

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

MERRY
CHRISTMAS



newsletter

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CHRISTMAS



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It's Allowed Anyway...

EVERY WEEK the Society's Planning Group devotes a good deal of time and energy to examining planning applications as they come in. They look at the plans, decide what may be detrimental to the town or the neighbourhood, and send off any objections to Wycombe District Council as the Planning Authority. In due course, we are invited to address the Planning Committee and tell them why we think an application should be refused or conditions imposed. By and large, the system works well: the Councillors on the Planning Committee do their work diligently.

But we don't always get the chance to have our say. Why?

It's called "permitted development" – work which can be done anyway without a planning application. Much of this is sensible and reasonable. Householders can do certain minor work, and the rules were recently expanded to include some types of "micro-generation". But that can't be said for all permitted development. Turn to p.2 for two examples.

Just when Chiltern Railways are beautifully restoring an historic railway building, a multi-storey car park is rising in the heart of our town to a design that they have decided entirely by themselves. Indeed, WDC officers told us that *if* planning permission had been required, they would have wanted a change not merely to the colour but "the whole caboodle". And the Education Authority benefits from permitted development rights too. Of course, they do not need permission to erect temporary classrooms, but Bowerdean Nursery in Gordon Road has recently acquired, without warning, a massive "conservatory" which is very inimical to the street scene, without any permission or consultation being needed, because it falls within the (generous) dimensions for permitted development by the County Council.

The permitted development rules are determined centrally, and Government needs to change them: it cannot be right that a railway company, however good and efficient, has powers that could allow them to trash a town centre. But sometimes, just a willingness to recognise the public's need to be consulted and then stick to what was agreed would go a long way to help.

Chris Woodman



...caring about our town: past, present and future

Registered Charity No. 257897

Planning This Quarter

THESE THREE months were dominated by the Group's consideration of the proposed Wycombe Community Stadium and a flurry of activity over the final arrangements for High Wycombe Station, while a trickle of tasks has come forward relating to the adaptation of Wycombe District Council's local planning documents to the Coalition Government's policies.

Wycombe Community Stadium Several members of the Group attended one of the Council's very welcome, though lively, forums on the future of the Community Stadium project (see p.4). There is no substitute for a well-run consultation meeting, as this was, for getting the feel of how others around the town feel about controversial proposals.

High Wycombe Railway Station Despite the undertakings given to members of WDC's Planning Committee that the new multi-storey car park would be white, and our representations, Chiltern Railways decided to use their Permitted Development powers to build it with a galvanised finish, although the most recent drawings we have seen indicate that the walls (parapets) on each storey will be in "Chiltern Blue". As we write, the car park is now taking shape in this form. It really is very unfortunate that the successors to the old public utilities and British Railways have these powers to build wholly inappropriate developments in town centres. WDC told us that, *if* a planning application had been required, not just the finish would have been different, but "the whole caboodle". Meanwhile the Transport Group has been considering the effect on the surrounding road network (p.8).

Premier Inn The Group had been concerned that the design for a new hotel on the old Sainsbury's Car Park, alongside the new link road between Arch Way and Bellfield Road, was not appropriate for a site which, in due course when the Council's Master Plan is implemented and Arch Way is downgraded or removed, will be linked in to the town centre. Alas, we were unsuccessful in persuading a local councillor that the proposal should at least come before the WDC Planning Committee. The application was allowed, albeit with a number of changes from the originally proposed design, on the delegated authority of a planning officer.

Bowerdean Nursery School In September our members reported that work was going on at the front of Bowerdean Nursery School, an attractive building that added a little character to Gordon Road. A massive white incongruous "conservatory" appeared, despite there having been no planning application. Our investigations revealed that BCC had been able to do this without even applying to themselves for planning permission (and therefore with no local public consultation), because being less than 4m (13ft 1in) in height, 50 m² (59.8 sq yd) in area and

100m³ in volume it fell within their permitted development limits.

Shutters and Pigs A great deal of energy was expended by the Group over unauthorised changes that occurred in August to No.12 White Hart Street, once one of the town centre's historic butcher's shops, but now converted to a computer store. Unauthorised shutters were installed, making a forbidding impression on the street scene, particularly at night, and the historic sculpted pigs were boxed over presumably because some people could consider them offensive. Group members drew on their experience and the example of the Sainsbury's frontage to Oxford Road to press for these to be replaced by transparent shutters behind the glass. As we go to press, the Council's conservation staff are on to the task but the outcome remains uncertain.

Wycombe Marsh Now taking shape and being marketed as *Wye Dene*, the great new mixed-use housing development on the former sewage works site has been the subject of an application to amend the planning consent, reducing the amount of employment space from 10,000m² in the earlier proposals (intended to include offices) to 3,500m² (mainly small business units), with a greater allocation for housing. The St James Group backed this up with a consultant's report on the lack of demand for office space in the town. The Planning Group considered the reappraisal was realistic and did not object.

De La Rue site Things have been quiet since Tony Fooks attended a pre-application presentation by Carey's to WDC on 11 August of the results of their rather successful consultation on a new scheme, following the Inspector's dismissal of their earlier appeal. We assume a new application will be made when the housing market is stronger.

Out with Regional Planning and in with Local Economic Partnerships. In the past, the housing totals that each local authority area is required to plan for over the coming years have been set in Regional Plans. The Coalition Government decided that regional decision-making was a bad thing, abolished the Regional Assemblies and announced that Regional Plans were withdrawn. A talk by Cllr Mike Appleyard to a recent meeting of ANTAS (the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies) explained to us where things now stand. Instead of Regional

Plans, the Government now want strategic planning to be done by Local Economic Partnerships, led by private sector interests. Moreover, they are refusing to approve LEPs unless they straddle county boundaries, and they are insisting that the LEPs should decide for themselves how they go about their work – a job they are ill-equipped to do.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Pickles' decision to abolish Regional Plans was ruled illegal after a challenge by Cala Homes plc on the grounds that he had misused the relevant Act of Parliament, and a subsequent Government statement that planners should take into account that the Government *intends* to withdraw them has also been blocked. A right dog's breakfast, you might say. And, talking of dogs, wasn't it a dog called Pickles who once found the World Cup? They should have sent the Secretary of State to Zurich!



Garden Grabbing Another of the new Government's early planning decisions was that private gardens are no longer to be classified as previously developed ("brownfield") land and should therefore no longer automatically receive priority over greenfield sites for new housing. At the time of writing, members of the Group were preparing to attend a workshop called by Wycombe District Council to consider how their long-standing policy statement on "intensification" (i.e. infilling) should be amended to include a policy on private gardens. In the past, the intensification statement has worked well with Inspectors at Public Inquiries, and this seems a good way to proceed.

High Speed 2 The Group has kept a beady eye on the marshalling of forces in Bucks against this project, including (most recently) the decision of some branches of the Conservative Party in the area affected by the preferred route to withhold contributions to Party funds. The preferred route does not threaten Wycombe District, but the preferred alternative would hit Hughenden Valley and Speen, and all assessed routes would ravage the Chilterns. It is difficult to believe that any Government would spend such huge sums of money on a project that

would bring such limited transport benefits, but it is Government policy and must be treated seriously.

Local Listing

Our project to identify and document local buildings and other "historic assets" of character to add to the Local List is continuing, following the launch meeting at the Friends Meeting House on 16 July. Those members who have agreed to assist have received a full pack of data including:

- a map of High Wycombe divided into four zones for the purpose of the exercise;
- a table of the criteria that WDC have adopted to decide whether a building should be added to the Local List, following a recent consultation;
- A detailed table of all Listed Buildings (nationally Grade I, II or II*, or locally listed) in the High Wycombe Urban Area, showing their addresses and which electoral ward they are in.
- A recent letter from the WDC Heritage Officer, Jo Tiddy,
- A copy of the Field Record Sheet form which it is proposed we use to support nominations

A copy of this documentation can be sent (by email or post) to any other member who would like to get involved.

At the end of October, project participants were asked to suggest an area of the town where they would be willing to take the lead responsibility and then to prepare a list of buildings that they think would deserve to be added to the Local List (though not to fill in the nomination form at this stage). We shall then have to move quickly in the New Year to prepare actual nominations.

If any members wish to put forward nominations of buildings they think are "special", with brief details, can they please send them as soon as possible to Peter Batchelor, who is leading this project on behalf of the Society, by email at peterbatchelor@hotmail.co.uk or by post to: 17 London Rd, High Wycombe HP11 1BJ, phone 01494 446182.

Just to remind you all, adding a building to the Local List is not as good as persuading the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to add it to the statutory list of historic buildings, because that would make it illegal for the building to be demolished; but it is still well worth doing because being on the local list is a "material consideration" for the purposes of all planning applications and decisions.

The Wycombe Community Stadium Project

Wycombe District Council's consultation on their Community Stadium project ended on 29 October, after a series of exhibitions and consultation forums. The events were well-publicised in the new joint WDC/BCC news-sheet, which goes (or is intended to go) to all households in the District. In addition, we contacted all those of our members who are on email and encouraged them to go to the events and let the Executive Committee have their views to take into account in drawing up the Society's response: many responses were received. Nevertheless, we knew from the start that it would be impossible to embrace the views of all of our members and affiliated associations, since these were sometimes mutually contradictory. But the Executive did its conscientious best and our response is now reproduced in full below. On page 6 we print in full a letter that we have received from one Association which does not agree with the position taken for the Society by the Executive.

The Stadium proposal is an extremely important issue for the town, affecting life in the suburbs, the town's natural environment and setting, the wellbeing of its two resident major football clubs, and the sports and exercise facilities available to residents. The Society's Executive Committee has encouraged all its members to attend the exhibitions and forums arranged by Wycombe District Council, and to submit their own written responses to the consultation.

We recognise that the Council is consulting on a number of options and locations, but we focus below particularly on the proposal for a new stadium and sports village at Wycombe Air Park because we doubt the financial feasibility of the alternative short-listed location (Abbey Barn South). The Wycombe Air Park option was of course the Council's original ambition before they took note of the requirements of the planning system, including the need for a Core Strategy amendment, which would require them to defend the Air Park with reference to alternative options.

1. Financial benefits to the town

We understand that the Council's intention is that the stadium should be seen as an investment, comparable with the Eden Centre, yielding long-term rental income to the Council and its taxpayers. That is a laudable aim, but it depends on the financial contracts with the Clubs being right, and we doubt that terms can be negotiated which would be to the Clubs' benefit or acceptable to them, particularly when the costs of the necessary transport links are added to the project costs (see below). We also fear that if an apparently satisfactory contract were negotiated, any failure of the external parties to meet their liabilities could lead to the Council facing a very substantial deficit on the project.

2. Retaining the Clubs in the town

We recognise that both Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps make a positive contribution to the town's life, both through the enjoyment of matchgoers and the associated outreach and academy activities. However, local interest and involvement are greater for WWFC than for LWRFC (whose fan base is regional rather than local). While it would be unfortunate if Wasps were to leave the town, this is not a foregone conclusion: the RFU have suspended their requirement that stadia should have a capacity of 15,000. In any case, if it were to happen, it

would not be a catastrophe. Nothing can guarantee that Wasps will remain in Wycombe, and their reluctance to change their name has to be seen as a measure of their commitment (and it has also limited any contribution they might have made to the town's reputation).

We believe that both Clubs would find the financial commitment needed by the Council difficult to undertake. The best way to retain WWFC would be through a modest improvement in their existing site and facilities, better access (see below) and no new financial burdens. (We note an analogy with the Colchester Community Stadium built recently jointly by the Council and the Football Club: the financial burden on the Club meant that ticket prices had to rise, and the gates actually fell.)

3. Prestige and the reputation of the town

We have heard it argued that a prominent first-class stadium and associated sports village would enhance the town's reputation. However, the future of the airfield is also an issue of prestige. The Council has admitted that construction of a stadium would mean that gliding would have to cease. This would be a serious loss, since Wycombe Air Park is known nationally as a gliding location. But we note from the Council's discussion forum presentation that, if the enabling development were to take place on the scale stated, this could take up 63 hectares of the 97-hectare airfield (around two-thirds), and we believe that powered flying there would also have to cease. The airfield is one of the busiest in the country and it has a long and honourable history, bound up with the diverse aviation activities in the town over the past 100 years.

4. Sports Village and Physical Fitness

We were disappointed to find that so little information was forthcoming at the forums about the assumed benefits of a sports village. We noted that while one sports representative said they would be glad to have improved

facilities, another (representing squash) said they would not be interested because there was a history of clubs moving into multi-sport facilities and then finding themselves displaced by other sports with more money or support. So while there are benefits in theory, we are not convinced of their reality. The economics of community sports facilities always seem to be precarious, and we fear that this would prove to be a white elephant. The potential public health benefits of a sports village would be offset by the loss of flying and particularly gliding, which are also outdoor pursuits requiring physical fitness.

5. Access arrangements

There is currently no easy high-capacity access to Booker Air Park. There has been talk of three, or even four, accesses to a stadium, one of them being a new road joining the A404 Marlow Bypass (where the Highways Agency would need to be satisfied with the feasibility and safety of a new access between Handy Cross and the Marlow exit). Whatever the solution adopted, there would be substantial traffic impacts in Cressex and Lane End, both on match days and (if the sports village proved popular) at other times, and there would be major cost implications which would have to be loaded on to the project costs to be borne by the Clubs or the Council.

The sports village would need to be served by frequent all-day buses. Currently, buses to the airfield are infrequent and there would be a cost entailed in providing an adequate service.

6. Environmental and Local Impacts

Booker Air Park is largely surrounded by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also in the Green Belt and, although it is classified as a "Major Developed Site in the Green Belt", Government guidance (PPG2) makes it clear that policies to protect the Green Belt remain in force. Although there is no public access to the Air Park (save for a public footpath along the northern side) the openness of the airfield contributes significantly to the atmosphere of the surrounding AONB and Green Belt countryside. The visual impact of a large stadium, which would be prominent in order to advertise itself, of a sports village and of enabling development covering perhaps two-thirds of the existing airfield, would be huge, and unacceptable. (The enabling development, although primarily housing, would also, we have been advised, need its own community facilities including possibly a primary school and health centre.) This would amount to a major expansion of High Wycombe south of the M40, an urban sprawl which would impact not only on Booker but on the rural village of Lane End.

7. "Enabling Development"

Planning law has recognised that enabling development may have its place in generating

funds for other development that is in the public interest. However, the test to be overcome is a demanding one. PPG2 states that new buildings in the Green Belt are "inappropriate" and that very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the "harm by reason of inappropriateness is clearly outweighed by other considerations".

The High Wycombe Society would be opposed to any enabling development in the Green Belt, or impacting upon the Chilterns AONB. In this particular case, however, the damage to the openness of the countryside and the landscape quality is huge because of the massive scale of the proposed development. It is unacceptable.

8. Abbey Barn South

The Abbey Barn South option suffers from many of the drawbacks of the Booker Air Park option, in that much of it is within the Green Belt, and there is a total lack of either existing or potential satisfactory accesses. It is also difficult to see where sufficient enabling development could go, and we believe that since it is not owned by the Council, any planning gain would not accrue to the Council. We therefore rule it out as environmentally unacceptable and financially impractical.

9. Remaining at Adams Park – "Option A"

This is the Society's preferred option. Although Adams Park is not the ideal size for London Wasps RFC, we understand that the existing physical capacity is 12,000 but that use is restricted to 10,000 because of a limitation imposed by the emergency services on account of the single access. We consider that if this option is adopted, the Wycombe District Council should make every effort to bring about a second access. This would make the existing stadium more suitable for both existing Clubs.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposal for a new stadium and sports village at Booker Air Park is unacceptable because of its massive impact on the countryside and on the communities of Booker and Lane End, the lack of any satisfactory current or future transport connections, the highly problematical nature of its suggested financial benefits to the Council or the Clubs, and the unsubstantiated benefits of the sports village.

We reject Abbey Barn South for similar reasons, but also because, since it is not owned by the Council, we believe that the enabling development route to finance is impractical.

Our preferred option is for the Clubs to remain at Adams Park, and for a new access to be provided to enable them to utilise the full capacity of the existing stadium.

High Wycombe Society
October 2010

Stadium and sports village - the perspective from Sands

Not surprisingly, the residents of Sands are not in tune with the HWS position statement on the proposed replacement Football and Rugby stadium and possible concentration of other sports facilities for the wider community.

The suggestion that expansion at Sands with an attendant new road to West Wycombe or Lane End is not, in our opinion, a good idea. It is not a new suggestion, and pressure would have been mounted in the past if it were a viable option for the clubs. Why is a road across our green belt and AONB any more acceptable than a road across AONB elsewhere?

The important point about the Sands location is that there never has been, nor ever will be, sufficient parking. Parking in residential streets and on green verges has always been the greatest bugbear of having to accommodate the Stadium.

Our position is that, wherever the new stadium goes, it should be properly catered for with adequate on-site parking as well as a green travel plan.

Also if public treasure is to be used, it should include facilities for the wider community.

Moreover, the existing Airpark, which is a high-carbon pastime for those with no social conscience, should be viewed with caution. The intrusion of repetitive circuit flying, and the commercial helicopter operation is a much bigger nuisance over Sands and the whole of the AONB than the Football club ever was. At last WDC have extracted an economic rent, after years of subsidising the Airpark with a peppercorn rent. This means that commercial activity will ramp up here to make it pay, probably with private jets. The lease expires soon, and unless there are any other plans for the site it will have to be renewed.

Like the Monkey's Paw, be careful what you wish for.

Footnote: If you haven't read this cautionary tale, it's by WW Jacobs.

Nigel Phillips
Chairman, Sands Residents' Association

Stadium Follow-up

The next step in this saga will be early in 2011, when the Council intend to publish information from the consultation (which elicited 8,500 responses). On 17 January the WDC Cabinet will consider "the results of the consultation and the way forward". Officers assured people attending the consultation forums that when the Council has decided which option it wishes to pursue, further information will be issued, e.g. on the access roads to the preferred site, and they also

concluded on p.8

"A Word or Two From the Chairman"

This Society's founding Hon. Secretary, Jack Scruton, was the powerhouse behind all that was planned and carried forward. Jack motivated as many of the membership as he could involve in pushing through a project, or organising a Trees Group or a Planning Group. Everyone inside the Society, and even external agencies such as the District Council, looked to Jack for inspiration and comment.

J.S. was succeeded by John Gore, who soon proved to be a mighty influence on our Society's events and happenings, by working single-handedly on the Newsletter, and in guiding planning matters to a conclusion.

Now times have changed. The Planning Group evolved into a body of volunteers committed to sharing the workload and positively supporting Tony Fooks as, initially, the new Group Leader. Chris Woodman proved to be a brilliant Editor of the Newsletter, and became our first webmaster in the emerging electronic age.

Many issues, comments or queries on policy have been directed to me as Chairman, and it is my practice to refer these to the Executive Committee's next monthly meeting. Sometimes, however, my contact has given the impression of expecting an immediate reply and action, regarding me as some form of "supremo". However, under our constitution, it has always been the Executive Committee that has responsibility for official policy and determining future action and outcomes, consulting the Society's Groups and members as necessary. My role as Chairman is to chair monthly Executive Committee meetings and Quarterly Meetings, and to represent the "public face" of the Society when called upon to do so.

Members seeking support on a planning or transport matter will often approach a member of the appropriate Group in the first instance, and that should continue. However, I would ask that in future, members seeking action or support from the Executive on any issue should send their comments by email, telephone or letter, to our Hon. Secretary, Frances Presland. She acts for, and with, the Executive Committee just as, for example, a Parish Clerk handles the admin. for a Parish Council (except that she doesn't get paid, despite the considerable time and work she devotes to the role).

The constantly ongoing informal liaison between the officers and the Executive Committee will continue to ensure that the High Wycombe Society remains a responsible and influential voice in the greater Wycombe area.

Roger Lawson

(The Hon. Sec.'s address and telephone details are on the front page of every Newsletter; her email is frances@fjpresland.plus.com.)

Transport

Sustainability and Smart Growth Demand Responsive Transport and FLEXIBUS

Our Transport Group has been campaigning for some years for an effective mode of transport around the town which will encourage people to leave their cars at home, taking advantage of the rapid advances in IT and mobile phone technology in recent years. In various places around England, mainly in rural locations, local authorities have successfully worked with private sector operators to introduce "flexibus" services. Now, thanks to the Group's efforts and a particularly go-ahead private hire firm, this looks like coming to fruition in our town too. Elsa Woodward, leader of the Transport Group, has given us this update.—Ed.

Sustainability must always be the top priority when introducing new transport schemes. Imagination and discipline are required to organise growth and innovation while conserving vital finite resources, including land and landscape, and maintaining climate stability, biodiversity, water supplies and soil fertility. Otherwise the legacy of unsustainable growth for future generations could be very severe. Flexibus projects offer land conservation, reduced carbon emissions and a boost for the economy by reducing congestion and making the most effective use of vehicles and manpower.

Traditional bus services employ vehicles that are too big to use on many roads, and they follow fixed routes and timetables. In contrast, a car offers flexibility, allowing many different routes between home, work, shops, entertainment and so on. Thirty years of wide car ownership has thus permitted very dispersed patterns of settlement, of homes, businesses, schools etc., in urban and rural areas, generating many journeys which traditional buses cannot match. They therefore often travel with many empty seats, using fuel and drivers inefficiently.

Flexibus will offer a fast, flexible, convenient door-to-door service, like a taxi, but sharing with strangers, like a bus. It will follow routes and times only in response to individual requests, using small, fuel-efficient vehicles able to access all roads, with 5–7 seat capacity occupied efficiently by people travelling in the same direction at the same time within a designated area (to be shown on a Flexibus map). The security arrangements described below will encourage users to share Flexibuses, and the sharing will be arranged efficiently and smoothly by a sophisticated booking system.

The booking arrangements are the foundation of successful Flexibus sharing operations. Requests for transport must be made to the Flexibus Dispatch Centre, by phone or in person. The Flexibus technology supporting the Wycombe operation has been developed and customised over more than three years by the private hire firm promoting the service, and it allows bookings to be made 10-30 minutes in advance (or up to a month if appropriate), depending on the type of journey. The system provides for continuous automatic communication between the centre and the drivers, taking account of the whereabouts of all the Flexibuses and the registered users travelling in them. The customised computer software also provides automatic immediate communication between

the allocated driver and the customer requesting transport, who can be told the colour and registration number of the particular vehicle. The arrangements allowing this fast booking are well-proven. The convenient sharing of vehicles will support sustainability, by making efficient use of fuel and reducing the need for parking, so releasing land now allocated for parking at homes, stations, shops, hospitals etc. to be used for more productive purposes.

All potential users must first register with Flexibus, providing evidence of their identity for purposes of security. There will be no in-vehicle cash transactions because they can be time-consuming, and can be a potential threat to the security of drivers and their passengers. Payment will be only via a Flexibus Membership card or a special mobile phone procedure. Fares are likely to be half the conventional taxi fare, but may be further reduced as Flexibus develops, offering attractive discounts for regular customers and students

Flexibus is due to be launched in Spring 2011. A few details remain to be put in place and members of the Transport Group are helping the operator with these.

Elsa Woodward



Banish Those Winter Blues....

Join fellow members for a
convivial evening at our Quiz
Night on Friday February 4th.

A new venue this time at Cedar Barn Hazlemere.

Come in teams of six or join one of our teams.

Tickets, in advance please, £8 per person to
include supper from Ann Simone, 01494 448773.

Keeping Traffic Moving

Motorists driving in and around High Wycombe over recent years will be well aware of the considerable increase in the number of traffic signals on major routes. Many will question the purpose of these signals which, rather than improve traffic movement, seem to have resulted in more delays. In the case of the A40 London Road, the additional signals at Wycombe Marsh, Cock Lane, Abbey Barn Rd, Gomm Rd, Hammersley Lane and Rayners Avenue have resulted in eastbound traffic needing to allow up to 20 minutes extra travelling time during the morning rush hour. Similarly anyone travelling up Marlow Hill around 8.30 am, and having crawled up to Daws Hill Lane, will then have to tolerate being stopped at a red signal at School Close and again at the Sports Centre.

In the light of these problems, and in response to our request to be brought up to date on the changes to the control of traffic at the Railway Station, Cllr Val Letheren arranged a most informative meeting between senior members of her staff and the Society's Transport Group on 22 November. This provided some confidence that the delays along the London Rd and up the Marlow Hill should largely be resolved by March 2011 when a new control system will have been installed on both these routes. This system involves up-to-date software which links all signals along the route, measures the flow of traffic and adjusts the timing of the signals to minimise delays. Pedestrian crossings will be linked to ensure that pedestrians are allowed to cross at the most convenient time in the traffic phase. On these main routes along the A40 and A404 a series of CCTV cameras will be installed to monitor traffic flows. In the event of a build-up of traffic, an operator can alter the phasing of the signals to ease any blockage. Provided the system works as intended motorists can look forward to less frustrating journeys next year. The Society's Transport Group will monitor the results of this new system and report any problems, and propose solutions, should the present delays not be reduced.

The one area of traffic management which is causing some concern is the new layout, and additional traffic signals, at the Railway Station. At the moment the poor phasing of the High St/Crendon St signals with the pedestrian crossing signals adjacent to Castle St often results in a backlog of traffic along Queen Victoria Rd which, at peak periods, blocks traffic around the gyratory at the foot of Marlow Hill. By the end of February 2011, the new signals at the exit from the Railway Station, and all sets of pedestrian crossing signals, will be phased in with the High St/Crendon St signals to aid the flow along the A404. Despite this improved phasing, there is some concern that delays back along Queen Victoria Rd could be increased, thus further slowing the traffic around the gyratory. One solution we have put to Bucks CC is to remove the High St/Crendon St signals. Experience has shown that, when these signals are not operating, traffic delays along the A404 are reduced with little inconvenience to pedestrians. This option remains a possibility. A further

concern is the problems likely to result from the decision – at least for an experimental period – not to allow traffic travelling down the A404 Amersham Hill to turn right into Castle St. Buses and other traffic will need to turn left into the Station entrance road, drive around the Station loop, and exit directly across into Castle St. This could cause problems in the Station loop road with traffic volumes and will be inconvenient for buses and taxis. It may also result in a significant increase in traffic turning right off the Amersham Hill into Priory Rd.

For several years now the Transport Group has pressed Bucks CC to consider adopting the contemporary policy of improving traffic flow – and reducing accidents – by removing traffic signals. There are now indications that 'The Big Switch-Off' solution is gaining strong support even with Bucks CC. An external consultant, an advisor to the Department of Transport and an advocate of fewer signals, has been engaged by Bucks CC to look at the traffic situation in Aylesbury and High Wycombe. The needs of all road users, pedestrians, cyclists, buses as well as motorists, must be taken into consideration but every effort is being made to make the best use of our limited highways system.

Arnie Parr

Stadium follow-up (continued from p.6)

said there will be a further opportunity for residents to comment, but we are not clear precisely how this fits into the process. If (and this is not certain) the Council do decide to proceed with an alteration to the Core Strategy (e.g. to reallocate a particular area of land for the purposes of a stadium and sports village), then this will be subject to a Public Examination.

Meanwhile, the reaction of the Sands residents has given us pause for thought. One particular problem was that our email inviting input from members and groups did not reach them because their name had dropped off our email distribution list. Humble apologies are due from your Editor (who also issues all the circular emails to members) for this unfortunate omission.–Ed.

If you are not receiving occasional emails from us about Society meetings etc., please let me know at chris@thewoodmans.plus.com.–Ed.

Curious Objects – Now There are Two!

Kathleen Peatey's appeal in our Autumn Newsletter for the current whereabouts of a "curious object" prompted an almost immediate response from Dr Catherine Grigg, Collections and Interpretation Officer at Wycombe Museum. Kathleen and I eagerly accepted her invitation to view an object held in a part of the museum usually only accessed by the curators. It had been donated some time ago by a Mr Parker. He was probably a direct descendant of the author of "*The Early History and Antiquities of Wycombe*", the book in which the curious picture had been spotted. It is about a cubic foot in size, probably made of plaster and believed to be medieval in origin, but it is too fragile to be out on public display.



The drawing in John Parker's 1878 book, "*The Early History and Antiquities of High Wycombe*".



The original plaster object in Wycombe Museum.

Photo: Wycombe Museum



Is this the "oaken corbel" referred to in Parker's book? Does anyone know where this object comes from?

Photo: Wycombe Museum

We cautiously compared the object (*centre*) and the picture (*left*). The likeness was convincing but we detected a number of very small detailed differences, not wholly accounted for by a century's wear and tear. This led to a very interesting discussion about illustration techniques and artistic licence. Illustrators in former times may not have been able to use photography or any of the digital image manipulation techniques we take for granted today, but they could and did make deliberate changes to improve appearances.

It is difficult to visualise how the above object

served as a corbel (if it did), but as it is made of plaster or stone it certainly isn't the "oaken corbel" described in John Parker's book. To our surprise and delight, Catherine Grigg was ready with another exhibit for us to look at (*right*). Made in wood, the object is of comparable size and similar design. The most significant difference is that the wings of the swan (and it looks more like a swan) are open. This object is not thought to be as old as the plaster one. Can anyone help give it any provenance?

Jackie Kay

The Halfway House

Many members will have noticed that the Halfway House Pub on the London Road at Wycombe Marsh has recently been demolished. A residential development will soon rise in its place. This has been a matter for some regret. The building dated from the 18th century, and indeed some members would have liked the Society to persuade the Council to apply for "spot listing", preventing the demolition. The view of the WDC Conservation Officer was that such an application would fail, because the building was not exceptional, and because it was in a poor condition: it is one thing to prevent demolition and quite another to

persuade anyone to restore it. The Planning Group did not feel there was a case for challenging this, although it did object to the planned new building, and an improved application was submitted.

The good news, however, is that WDC have persuaded the Department of Culture, Media and Sport that the historic milestone should be nationally listed, Grade II. Congratulations to Martin Andrew and his team.



The milestone really is half-way between London and Oxford: the opposite face reads "Oxford 27, Wycombe 2".

Quarterly Meeting

Going Places with Chiltern Railways: Building the Chiltern Mainline

The November 3rd Quarterly Meeting took place in a new venue for the Society – a spacious new lecture theatre in Bucks New University's Gateway Building – and with some 150 attendees we certainly needed the room. Ian Baxter, a Director of Chiltern Railways, kindly stood in for our scheduled speaker Adrian Shooter, who was in Germany talking to the company's owners (Deutsche Bahn), and gave a fascinating and enthusiastic account of the Chiltern Mainline past, present and future.

However you measure it, Chiltern Railways has gone from strength to strength in the 15 years since privatisation. Passenger numbers have risen by 150%, from 6.5 to 16 million per year (and that during a period when the national increase has been only 40%). Their train fleet has risen from 80 to 160 units, and stations and facilities have been upgraded all along the line. (We saw some striking 'before' and 'after' pictures of stations showing just how far the line had been allowed to decay before privatisation.)

Despite having 700 employees, Chiltern is still a relatively small, almost family company, and a key to their success has been making well thought-out strategic investments with an element of risk, but never taking on too much at one time. As an example, Warwick Parkway was opened to exploit a gap in the market (drivers in the Midlands who didn't want the hassle of driving all the way into London) and has been so successful that it is soon to have its car park expanded for a third time. Multi-deck car parks have worked well at many other Chiltern stations too, and Wycombe will soon have its very own one as part of the current round of station improvements.

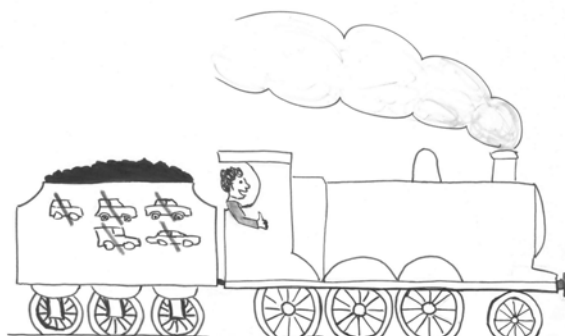
It is this sort of creative spotting and exploiting of new opportunities that has made Chiltern so successful and allowed them to compete on an often unlevel playing field. For example, Virgin Trains, we were told, prevented them from using the obvious route to Wrexham for fear of competition, so Chiltern's trains are currently having to take a circuitous route around Birmingham instead of the direct route that they would have preferred. Similarly, while Chiltern are borrowing the £¼ billion needed for their current upgrades on a purely commercial basis, the UK government is pondering public investments of £9 billion for upgrading the lines out of Euston and £35 billion for High Speed 2. Rather than spending megabucks on electrification, Chiltern is

speeding up its line by using simple ideas like moving platforms so that bends in the line can be taken out. Interestingly, London to Birmingham is one of the few rail routes in the UK where there is genuine competition between operators, and Chiltern see their upgrade as essential to compete with the services from Euston which are benefiting from public investment.

For lovers of railway nostalgia there was a tribute to W. Y. Armstrong, who engineered Birmingham Moor Street Station and much of Chiltern's route in the run-up to WWI, thereby enabling the first two-hour express from London to Birmingham in 1910. The great days of the GWR were not solid gold, though – train punctuality was just 70% and hit a nadir of 50% shortly after WWII. These days we regard 95% as a minimum standard, and Chiltern are proud of exceeding 97%. They also make a point of running a steam train at least once every year with senior managers like Ian taking on the driver and guard roles.

There was plenty of good news in the talk for a regular Chiltern traveller like myself, with improved journey times to London and a new service to Oxford coming up. In addition, Chiltern have consulted widely on how best to restore and reincorporate the Brunel train shed at Wycombe as part of the Phase II upgrade to our station, and they are hoping to encourage bus integration by getting the Council to route buses right past the station door. The longer term is likely to be equally interesting as Deutsche Bahn have recently bought a number of other UK train and bus operators, so we may well see some more transport creativity over the next few years.

Peter Sadd



Letters

It was a lovely surprise to read about Murray's in the Newsletter and it brought back many memories to me.

I am sending you a little of my experience at Murray's, although I am sure that you will hear from someone who was at Murray's a lot longer than myself. I still meet up in the town with the odd person who worked in the Department store and always remember the "good ole days".

I hope it will be of interest to you.

Margaret Lambourne

My experience working for Murray's the Department Store

I first went for an interview at Murray's 6 weeks before Christmas in 1981.

I was employed as a dinnertime cover for the full time staff on the hardware department which was upstairs in the store. After a lot of practice I eventually got the hang of packing up saucepans and other awkward hardware goods.

In January 1982 we had a heavy snowfall and a lady who was supposed to be demonstrating a sandwich maker did not turn up. I was therefore asked to demonstrate, keeping in mind that I did not have a clue, but when I did I was handing out cheese sandwiches to all who came and saw me. I think I managed to sell about four in the whole day!

The following January I was offered a full-time job in the haberdashery department, which I accepted, and was there for four years. Murray's was a wonderful company to work for also because the girls were great to work with.

The down side of working at Murray's was that when they decided to cut the store in half, it was never the same after that. I can still remember the day when the doors were

kept shut and we were asked to go to the canteen for an announcement, which was that they were shutting the store altogether. It was quite a shock and a few tears were shed as a lot of staff had been there since their school days.

When we eventually opened the store that morning the customers were greeted with a lot of tearful staff so the news got round the town quite quickly. The store became so untidy and dark and was therefore not a pleasure to go to and work. I therefore managed to get another job and left two weeks before Murray's finally closed. It was a sad day for the people of High Wycombe but I have fond memories of when I worked for the company.

Margaret Lambourne



Starting in 1958, in Murrays' heyday, the store would hold fashion shows in the Town Hall using its own staff as models.

Photograph by Ronald Goodearl in the Library collection, SWOP 51698.

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mrs A Forward of Ellsworth Rd., HW.

Mr M Mole of Fremantle Rd., HW.

Domestic accident!

The Chairman wishes to thank the President, Vice-Presidents, Committee and Society members for their good wishes for his return to mobility after his unfortunate domestic accident.

You didn't hear about it? Well, it involved a bottom stair, a well-polished carpet slipper, and a tendon. Nasty!—Ed.

FAGAM

The next meeting of the Forum for Affiliated Groups and All Members (FAGAM) is in the Friends' Meeting House on 11 March. At these meetings we have very good exchanges about all sorts of matters of interest to the Society. This is *your* opportunity to raise issues of concern to you or the affiliated group you represent, particularly on matters concerning planning, transport and The Rye. It would be helpful, but not essential, if you could advise the Hon. Sec. in advance of any issues you intend to raise: this will help the Executive members to be better prepared.



Yes, High Wycombe is now the proud recipient of a Purple Flag, "the new gold standard that recognises great entertainment and hospitality areas at night. Places that achieve the standard offer a positive experience to night time visitors and users." Our congratulations to all – Society members and townsfolk alike – who were involved.

And thanks to...

... all those of you who helped at Pann Mill Open Day in September. It was a successful day with a delightful and busy ambience as visitors toured the mill, then browsed the stalls and enjoyed their tea and cake in the garden. I hope we thanked you on the day but, if anyone was missed, it's a big thankyou now to the gazebo erectors, refreshment sellers, cake bakers and stall holders.

We look forward to seeing you, perhaps with a friend, next year.

Membership & Publicity Group

Publicity Officer

Our new Publicity Officer, Tony Murphy (01494 443552) has hit the ground running, with eye-catching posters advertising our events around the town. For the Chiltern Railways meeting on 3 November (*p.10*) he contacted professional bodies and commuters at stations up and down the railway line. The attendance, about 150, was a Society record, at least in recent years. He and Jackie have also been active and efficient on the cake stall at Pann Mill Open Days. This is what they look like:



From the Editor...

Many thanks to all those who have contributed copy for this issue. Material for the Spring 2011 issue should reach me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 February**.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Put these dates in your diary **now!!!**

2011

Friday, 21st January
7.30pm, Guildhall

Friday, 4th February

Friday, 11th March
7.30pm, Friends' Meeting House,
25 London Road

Friday, 8th April
7.30pm, Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: Archaeology – all stones and bones?
Speaker: Dr Jill Evers, Director, Chiltern Archaeology.

Quiz Night for Members and their friends (*see p.7*).

Forum for Affiliated Groups and All Members (*see above*).

Quarterly Meeting: Annual General Meeting followed by Reports from the Society's Groups.