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*Caring about Bury St. Edmunds*

# SocietyReview

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## Keep town centres vibrant - TV's Griff urges Society

Report by Rod Rees and Sue  
Sollohub. Pictures by Sue Savage

Civic Voice president, television presenter, writer and actor Griff Rhys Jones was warmly received when he spoke at a Bury Society talk on 12 October.

Griff Rhys Jones gave an entertaining and informative talk to the Society. Griff is the new chairman of Civic Voice and is currently touring the country talking to local amenity societies.

The previous evening he had been in Cambridge and after talking to the Bury Society, he would be addressing an audience in Ipswich.

Griff began his talk by saying that one day the recession would be over. We should not therefore give in to pressure to support poor planning solutions simply because they are financially advantageous in the short term.

He stressed the importance of maintaining vibrant, healthy town centres.

He considered Bury was lucky still to have a centre with a good mix of housing alongside small and larger shops.

Many towns he has visited comprise large commercial centres dominated by national corporate retail stores with



Griff Rhys Jones addresses the Bury Society at the Unitarian Chapel.

little opportunity for homes or smaller shops.

He said we should recognize why people visit town centres. He suggests people mainly want a variety of good communal facilities including entertainment or public buildings - as well as shopping and employment. We should also understand that shopping patterns are changing with the growth of the internet.

Cloning of the High Street was certainly seen as a problem and he used the analogy that a town centre should be like your front room...you put all your best things in it.

Griff peppered his talk with anecdotes of where this mix had worked well, including his own neighbourhood behind Tottenham Court Road in central London. Here, small businesses and shops happily jostle alongside commercial premises.

He also referred to Prince Charles' project at Poundbury where he suggests that, whatever one's views about the

style, the development has created a real sense of 'place'.

Griff also reported on the recent planning battle at Hadleigh for a new Tesco store. The application for a large food store on the water meadows was recently refused, with the support of many local people - but apparently Tesco put in a new application the following day.

Griff reminded the meeting that transport remains one of our major problems and can no longer simply be solved by building new ring roads.

He had an intriguing example of a small town outside Copenhagen where all road markings and signs had been removed. It caused chaos for new visitors - but slowed down the traffic.

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