

# MILTON SOCIETY

Formerly Milton Conservation Society & Hamlet Court Conservation Forum

## SPRING 2023 NEWSLETTER

### A new local Society is formed

Welcome to the first newsletter of our new Society, an alliance of the longstanding Milton Conservation Society (formed 1987) and Hamlet Court Conservation Forum (formed 2017).

There is little doubt that the covid pandemic changed our world. Society is now getting used to working in different ways and there is more importance given to our local place. Thankfully we live in a great part of our city with three conservation areas – Milton, Hamlet Court and Shorefields conservation areas. We also have some great non-designated roads in the historic Milton estate area including those from Burdett Avenue down to Station Road. We neighbour The Leas conservation area have our wonderful cliffs and seafront on our doorstep.

The pandemic change also created challenges for local groups with contact forbidden or severely restricted and membership struggled.

It became obvious that two local groups working in similar ways should work as one and hence Milton Society was inaugurated last autumn.

As one group we can consider both the wider historic estate area of Milton and how conservation guidance might help the non-designated roads. This is where we have developed our thinking to embrace a view of local heritage rather than just pure conservation. All roads have this heritage and whilst the conservation areas have legally enforceable rules and a higher bar for changes to property we can try to care better for all roads.

This does not change any design standards in the non-designated roads and normal planning law and the Local Plan apply as has always been the case. But it does encourage a different view that can grow over time to encourage good care of the place where we live.

Our Society has a formal constitution and executive committee that meets regularly to discuss the issues of the time. To find out more go to [www.miltonsociety.com](http://www.miltonsociety.com).



Milton Heritage Area shown with a black broken line

The work of Milton Society is based in the historic Milton area of Southend. The area is indeterminate and flexible so that we could take on representation of projects near to the area. One good example of this is the Southend Cliff Gardens and our beach. We also pick up on odd sites or projects away from our area but where we feel we can give appropriate support. In the past this has included The Britannia pub on the seafront and our current support for the Jazz Centre UK.

### Save the Jazz Centre UK



The Tim Kliphuis Trio

The Jazz Centre UK at the Beecroft Gallery is under threat of eviction by our Council in August. This is a fantastic example of local cultural heritage, formed in 2016 by local jazz legend Digby Fairweather and his

colleagues. It exhibits many jazz artefacts and regularly puts on live performances, including those of international stars, right here in Southend. It is an amazing cultural heritage asset for our city which should be supported. To give support please sign the petition at [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) and search 'Jazz Centre'.

## Save our Cliff Gardens!



You may have seen that our beautiful cliff gardens are not in the best of condition with a number of pathways barricaded and out of use. This means that you cannot walk freely through the gardens and may be faced with multiple blocked pathways. The gardens are also in deteriorating condition with many instances of crumbling masonry, displaced steps and cracked paths. This is a great shame and we want to do something about it. Milton Society have applied to the Council for the gardens and the numerous structures including the shelters, the war memorial and the cliff lift, to be designated as a conservation area. This is what happens with significant gardens in towns and cities like Brighton and it would help to give statutory protection. **It can happen here.**

Conservation Area designation would not only help to protect the gardens but would also make it possible to attract heritage funding to help with repairs and other improvements.

To date we have not heard back from our Council on the designation proposal. Without designation this looks like becoming a long term campaign.

## Replacement Windows – what can we do?



A regular reminder that if you live in a conservation area timber windows should be replaced with like for like timber windows. uPVC or other types of windows are not

normally allowed. This is not the case outside conservation areas where uPVC etc., may be considered 'permitted development'. **Always** check with the Council first.

## A long term future for Park Road Methodist Church?

Park Road Methodist Church is a landmark feature of Milton Conservation Area. The church dates from 1872 so was part of the area estate as first built in the 1870's. The stone building was built in the neo Gothic tradition with Gothic arch windows and doors. The original building also featured a 'flèche', a Gothic spire placed at the top of the roof (only the flèche base survives today but we hope might one day return), and unusually two tall pinnacles that appear reminiscent of those found on mosque or temple.

The church has been privately owned for many years and not used for religious purposes. As is often the case with redundant churches the building has fallen into some disrepair. Some years ago the owner tried to obtain permission to convert the building to residential use, which we supported. Unfortunately the Council refused permission and the building has been unused since.



Park Road Methodist Church viewed from Park Road

Over many years we have asked the Council to require essential repairs to protect the future of the building and there is a dialogue with Council officers at present. We have also been in touch with the property owner to no avail. So we have reached the point where we have advised that without action we will now bring this building to the attention of the Secretary of State, who can require works where an owner and the local authority both fail to take action.

This does not mean that the Secretary of State will necessarily support our calls for repairs but is the next best step to secure a long term future for the church. But we are hopeful that our Council will act.

# Milton Society and Planning Application consultations

As a local amenity society the Council usually consults us on all planning applications inside the conservation areas. This actually makes up quite a lot of our work. We then determine which applications we should comment upon.

This does not apply to applications outside the conservation areas where we would not normally comment.

Any application for comment is considered on its merits and against the general requirements of the local plan and what we consider to be in the best interests of the conservation area. Generally, we are more concerned with the affects on the public realm and not private areas away from public view. Whilst we support protecting the historic fabric of the conservation areas we will support appropriate modern intervention where this is well designed.

All planning applications are published by the Council and anyone can see these on the Council website. Our representations on private dwelling applications are not publicised to respect privacy but two commercial sites give good examples of our work.

Firstly, the old Beecroft Gallery site is one where we have consistently tried to protect the existing building from demolition and this has included numerous written representations, lobbying and Freedom of Information requests over the years. The history of prominent corner sites like this being sold off for demolition with multi storey development following is widespread across our city. However, our efforts helped change this thinking and eventually the site was sold with the Council seeking a restoration project. Now this restoration is in hand and the building is saved – one of our biggest conservation success stories.



The former Beecroft Gallery site under restoration today

Secondly, the Post Office site in Hamlet Court Road. Here the property owner renewed all old timber the windows with uPVC windows. These are not normally allowed in conservation areas (unless they replacing existing uPVC windows) but these were changed *before* the area was formally designated as a conservation area. We have offered support to the property owner, arguing that although these do not have planning permission, as was the case with many other uPVC windows in Hamlet Court Road, the Council *should not* take enforcement action against the owner, to remove the plastic windows. After designation, when a management plan was put in place with protection to historical building elements described, the position is different and any building owner should first obtain planning permission.



Hamlet Court Road Post Office

In other words we have tried to support the non-historically correct approach because this was reasonable at the specific time of the works, i.e. before conservation area designation.

We have made clear to the owner that, as elsewhere and since designation, we generally only support historically correct changes to existing buildings inside the conservation areas.

When a new conservation area is designated in a commercial area such as Hamlet Court Road there are always likely to be problems with a change in planning policy but the intention is to protect our wonderful historic buildings and try to get heritage funding into the road to help regeneration.

# The High Street Task Force comes to Hamlet Court Road



Hamlet Court Road today

The Government's High Street Task Force is now in town working with Southend Council and local stakeholders, including Milton Society and local traders, to consider ways to regenerate Hamlet Court Road. At the latest meeting numerous ideas were put forward and considered under the direction of Steve Millington from the Institute of Place Management. Many towns have been through this before or are further advanced with regeneration so it is possible to learn from ideas that have worked elsewhere. One example is Altrincham just outside Manchester where the local economy was badly hit when the huge Trafford Centre opened a few miles away, some 25 years ago. A multi agency approach was adopted where local businesses contributed through their various small scale efforts, a new market was introduced and the local authority invested. Essentially a sense of place was created and this generated footfall and economic recovery.

The world has changed post pandemic and with people working entirely different work patterns, often from home, the local high street needs to work differently. Footfall patterns are changing and often the busiest day of the week may not be the traditional Saturday. We have to find ways to adapt to this new future.

What's most interesting is the importance of community in regeneration and the Council did make clear that the reason this High Street Task Force consultation was directed to Hamlet Court Road was because of the connection and potential connection with the local community.

If you would like to get involved in this work please email [chair@hamletcourt.com](mailto:chair@hamletcourt.com) in the first instance or contact the Council or one of the Ward Councillors.



Edwardian Hamlet Court Road

Our Society has been set up to combine our interests in our amazing local heritage and the regeneration of Hamlet Court Road. Heritage is becoming more and more important to the future, not as some kind of nostalgic view of the past that we should return to but as a springboard that is the best of our past and one that can inform the best of our future. UNESCO have long recognised this through their Historic Urban Landscape approach which informs our work. Recently we attended an All Party Parliamentary Group meeting arranged by Civic Voice at the House of Commons where heritage and the high street was discussed. Lord Parkinson spoke on the importance of heritage and he has followed this up with a 'Heritage Day 2023' speech which you can read online.

## Hamlet Court Road in Harmony

On the Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May between 11am and 3pm Hamlet Court in Harmony returns to our high street. Milton Society will be represented at one of the tables so please take time to come along and say hello.

## A NEW Public Survey

A new survey of public opinion has just been launched and is your opportunity to give your views on your local concerns. Please take a short time to complete the survey which can be accessed here:

[surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HamletCourt](https://surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HamletCourt)

**If you would like to join Milton Society at a cost of £10 per annum please go to:**

[miltonsociety.com/join](https://miltonsociety.com/join)

**If you would like to get involved in our work please email [chair@hamletcourt.org](mailto:chair@hamletcourt.org)**