

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

BLUE PLAQUE PROPOSALS

Report Reference ET-25-03
Meeting Date 9th June 2025
Agenda Item 9
Prepared by Town Clerk



1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Town Council's Blue Plaques Scheme looks to help visitors and residents identify with the history of the town and aims to promote the recognition and awareness of people, places and events which have been of lasting significance in the life of Knutsford or more widely.

The Town Council encourages suggestions from members of the public for suitable plaques. A decision to install a blue plaque will be made by the Environment and Transport Committee following a recommendation of the appraisal panel.

Two proposals have been received and appraised by the working group.

1.2 COUNCIL POLICY

In order to be eligible for a commemorative plaque an individual must have been deceased for a period of 20 years OR the centenary of their birth has passed. Individuals must also:

- a) Have been an eminent member of their profession or calling OR made a significant contribution to human welfare or happiness
- b) Be re recognizable to the well-informed passerby or deserve national recognition
- c) Have distinguished themselves by a significant public service, act of bravery or committed a notorious act.

For plaques commemorating buildings the building must be either locally or nationally known as of special significance and worth of lasting recognition.

When locating plaques, the policy seeks to ensure they are visible from the highway, that plaques for individuals are placed on a residence/site (not a redeveloped site) and the plaques should be installed on buildings rather than gates/boundary walls. A recommendation to locate a plaque which does not meet the three principles must be accompanied by sufficient explanation as to the reason it is deemed acceptable by the appraisal panel.

2.0 APPRAISAL PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 BUCKLOW UNION WORKHOUSE

A proposal was received for a blue plaque for the Bucklow Union Workhouse. Workhouse buildings

are historically significant because they represent a crucial, albeit harsh, chapter in the development of social welfare, offering insights into the lives of the poor and the evolution of social welfare systems, serving as both a place of refuge and a symbol of the Victorian era's approach to poverty and the poor.

In 1834 an amendment to the Poor Law Act meant that the 15,000+ parishes in England and Wales were grouped into Poor Law Unions. Each had to build a workhouse. Knutsford united with Altrincham, Lymm and Wilmslow to form the Altrincham Union Workhouse. Built in 1837 at a cost of £7,000 the Altrincham Union Workhouse was the first public building in Knutsford to be constructed in the Victorian era. At a time when vagrancy was an imprisonable offence the workhouse served the needs of the destitute poor providing not just food, shelter and clothing, but medical care and schooling. Knutsford is fortunate that the south side of the workhouse site remains and with it a number of original buildings which are in use to the present day as part of the Knutsford Community Hospital.

The proposal was reviewed by the blue plaque appraisal panel against the council's criteria for blue plaques. It was agreed that the building is of local special significance. It was therefore agreed that the application for a blue plaque should be approved.

The proposed wording for the plaque is:

BUCKLOW UNION WORKHOUSE
(formerly Altrincham Union Workhouse)
Built in 1837 to accommodate 300 destitute men, women and children.
After 1930 the buildings were managed by the local authority,
and some wards became Cranford Lodge Hospital.

2.2 HELANA SWANWICK

A proposal was received for a blue plaque for Helena Swanwick, a notable early suffragist who lived at Annandale, Mobberley Road.

Swanwick was a leading feminist and pacifist and President of the Knutsford Women's Suffrage Society which fought for women's voting rights in the early 20th century. During this period, she was the first Editor of the journal *The Common Cause* which was the official organ of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Swanwick lived at Annandale for between 15-20 years and in that time became a national figure in the campaign 'Votes For Women'. She was a Suffragist who preferred reasoned argument rather than the militant tactics of the better known Suffragettes. Her sole objective as a Suffragist was for women to have parity with men, nothing more. She addressed mass meetings in many parts of the country, including, in Knutsford, the Heath, the Town Hall, and the Ruskin Rooms.

Her work as a pacifist, particularly after WWI, included editor of the journal *Foreign Affairs*; founding of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Union of Democratic Control; delegate to the League of Nations and member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. She was made Companion of Honour in 1932. Swanwick was a member of the first Labour government delegation to the League of Nations Assembly in Geneva 1924; and was there again in 1929 as one of only two Government appointed British delegates. The *London Daily Chronicle* of September 2 1929 included her under the headline: 'Stateswomen Of The Nations'.

The proposal was reviewed by the blue plaque appraisal panel against the council's criteria for blue

plaques. It was agreed that she meets the criteria of being an eminent member of their profession / having made a significant contribution to human welfare. It was therefore agreed that the application for a blue plaque should be approved.

The proposed wording for the plaque is:

HELENA SWANWICK CH
(1864-1939)

Prominent Suffragist and Pacifist
Lived here c.1900-1912

3.0 ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGY

3.1 COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN

The installation of blue plaques contributes to the delivery of objective H2 – initiatives which celebrate and promote the heritage of Knutsford.

The plaque at Annandale would loosely align with objective C2 (bridging the disconnect between Longridge and the rest of Knutsford) as it would be the first blue plaque in St John's Wood ward.

4.0 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The plaques would cost approximately £375 each, with the budget drawn from the street furniture cost coder under the Environmental Projects centre.

The installation of the plaques would be subject to the permission of the landowners, which has not yet been sought. Subject to the committee's approval, permission would be obtained and the plaques would then be put into production.

5.0 DECISION REQUIRED

The committee should:

- a) Consider approval of a blue plaque for the Bucklow Union Workhouse
- b) Consider approval of a blue plaque for Helana Swanwick CH