

Leiston Community Land Trust
Chair's Report 2021 to 2022

Our focus has continued to be implementation of the urban plan concept that local architect and Trustee Simon Merrett has visualised in sketches and the Three Squares concept.

We explained previously that we have three areas of initial focus split into individual projects – or our Three Squares. The first is the development of Church Square, the garden here at the United Church into a publicly accessible space linking the High Street to the Co-op and Sizewell Road. This space has been planted to offer a sensory garden, along with a small event space or bandstand feature. Funding has been through grants and donation; this has been achieved by the dedicated work of our Trustee Phil Edwards and his resolve in tracking down a variety of funding routes. We thank all the funders for their grant offers but must also recognise the key part that Leiston Town Council has played in this.

If you cast your minds back, you may recall the huge wall that separated this space from the Coop carpark. We are grateful to both landowners for having the courage to support our vision and making his space possible. As an side note, Stewarts Landscape Construction who did the work are Chelsea Flower Show GOLD Award winners, a nice touch and I hope you will agree with me it looks terrific. Thanks to a project from East Suffolk Council the Church Square will soon provide free WiFi for public use.

The second development is Market Square the proposal to regenerate the East Suffolk Council owned land between Sizewell Road and their car park in the High Street. These plans, based on the Leiston Neighbourhood Plan 2017 centre on affordable housing mixed with small retail units and new civic space. We have presented our ideas to the landowner (East Suffolk Council) and they are very receptive. They have appointed a Regeneration team and Gabriella will explain more of their work later.

The third development Heritage Square is focused on re-use of the Town Council office in Old Post Office Square is contingent upon completion of the market square proposals and is some way off. However, this has not prevented us from exploring more of the opportunities and challenges this scope of work will present.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the work of the CLT and their support in moving things forward. I'm concerned about thanking anyone in particular for fear of leaving others feeling unmentioned, however I want to express my personal thanks to all the Trustees for their involvement and engagement in driving forward the Church Square project, and particularly Phil Edwards for the tenacious way he has pursued sources of funding. While it was not intended as such, it is rather nice to see this project come to completion in the Platinum Jubilee Year.

We have also been working closely with the Leiston Together project, and thanks to their support we have been able to extend the Church Garden works to include a 'talking bench' and we have invested in some planters to help set it off. The bench doesn't talk, but is there as a conversation starter that tackles loneliness and isolation; the bench is made from recycled materials; and made by people who are long-term unemployed, disabled or disadvantaged. A very special project in its own right.

Looking ahead there will be a bit of a lull while the Master Plan is developed, but then we anticipate it will be consultations and commissioning works.

Russ Rainger
Chair Leiston Community Land Trust