (LDF) that replaces the Local Plan.

We have asked for the spinney site to be designated an urban green space or an area of community woodland. If you support this idea (or know anyone else who supports it), please tell us and/or your local (Knighton) councillors.

We welcome the owner's intention to remodel a family home in **Avenue Road** in a way that reflects the grandeur of some of its older neighbours in the Conservation Area. Such projects come along only once in a while and this one offers an opportunity to enhance a property which currently embodies a variety of architectural styles that were once 'modern' but are now looking a little dated. Done well, it will add extra value and allow it to appeal to a wider market when the time comes to finally sell. Traditional materials and finishes, the use of green landscaping to 'soften' hard surfaces and sympathetic planting can add elegance and character and be particularly cost-effective.



A retrospective application to demolish the 1950s bungalow formerly at **48 Knighton Drive** and an application to replace it with a 2-storey 4-bed house were both conditionally approved in January. We featured this case in the December newsletter and are very pleased that comments made by residents, ourselves and the Leicester Civic Society concerning the design have been incorporated into the planning permission. Conditions require wall, roof, window and landscaping details to be approved before work commences and we have been assured that red brick in keeping with the area will be used. Obscure glazing will protect neighbours' privacy on one side while the proposed widening of the Elms Road vehicle access which would have endangered a mature street tree has been vetoed.

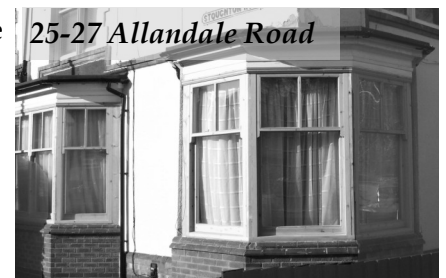
Many opposed the development and we were sympathetic to their views but we doubt that a refusal of planning permission would have been defensible at appeal and believe that planners have done as much as was practically possible to ensure that the new house fits into the conservation area. Responsibility now passes onto owner, architect and builders.



4 Knighton Park Road

An application has been made to replace second-floor dormer windows and a fire-escape door in uPVC at the **The Scotlands, Knighton Park Road**. Like its nearest neighbours, this beautiful property was originally a Victorian family residence (or half of one) built in the 1860s in an Italianate style and has been subdivided into flats. Inevitably, its external appearance has suffered as a result. The second-floor windows to be replaced have an asymmetric design. The proposed replacements would be symmetrical and an improvement but using timber sashes would be closer to

the original design and would be better still. Ground-floor timber windows recently installed to replace obsolete metal units at **25-27 Allandale Road** show how well this can be done.



25-27 Allandale Road

Plans to enlarge a rear annexe at **16 Knighton Road** into a dwelling containing two self-contained 1-bed flats were refused in December. This is a new attempt to obtain permission for proposals first refused in 2004 and then again in 2005. As with the earlier cases, the owner has appealed. In an area where neighbouring properties are predominantly single family homes, the development into residential accommodation of all available space (including rear gardens) at such tenanted 'investment' properties is, we believe, unacceptable. A decision is due in April.



52 Ratcliffe Road

Finally, permission was given to change the use of the large, elegant Victorian house at **52 Ratcliffe Road** (once a University hall of residence) from a single family dwelling to a 10-bed care home. There will be no changes to the existing exterior features and only minor internal alterations.

Nick Knight

Cuts to Conservation would be a False Economy

Among the spending cuts being considered by the City Council are worrying proposals to reduce the City's budget for Building Conservation staff. The current regional average is 1.3 per local authority. Leicester is lucky to be above average. Conservation officers are usually highly qualified and often members of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation. A large city like ours with 24 conservation areas and over 400 listed buildings can't afford to cut back on the professional advice that they give to City planners and members of the public considering or making planning applications involving historic properties. Developers and private sector investors, too - and particularly the 'white knight' developers who we need to help restore and reuse our larger heritage buildings - profit from their expertise.

The National Trust Leicester Association

On Wednesday 23rd March, the National Trust Leicester Association will host a talk by John Bush about 'A School in India' at the St John the Baptist Parish Centre in Clarendon Park Road. The event is open to non-members and admission is £4, including refreshments.

The Association, founded in 1966, is a voluntary group whose membership is open to all members of the National Trust, its affiliated organisations and National Trust volunteers. If you would like to meet people with similar interests in heritage, conservation, gardens and the countryside, they would like to hear from you.

In addition to raising funds for projects, helping at National Trust properties in the East Midlands and promoting the Trust locally, the Association arranges a programme of evening and afternoon meetings with talks, outings and social activities for the enjoyment of members. To learn more, visit their website www.leicesternt.btck.co.uk or contact the Chairman on 0116-2229133.

Increased Police Patrols in Clarendon Park

A spate of burglaries in December and January has led police to step up patrols in an attempt to catch thieves who have been targeting homes in Clarendon Park. As many as twenty homes, many of them occupied by students, have been affected.

Police have delivered crime prevention leaflets encouraging residents to take simple steps to protect their properties. PC Emma Jayne, beat officer for the neighbourhood, is surprised by the unusually high number of incidents. PC Jayne has urged residents to be extra-aware of home security and take simple precautions like making sure windows, doors and garden or alley gates are locked. She also suggests using lamps plugged into timer switches so that lights come on at intervals when you are out and the home is empty.

Police crime prevention advice is available on 0116 222 2222 or at: www.leics.police.co.uk

Membership News

As 2010/11 draws to a close, we are delighted to report that paid-up membership has again reached an all-time high - of 146. Thanks to all of you, families, couples and individuals, who have helped SCAS continue to grow. This last year has seen us attract 31 new members - more than ever before.

I/we wish to renew membership of SCAS and enclose a cheque for £5 (per household per year) as from April 1st 2011

Name:.....

Address:.....Postcode.....

Contact Phone: email.....

Send to: Jenny Westmoreland, Membership Secretary, 358 Victoria Park Road, LE2 1XF

Phone: 2705828 email: michael@westmoreland.demon.co.uk