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mosque administration will encourage worshippers to use public transport whenever possible, resorting to cars only if absolutely necessary and approaching the building from the ring-road rather than through town. This should reduce the expected increase in traffic. We also hope that the mosque will develop a large and articulate community who, along with residents and traders, could lobby the county council to find real solutions to Mill Road's traffic problems. Some residents close to the site were concerned about the structure blocking natural daylight from their homes. I spoke to Skelly and Crouch, light consultants to the architects Marks Barfield. It surprised me that they were unable to confirm that there

had been an assessment of light deprivation to nearby homes. It was however several years ago, and one may have been undertaken early on in the design process. Others were concerned that the mosque could change the road's identity. All change changes but here is an irony. For many years it has been said that Mill Road is just a trail of cafés and hairdressers. It took the mosque organisers to spot something else; Mill Road already has 4 churches and one temple making it 'an ideal spiritual home' for the mosque. So, from now on, along with our favourite descriptions of Mill Road – 'lively, alternative and diverse', we can add the adjective 'spiritual'.

Charlotte de Blois  
Mill Road

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**THE MILL ROAD NEWS** is published by the non-profit organisation **Mill Road Bridges**, c/o The Six Bells Pub, 11 Covent Garden, Cambridge, CB1 2HS UK. Mill Road Bridges is a volunteer community group serving Petersfield & Romsey wards in Cambridge.

**We welcome your submissions** on any topic about the Mill Road community. Send images and short articles to [info@mill-road.com](mailto:info@mill-road.com). Please note that articles cannot favour a political party, they should not be of a purely commercial nature, and we reserve the right to edit, refuse, or postpone use of submissions. Any views expressed in the Newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editor or group.

**ISSUE N°19 MAY 2018**  
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Printing: Elitian, Mill Road [www.elitian.co.uk](http://www.elitian.co.uk)  
Distribution Coordinator: Richard Wood, Perowne Street. [treasurer@mill-road.com](mailto:treasurer@mill-road.com)  
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MRB logo: Sam Motherwell, Gwydir Street

**Community Spaces: what do we need?**  
Have you ever booked community spaces in and near Mill Road, for regular or one-off events, for local groups or for private functions? Have you found the facilities that you needed at the right price? With the Gatehouse on the Mill Road Depot site being earmarked as community space, we all have a chance to contribute to decisions on what could take place there and even to offer to help run it. The Petersfield Area Community Trust will be managing the Gatehouse and they are keen to hear your views and receive offers of help. Up to now their focus has been mainly on North Petersfield, north of Mill Road, so it's important that they hear from the wider geographical area. Please complete their survey at: [www.petersfieldgatehouse.org/survey.html](http://www.petersfieldgatehouse.org/survey.html)

**Dates for your Diary**  
**Talk Tue12 June 2018 7.30-9pm at St Barnabas Centre**  
**Mapping the Cemetery: Uncovering its Stories**  
Find out more about the mapping project in Mill Road Cemetery, where volunteers working with the Ordnance Survey. <http://millroadcemetery.org.uk/>  
**Workshop Tue 10 July 2018 7-9pm at The Bath House**  
**Working with photographs**  
Practical photography for local history: hints, tips and tricks for getting the most out of your camera, laptop and a shoe box. A practical session learning how to digitize and use historic photographs, negatives and slides.  
**Mill Road history walks** with Cambridge Green Badge guides:  
**Thurs 9 August: Petersfield**  
Meet at Donkey Common (corner of Mill Road and Mortimer Road) at 6.50 pm. Finish around 8.30 pm.  
**Thurs 23 August: Romsey Town**  
Meet at the corner of Mill Road and Cavendish Road at 6.50 pm. Finish around 8.30 pm.  
*Each walk: £8 per adult booked in advance; £10 on the day (if space allows). Includes a donation to Mill Road History Society. Under 16s free. Advance booking: [millroadguide@gmail.com](mailto:millroadguide@gmail.com)*

**Mill road in bloom**  
Photo: by Anne Beamish  
send your pictures to [info@mill-road.com](mailto:info@mill-road.com)



THE INDEPENDENT  
**MILL ROAD NEWS**  
N°19 May 2018



**Time for a Mill Road Plan?**  
By Allan Brigham

Cambridge is renowned for quality architecture and open spaces. But are we seeing this on Mill Road? Two recent planning applications – Mickey Flynn's site in Petersfield and The Labour Club in Romsey – both support the claim that buildings are being parachuted into the street scene without respect for the surrounding area.

**Mickey Flynn's**  
Recently submitted plans for this site have failed to respect the City Council's advice that new developments should 'Maximise the unique characteristics of the site to create a sense of identity' and 'Make a positive contribution to the character of the surrounding area' (Design Guide. 2011). This site could and should be designed to enhance the surrounding area (perhaps opening onto a pavement café), but the plans only made a nod towards this option. The new proposed development rises above the pavement, while the building line comes forward towards Mill Road, reducing the existing welcome sense of space for pedestrians.

Development of this site is a one-off chance to enhance this area, bordered by one of Mill Road's distinctive historic buildings – the Bath House. The plans fail to recognise or add to the partial improvements made 15 years ago. These established a base-line by using high quality materials – recycled granite bollards; a special lamp column; Judas Tree; ground cover planting; and underground soakaway. The redevelopment of this former snooker hall should be the completion of this scheme – creating a 'public square' in Petersfield and bringing the 'Cambridge' quality into Mill Road. Revised plans awaited.

**Romsey Labour Club**  
Over the bridge, plans have now sadly been approved by the City Council for the redevelopment of a piece of local social history – the Romsey Labour Club. Although 'retaining' the original façade, the old building will be dwarfed by a block of student flats. This mockery of the historic frontage reduces the important story that it tells about Romsey and is unsympathetic to the Conservation Area. The inappropriate use of materials shout at pedestrians, while the height will block out light from the surrounding streets.

Mill Road is at the centre of a Conservation area. No other arterial road in the city has this designation. The road's history is central to the story of Cambridge. It is a 'High Street' in its own right. It serves the population of a small town in the surrounding catchment area, with the highest pedestrian footfall of any main road outside the city centre, but the City Council has no 'Plan' for Mill Road. Developers exhaust planning officers and residents by first submitting applications that ignore planning guidance. They then return with plans that are marginally improved, and which are accepted. Too often plans lack aspiration and fail to reflect local knowledge. But what is built will be here for 100 years, and it is important that it is not 'just good enough', but 'the best'. So, is it time to have a 'Mill Road Plan'?

**Guest Editor**  
I feel very honoured to have been asked to be guest editor for this issue of the Mill Road newsletter. It's quite a tricky one though! I've been involved, along with other concerned residents, in various unwelcome planning applications– some of which we have fought successfully. Others we have sadly, and frustratingly, lost. Currently there seem to be no levers that local residents and the local council can use against the deep pockets and expensive lawyers that some developers can call upon. And this, I think, is the difference. Change is inevitable and development in Cambridge has been a constant for centuries, just go on one of Allan Brigham's walks to see the evidence! However, previously it was initiated and funded by local business people and local institutions who actually had some stake in the city. OK, sometimes it may have been more ego-driven than altruistic – but at least its intention was growing the city for the benefit of its residents and local businesses.

Now, many of the developers are overseas speculators – viewing Cambridge as part of a property portfolio and trading on the Cambridge 'brand'. There seems to be no concern for what local residents want or need – particularly as buying a house is becoming further and further from the reach of the average person. So, although this sounds like the archetypal David and Goliath struggle, Mill Road does have a special weapon: its strong sense of community. And battles have been won. The important thing is that people are still able to see that they can make a difference and get involved. Otherwise it really is game, set and match to the developers.

Anne Beamish

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Next Issues Topic  
**"What infuriates you most about Mill Road"**





Photo: by Daisy Zoll

## Montreal Square – its past and its future

Residents of Montreal Square in Romsey may face re-housing while their houses are redeveloped as CHS Group seeks to fulfil its charitable duty to provide as much social housing as possible. The loss of the square would not only mean the loss of well-loved homes and valuable green space, but also the loss of a vision of how housing should be, with areas that are individual and areas that are communal, with places to meet and to play as well as space to relish personal privacy. Montreal Square was built by Cambridge Housing Society, an organisation started in 1927 by Alderman Conder, Councillor Mrs D Stevenson and Dr Alex Wood (after whom the hall in Norfolk St and the bus shelter in Petersfield are called). Its

aim was to help families who couldn't afford market rents. Originally these houses didn't have separate bathrooms but had baths in the back kitchen, which were covered with a lid to form a table. Despite this, they were extremely popular. On November 30<sup>th</sup> 1928, the Cambridge Independent Press reported that the Mayor, Alderman J. E. Purvis visited Romsey, and a plaque was unveiled which is still there.

Caro Wilson, Mill Road History Society.

### Quote from CHS Group

Nigel Howlett, CHS's Chief Executive has said: "As a charity, we have a duty to provide as much affordable housing in Cambridge as we can. Private rented property in Cambridge is unaffordable for people on low incomes – we want to build more affordable homes to help more people. It's currently very difficult for CHS to find or build affordable housing in Cambridge, where need and lack of affordability is greatest. We recognise that moving customers out of their homes will be disruptive and we will do our best to offer them as much support as we can." There is an ongoing consultation with the residents.

# Rants & Raves

## Mill Road infrastructure and building

What is it about Mill Road that seems to attract building and infrastructure problems on both sides of the Railway Bridge? From small things like pot holes not being filled in properly, to the road being dug up without advance warning which upsets the delicate balance of the traffic flow. Does nobody in the City or County Council have the information for proper planning for works by highways or communications companies and the ability to let the public know – however, we all understand about emergencies. As for the building works, Mill Road has plenty going on and more to come with the plans for the Depot site. Near to the railway bridge there are three projects taking place with one contractor, and others are going on on Devonshire Road, none of which seem to run to an end date. The Great Eastern Street development was meant to be complete last November, amazingly it is complete now, only six months late. The butchers site on the corner of Devonshire Road did not look as though it would be ready for Easter, sure enough it wasn't and still is not complete. At least the pavement has been repaired, although with something missing for visually impaired people? What is it that prevents building contractors these days agreeing to a schedule, publishing it on the site and keeping to it so there is



Photo: by Anne Beamish

minimal disruption to trade, shoppers and others? Mill Road is a busy, congested road so contractors should keep disruption to a minimum and not annoy the locals! Jennie Hawks

## Living together – or apart?

The answer to this question for most people would surely be both. Most individuals/couples/groups/families want some space of their own but also a sense of community around them, neighbours to greet when they go out, to share ideas with, perhaps to become friends. I moved to Mill Road for just this sense of community and love it – casual conversations with shopkeepers, residents, the Big Issue seller, visitors to the area... New faces are welcome and students sharing local houses for a year or more can be excellent, interesting neighbours. However, I am concerned that the building of so many single occupancy studios, designed for very short-term lets, is detrimental to the community, especially the tiny rooms being built behind shops. We are losing many of our small open spaces, trees and plants, vital in an area which suffers from air pollution. The studios are tiny and isolating – each with a WC, shower and sometimes kitchenette for just one person, designed for very short term lets, often students coming to language schools for 3 months or less. Airbnb lets are also growing fast. Such a turnover is affecting the sense of community. Even for short term visitors, surely those who stay with local people or who share accommodation have a better experience and learn more than those living on their own. We need housing locally, and I support some local developments, especially those with social and flexible housing; but let's try to keep small open spaces and make sure that those committed to Mill Road are not outnumbered by those passing through. Let's also use our shops/cafes and, for those who still have gardens for customers, use their outside space too, reducing the incentive to build yet more studios. Sarah Oliver

grabbing was against key policies in the Cambridge Local Plan – yet in a system that is weighted in favour of development, it could well have got through, without a lot of hard work and determination by local people. Two new houses will now be built on the car park and the former student houses will be sold, providing the family homes that are so much needed in this area. Jean Glasberg

## Romsey or Petersfield?

There was a time when the Cambridge News referred to Mill Road as 'Street of Fear', and the part of Mill Road 'over the bridge' was the most fearsome of all. Now though, things have changed with TravelSupermarket recently naming Romsey Town as the '14<sup>th</sup> coolest place in Britain'. As a long-time Petersfield resident, it pains me to say that I am inclined to agree that parts of Romsey are cooler. I don't think it's because Romsey has better shops and bars – I wouldn't like to bet who would win in a fight between Urban Larder and Garden Kitchen, or Fidelio vs Fabio – and we have some unbeatable gems on our side, Arjuna, Fantasia and of course the peerless H Gee, to name but a few. Eileen O'Brien



Photo: by Independent Cambridge

It's all a question of layout. The Broadway area of Romsey has a village feel, something which Petersfield doesn't quite achieve. The wide pavements on both sides of the road at The Broadway are largely responsible for this. So, is it time for Petersfield to up its game or be left behind? We've recently acquired a tailor, an upholsterer, an Italian trattoria and the eclectic Fantasia, but there are units empty before the bridge, whilst Romsey seems to have a far higher rate of occupancy. Why is this? Are the rents on the town side so much higher or is it just easier to keep a business going on the cool end of the street? Mill Road News would love to hear from you with your views on these questions.



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## Mill Road – a spiritual home

Mill Road is passing through an era of knock down, re-build, and re-build again. Many residents have questioned whether this is improving our environment or whether we are now seeing slum creation on an enormous scale. Some half-built, recently completed and currently-proposed buildings have prompted heated debate, not least the scheme to build a new mosque on our Romsey Town stretch. Initially the application prompted protest from out-of-town opposition activists who marched with placards against the proposal; but it also triggered overwhelming local support in the form of 400 written submissions to the City Council's planning department, the vast majority of which were in favour. Nearly 200 of these comments were received on just one day, the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2011. Most of us dislike disruption so many Mill Roaders, both in and out



Photo: by Anne Beamish

of the Muslim community, were apprehensive. I too was uncertain as, having lived in London for many years, I was used to seeing mosques erected almost overnight out of cheap materials using voluntary labour and the results could not be described as good well-crafted design. My reservations about the Romsey Town Mosque disappeared once I saw plans on the City Council's Planning Website. The drawings and mock-ups are breath-taking with light filtered into the interior through skylights creating dappled shadowing on the floor. I found an interesting piece of correspondence in the accompanying documents. Dr Tim Winter, a trustee of the Muslim Academic Trust, wrote to the City Council emphasizing that from the project's inception, the mosque's builders took the view that the "type of relatively functional and inexpensive construction which is commonplace in new UK mosques would not be desirable." He explained that the provision of an aesthetic impact was important

to those organising the construction of the mosque and suggests that the mosque may well provide non-Muslim visitors with a "sense of the fruitful integration of Islamic and British cultural narratives... the structure includes references to Gothic fan-vaulting, to Northern European forests as well as to classical Islamic arabesques and other geometric motifs." Possibly Dr Winter's remarks could be re-phrased as, "This is an opportunity for Islam to inspire a beautiful piece of municipal architecture that will last for centuries." It is an ambitious attempt to create something grand.

Seven years on, how does the community embrace the building of a new place of worship, gardens, community art space and housing, now that the structures are nearing completion? Economically active and devout Muslims like to walk to prayer, so they need to be close to their place of worship. For this reason, Petersfield traders may well consider the Mawson Road mosque to be superior. It has the advantages of being small, cosy, unpretentious and close. If worshippers are happy with the Mawson Road mosque, and many are, naturally they may wish to point out that money spent on grand designs could have been better spent on other things within our needy community.

Other objections to the proposal involved worry that it would increase traffic. It is inevitable that once the mosque is functioning there will be an increase in traffic and none of us want that. At the planning stage the Muslim Academic Trust argued that by providing 96 parking spaces it was alleviating potential traffic issues. Such provision may alleviate increased parking problems but providing parking places actually encourage car use and therefore creates congestion and pollution. Despite this, the provision of parking for a hearse however is most welcome. I once saw a hearse parked half on, half off the pavements over double yellow lines outside the Mawson Road mosque. The coffin was askew and in the middle of the windscreen a parking warden had slapped a parking penalty notice. This is deeply upsetting for anybody with any sense of decency and demonstrates the need for a mosque which is not barricaded in by double yellow lines. Meanwhile, many of us are hopeful that the

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## Romsey Terrace – residents' success story

"This is Robinson College and Bidwells - they always get their way", was the despondent feeling of residents at the first meeting held to discuss the College's planning application to build behind the houses they own at the end of Romsey Terrace. It was the start of a 3-year battle, as residents objected strongly to repeated applications, culminating in a Planning Appeal in 2016. The Inspector's decision to dismiss the College's case was welcomed by Roy Stamp, Chair of Romsey Terrace Residents group, who said, 'It has restored our faith in the planning process that after years of pressure from Robinson College it has been recognised that the dense 'back-to-back' layout of this scheme would result in poor living conditions for both present and future residents'. This 'garden

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