



# THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

## *newsletter*

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### **A question of support...**

NO, NOT the sports quiz with the catchy theme tune. The theme of this article and of much of this Newsletter is recruitment to the Society and support for the Society's Groups. The High Wycombe Society would not *be* a Society were it not for you, our members, who support us with practical and monetary help. However, as we are all aware, the town and its environment are changing, and the Society must change too if it is to remain active and relevant. We must become more proactive, anticipating change, and we must support that which we consider to be good, and challenge what we believe to be detrimental to the town. We can only do this effectively if we are truly representative of the people of High Wycombe.

As you will see from the many articles inside this Newsletter, we would like you to join a group within the Society so that you can put forward your views, influence the Society's activities, and be more involved in what we do. Those of you who are unable to play an active part in the groups can perhaps influence friends to join the Society to do the hard work on your behalf!

If each of you were able to recruit just one member, this would double our membership and would enable us to represent the town that much more effectively. Somehow, over the years people have lost the will to be heard, feeling that nothing they do or say will make any difference. THIS IS AN ILLUSION. When enough people care, they have a voice that *must* be heard.

We know you care, or you would not be a member of the Society, but can we count on you to do that little extra? Support our recruitment drive and, if you can, join one of the groups to give the Society the benefit of your time and energy. Please use the form enclosed with this Newsletter to encourage someone you know to join the Society. *All* members of the Society are valuable, but if you are one of those who feels able to take a more active part, then telephone any of the contact numbers within the newsletter to find out about joining one of the groups.

Your Executive Committee really appreciates your membership, and in this time of rapid change, we would greatly benefit from your help.

*Frances Presland*



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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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## Planning Workshop

THE PLANNING WORKSHOP held in the Friends' Meeting House on the evening of 23 June was a novel event – a one-off meeting to review how the Society deals with planning matters in the light of criticism that we are not 100% democratic when it comes to deciding the Society's position on major issues. Although attendance was light (16 people altogether) the discussion was lively and imaginative.

Roger Lawson, opening the meeting, observed that the Society had begun life to campaign to save the Rye from the encroachment of a road, and had quickly moved on to consider individual planning applications. He had been amazed at how much more consultative and inclusive the planning procedures had become over the past 30 years: the meeting he had attended with the developers of the Equity & Law site at which a great deal of weight was given to the views of neighbouring residents would never have taken place in the 1960s. But the Society's planning work was concentrated in the hands of too few people. John Gore leads, and Roger Lawson and Norman Belson assist with Downley-related applications.

John Gore explained that planning issues feature strongly in the Society's constitution. Once a week, the District Council issues a bulletin of 50-60 applications. Most are outside the town centre or uncontroversial, but 1 or 2 a week are of interest. Those which are not delegated to the Council's officer are the subject of a Planning Panel meeting once a month. If the Council is minded to approve and the Society or anyone else objects, the Council allows 3 minutes for *all* objectors to make their points before taking a decision.

Individual planning decisions are taken within the context of the Local Plan, renewed every 5 years or so, which is led by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' estimates of the long-term *need* for housing. The draft Local Plan currently under consideration meets the DETR's requirement for 60% of housing to go on "brownfield" sites. The DETR also issues a series of Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs).

With that introduction, the meeting split for half an hour into 3 working groups. Group A considered what (if anything) should be done to consult the membership more widely on planning issues. Group A concluded that:

- the Society's members who were most free to contribute time were those not in full-time work and a pilot meeting should be arranged

during the day.

- individual planning applications, and many specific issues, were resolved in very tight deadlines. Questionnaires took too long and gave ambiguous results. The Society should investigate the availability of notice boards – e.g. those in car parks – to communicate with its members.
- a Planning Group should be formed, and it should be for members themselves to keep in touch with the leader of the group.
- members of the group might prefer to concentrate on applications in their own area.
- there should be a series of meetings for the group.
- links with the Press and Local Radio should be cultivated.
- comments should be invited in the Newsletter.

Group B considered a 25 point list of considerations relevant to planning decisions and tried to identify the most important. In order, the Group decided the most important were

- that buildings should be in keeping with their surroundings.
- that the density should be right – neither over-development nor wasted space.
- that transport and access arrangements should be right.

Overall, however, the Group felt it very important there should be a coherent vision of what should be where in the town – particularly in the centre. High Wycombe is unusual in that, although it is in the commuter belt, it has plenty of employment and is definitely not a "dormitory" town. But we need a thriving and living town centre even in the evenings. That, and the need to encourage people to live near where they work, implies a push for more residential accommodation in the centre.

Group C came up with a medley of conclusions:

- we should make the most of Councils' growing duty to consult, e.g. by trying for a slot in *Community News*.
- we should have a Society stand at the proposed new "one-stop shop" for voluntary organisations.
- there should be a rota for Society members to attend WDC planning meetings.
- there should be a training package for new members of the planning group.

- we should cultivate links with residents' associations for big Public Inquiries (like that to take place after Christmas on the Local Plan).

Most of these conclusions were accepted by the meeting as a whole. There were a number of fresh ideas. It is now for the Executive Committee to see how far they can be put into

practice. A special meeting of the Planning Group has been set for 19 October (see *Diary*, p.12). If you have any comments please pass them to any member of the Executive Committee, or write in with your views for the *In My Opinion* column in the next issue of the *Newsletter*, or attend the Planning Group meeting.

## Planning this Quarter

*Monitoring and participating in the process for local planning applications is one of the Society's most important ongoing tasks. In this issue, John Gore, leader of the Planning Group, reports on some of the more significant cases that have been active over the past quarter. Should this be a regular feature?*

AS USUAL, there has been plenty of activity on the planning front in the past quarter, so here is a selection of recent and current cases.

*Former AXA Equity & Law site* It is probably well known that Berkeley Homes gained outline planning permission following a public inquiry earlier this year to build homes on this attractive 9.9 hectare (24.4 acre) site following AXA Equity & Law's decision to move. In May, we were pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation from the company to take part in a discussion about the plans for the type and layout of housing etc on the site. Also invited were representatives from Hazlemere Parish Council, Hazlemere Residents' Association and the residents of the adjoining Magnolia Dene. Roger Lawson, our Chairman, and I went along to the initial meeting and a subsequent one. There was general agreement on most issues, the main exception being on the future of the quadrant office building, which Wycombe District Council and the developers wanted to be converted into housing in the interests of sustainability, whereas Magnolia Dene residents, fearful of being overlooked, favoured demolition. As submitted in July, the planning application calls for the block to be adapted to include 41 town houses and apartments. In all, 143 dwellings, of which 31 are scheduled to be 'affordable housing', are proposed for the site, with a good mix of housing ranging from one to five bedroom dwellings. This, we are pleased to note, means the site will contain over 40% more dwellings than the original planning application. The old St John's House is to be retained, and the wooded nature of the site will be respected. We hope other developers will follow this precedent of inviting local residents and amenity societies to discuss their proposals.

*Western Sector* The Secretary of State has also recently given the go-ahead for the Western Sector development, which is aimed at significantly improving the town's attractiveness

to shoppers. We hope the Council will honour its undertaking to carry out further public consultation on the details of the development before any concrete is poured. The position of the bus terminal and the lack of active leisure facilities are issues that need to be addressed.

*Mobile phone aerial masts* There has been a rash of applications from the numerous mobile phone companies to locate masts in all manner of places. We opposed one at the eastern end of Kingsmead some months ago. This was withdrawn, and then a substitute siting on the Rugby Club car park was rejected by the Council. We have recently opposed an application for an aerial mast disguised as a lamp post outside the Rifle Butts public house in London Road on the grounds that it would be unsightly and too close to dwellings, bearing in mind that the health risks of the microwave emissions remain something of an unknown factor. The application has now been withdrawn.

*Wycombe Summit Health and Fitness Centre* At the end of last year, Wycombe Summit, who run the ski slope at Abbey Barn, applied to build a Health & Fitness Centre on the site. We opposed this on the following grounds: (i) It was aimed to attract people from a wide area, and as there was no public transport, many more car journeys would be generated. A town-centre site accessible to people with and without cars would be more sustainable in transport terms. (ii) Access roads would not take the extra traffic. (iii) Such an urban-type development adjacent to Deangarden Wood would have an adverse effect on the landscape. (iv) The centre would cause light pollution across the valley.

The Council's Planning Applications Panel considered the case in July but decided to defer their decision.

**John Gore**

## Help the Planning Group!

We need a Planning Group if we are to fulfil the aims of the Society which, briefly, are to protect our heritage, safeguard the environment, and encourage high standards of town planning and architecture in and around High Wycombe. We therefore monitor planning applications every week and send comments, where appropriate, to Council Planning Officers and Ward Councillors. We also play our part in the District Local Plan consultation process, when the Plan is updated every five years or so. We comment on the Plan policies, which largely govern how development is to be controlled; for example, new housing sites. Then we defend our views at the Public Inquiry before the Plan is finalised. We also put forward Society views on specific projects, such as the Western Sector. The Society works on the basis that it is no good complaining afterwards if you don't put your case when you have the chance!

Planning Group members should be prepared to monitor planning applications arising in a section of the town, decide with other members

what the Society's response should be, and help draft letters to put forward our views, remembering that a response has to be made within three weeks of the filing of an application. Members need to make themselves familiar with Local Plan policies and with broad Society guidelines.

If you would like to know more, please contact the Chairman, Roger Lawson, on 01494 528047 or John Gore on 01494 526671. We look forward to hearing from you.

**John Gore**

### Library Garden 'Crest Bed'

Every summer, the 'Crest Bed', which faces the old Post Office in Queen Victoria Road, is used to commemorate significant events in the life of local groups. This year, it is the turn of the High Wycombe Society, and the display marks our 30th anniversary. It depicts a silhouette of the Guildhall. Appropriately enough, the Guildhall is currently undergoing renovation and extension to meet modern requirements: a commendable case of sustainable development!

### *Snippets and Scraps*

- \* Some details have emerged on the timetable for the Public Inquiry into the Wycombe Local Plan. There is a Pre-Inquiry Meeting on 11 January and the Inquiry proper starts on 11 April. Before this, the Council must decide what changes it wants to make to its proposals in the light of consultation. Council Officers have stated to us: *"The Authority is currently considering the objections received during the Deposit period and will shortly confirm the programme of Autumn/Winter Committee meetings when the objections and any Pre-Inquiry changes will be considered. These meetings will as usual be open to the public. Pre-Inquiry changes will then be widely advertised and considered by the Council prior to the commencement of the Local Plan Inquiry."*
- \* Although the Secretary of State has approved the Compulsory Purchase Order for Tesco, the Council is still not yet free to proceed with the Western Sector Development. Council Officials have stated: *"Tesco have now launched a High Court action to try and overturn the Secretary of State's decision... It is disappointing that they are still trying to prevent much needed improvements for the town centre... The Council will of course be challenging Tesco's objections and will be attempting to keep any delay to a minimum. Unfortunately such actions inevitably lead to some form of delay*

*and therefore at the present time the timing and form of any further public consultation remain uncertain."* Notice that word "any"! Frances Alexander told us there *would* be further consultation, but that was before the elections!

- \* The new Council, when it was elected, went through a period of being distinctly lukewarm about both bus lanes and Park and Ride. So where *does* Park and Ride stand? Listen to this! *"Park and Ride forms part of the Wycombe Transport Strategy, is included in the County Council's 'Provisional Local Transport Plan' and is referred to in the Deposit Local Plan. The main part of the Hazlemere site has been purchased but there remains much to be done to progress Park and Ride. Further consideration is being given to how this should move forward, partly in response to objections lodged in respect of the Deposit Local Plan. I expect the situation to become clearer at the end of this year, once our committee has considered this."* Watch this space!
- \* The National Trust have purchased Green Farm "to protect the surrounds of the Hughenden Estate". This is terrific news. Not only does it prevent further inappropriate development at the foot of Green Hill, but it is a clear indication that the NT will oppose strongly any attempt by the County Council to resurrect their ghastly scheme to divert the A404 into the Hughenden valley.

## Join a Group!

YES, if *you* have talents that you think could be useful to the Society, we want you to join one of the Society's groups and play an active role. There are currently six groups (although there is no reason why there should not be others if new roles can be identified). Besides the three described on this page, look elsewhere in this Newsletter for details of the Planning, Pann Mill and Heritage Groups.

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### Transport

Jack Scruton, who founded the High Wycombe Society in 1968, was famous for being able to see into the future. In 1989 he recognised the growing importance of transport for the town's well-being, and set up a 'Roads' group, charged with the immediate task of opposing the horrendous plans for a northern relief road. When the pedestrianisation of the town centre was completed in June 1998, it incorporated key suggestions made by the Group, and had been achieved without the relief road which the County Council had previously considered to be essential. The western half of the road was withdrawn from the plan around 1997.

In 1989 the Group quickly realised that the road scheme could not be fought in isolation, but had to be studied in the much wider context of transport and the environment. So the Roads Group soon evolved into the Transport Group, which tries to follow the many relevant developments at the local, national and global levels. The changes on the transport front have been so sweeping, as exemplified by the two Road Traffic Reduction Acts (1997 and 1998), that probably not even Jack would have foreseen them happening so quickly.

At the Wycombe Show this month, we launched a questionnaire in support of the Road Traffic Reduction Acts, asking people what imaginative new services and facilities they need to help them use their cars less. The Group is also campaigning for the reinstatement of the disused High Wycombe/Bourne End rail link (with diversions where the track has been built on) using Ultra Light Rail (ULR) which is unobtrusive and environmentally friendly and requires no overhead power lines.

The Group already contains railway, planning and business skills. We would particularly welcome new members with experience of public transport in other countries, or with a special interest in bus and minibus services, or with computer programming expertise. If you would like to know more about the Group, contact Roger Lawson on 01494 528947 or me on 01494 443590.

**Elsa Woodward**

### Friends of the Rye

The Friends of the Rye Group has recently been re-formed and has two main objectives. The first is to prevent the over-promotion of one particular activity, e.g. formal sports, at the expense of other activities that people currently enjoy. The second objective is to try to safeguard the Rye environment, so that it remains a pleasant place to visit. We intend to do this by writing to the District Council about our concerns, informing local residents about any developments that may concern them and by regularly attending meetings of the Community and Leisure Committee.

The aim of the Group is "to preserve and protect the Rye, its environs and Holywell Mead as an undeveloped open space for free access and informal recreational use by all the people of High Wycombe". If you agree with this aim, you may like to consider becoming a member of the group. If so, contact me on 01494 523263.

**Frances Presland**

### Membership and Publicity

We are behind-the-scenes people. Without us there would be no speakers, no meeting rooms booked, no coffee mornings organised, no charity stall goods and volunteer rosters, no notices around the town or in the newspapers, and no events or excursions!

We really need more members to join our rather small committee and make suggestions for activities, do some phoning to get helpers for special events, write short articles, look after our stock of books and other items to sell, and try to make sure all our activities run smoothly.

If *you* could spare one evening (or afternoon) about every six weeks, and feel you could be useful, please contact me as Chairman on 01494 448773, or Annie Woodward (Membership Secretary) on 01494 527978. We look forward to your call!

**Ann Simone**

## Meet the Hon. Sec. (concluded)

IN THIS concluding section of our interview, Frances Presland talks about reaching out to the town's population, and the work of the Society's Planning and Transport Groups.

*What did you actually think of us as you found us, the 350 members? Did you form any view about the Society?*

Not immediately. I must have gone to about 2 quarterly meetings and obviously I'd met Annie, and Ann, and my next foray was the cream tea for new members! I can't quite remember what happened there. I think I had a mouthful of cream cake and somebody asked me to do something. My "mmm" was considered to be a "yes", and that's how I started to get more involved with the workings of the Society rather than just being a member. Then one night Annie rang up to ask, would I like to go to one of their Executive meetings, and that was how I got on to the Executive.

*Did you feel that the Society was doing a good job and, basically, was a sound organisation, or did anything worry you?*

No, it had been more active in the past, I felt, and obviously I'd heard of Jack Scruton, and what he'd done to stop the road on the Rye, but although I was conservation-minded it really didn't affect me that much, until this last crisis. I felt you'd got quite an old population, older members, that was one thing that did strike me, but it also struck me that, you know, it *was* quite an active society.

*But you did eventually decide to accept the nomination for the honorary secretary job that John Gore had done for 11 years. What made you decide to accept – apart from the fact that we were all very persuasive!*

I think it would have been nice if we could have had an early retired person to do it, because obviously there are constraints on my time. I can't go and badger councillors for you because I'm not available – unless there is something so dire that I need to take time off to actually go and see somebody. Apart from that I really welcome the challenges and the interests that this will give me.

*I can see that limitation, but what drove me to think your candidature was a good idea was simply that you've a huge amount of energy and drive, and those are things that are not really in plentiful supply.*

*You've said that the Society is predominantly old. What are your aims for the Society?*

I'm not too worried, and I would like to lower the age profile a little bit, but I'm not overly concerned about that because I think that

older people have just as much energy and just as much motivation as younger ones – I think that this concept that you have to be young to do things is wrong.

My major concern is to try and increase membership, to try and get people interested in what the Society tries to do, to try and get more communication of what is going on in Wycombe out to the public, and to try and shake this apathy that we can't do anything. That really does concern me a great deal.

*Well, OK, shaking the 62,000 people of Wycombe out of their apathy, how do we go about that?*

I think that some of the things that we have done, like the Western Sector display at the Wycombe Show last year – again, when you actually talk to people and try to get them interested, they do become more interested as you talk to them, I find.

*How do you even make contact with the people we want to interest?*

Well, besides the Wycombe Show, we could have displays in the library, and we can try and disseminate the newsletter. I think we should start thinking about leaving it in public places, we should ask the library if they'll display it, we should ask local doctors' surgeries if they'll take it, hairdressers, anywhere where people are about and would like to see it and read it: anywhere where you can communicate with people. And try and get people to realise that they *can* do things they can't if they just sit there and say, "there's nothing we can do."

*Not to mention membership forms!*

Exactly. We do need to push for new members and, above all, to give information about what is happening.

*So, to sum up on your aims for your first year? I know the secretary can't do everything, but nevertheless, you're probably in the strongest position to take an initiative this year.*

Recruitment is my major aim this year, to boost membership and try to raise the profile of the Society in as many ways as I can think of.

*OK. Now, you're also interested in the Planning Group. What do you think our aim should be there?*

I think there, we have to tread a careful line: we have to try to see, as I think we have, everybody's viewpoint. I think the houses needed by 2011 in the Local Plan is a good example,

where the council really does find itself caught in a cleft stick. It has to find room for these houses, and I think that this is one thing that they did well, in that they invited public consultation. Those meetings were very well organised and I feel that they did their best to take on board everything that people said.

*Yes, the one reservation I have is a point that emerged fairly strongly during the election campaign, that the Conservatives were, before the election, accusing the Lib-Lab coalition of having volunteered to take 300 more houses than the county wanted them necessarily to take and indeed, the Liberals replied in another leaflet that the town actually needs those houses for its own people to live. I didn't find that very convincing.*

No. And I'm not convinced about the sort of housing that we're seeing. The new houses are very often 3 or 4 bedroom luxury homes. Now we're told that the new houses are needed because of changes in the way people live, i.e. more single people. To me, those houses can't possibly satisfy the need of single people. It's all very well releasing land for houses, but they're not building the sort of houses that we've been told to prepare for.

*OK. Now, on Transport, a lot of the thought and the campaigning around the town in the last few years has been on parking and pedestrianisation and we've also got the bus lane and the expanded bus services. There was a major, so-called "package approach" to the Government which got a lot of Government funding, jointly by the county and the district, which actually made some difference in High Wycombe. Do you think those changes are good?*

I think they are, but on the other hand I think it was last January the subsidy for buses and the provision of new routes was actually cut. Now, to me it's absurd to discourage people from driving and then take away the only practical way they can get into town. Some people are saying that now they're reduced virtually to a Sunday service. Now, you cannot penalise the motorist without giving him some way of actually going around the town. The trouble is, that people then start to see it as a means of penalising the motorist, and that is where the resentment will come in, because people will feel that these parking initiatives – the high parking tickets and things like that – are actually there simply to gain revenue for the Council. That is how people will view it, because they're not being given a sensible alternative.

*Indeed, it seems to me there's an awful lot of muddled thinking that goes on behind that.*

I can understand what they were trying to do, and I think the people behind it did the best they could. I don't think they bargained for the Bucks County Council turning round on them and saying, "No, you're not going to have this public transport extra money." I think that really did upset their applegart.

*Now, the High Street is pedestrianised, and there are all sorts of views about whether the granite balls were a good way of spending the money, and the Whirligig, but you have another reservation that I hadn't really thought about before.*

Yes, I feel that the High Street in High Wycombe was its major characteristic: it had this very very characteristic long wide High Street. Now, if you go to the end of the High Street, that has been completely broken up and obliterated, and I think that that was a major characteristic of Wycombe which is gone. I do not care for the granite balls, I do not care for bollards and I think that it looks absurd. I've no objection to the pedestrianisation of the High Street, I think it's a very good thing, it's just that my way of dealing with it would have just been to put No Entry to cars at either end of it. And I think the rising bollards are just so funny!

*Right, we've just had the Council elections. Do you think that's going to make any difference to the Society, what we have to do?*

I don't believe so, I think we have been fairly apolitical. I think that we'll have to strike up relationships with our various councillors again, but I don't think that would really be a problem for anybody. I think that they do listen to us, whether they be Lib Dems, Labour or Conservative. I don't really think that it'll make that much difference to us as a Society.

*It's true that for a Society with our aims, the left-right split in politics is not actually at the centre of what we're doing, is it? Everyone's an environmentalist to one degree or another. The biggest difference comes in things like personal freedom where you may have seen that Kathleen Peatey our vice-president said "it's a diabolical infringement of liberty" – what the Government was proposing.*

Yes, that was on congestion charging, and making firms pay for employees' parking spaces.

*OK, it's a pleasure to have you as Hon Secretary. Do you know how long you're going to continue this job you've just taken on?*

If somebody, I don't know, early retired, fancies the job, I'll be quite happy to stand down. But as long as the Society feels it wants me, I'll be happy to do it.

*Well, that's very gracious. Let's hope that you're sufficiently successful in activating the Society that there's actually competition for committee posts in future. Thank you very much. ■*

## Pann Mill Restoration

DURING the past year the Pann Mill volunteers have been very productive and we feel we are now in sight of our goal to mill flour.

The seven months until National Mills Day 2000 will be continuous hard work for us, as we have established our priorities for linking up the grinding mechanism for our demonstration in May.

A second flight of stairs has been fixed leading to the stone floor, which, given our very limited space to move around, is essential. Millers can use one flight whilst visitors use the other.

New cogs are being shaped to fit the stone nut whilst the large old cogs in the pit wheel have been cleaned and repaired.

A beautiful new tun (wooden casing for the revolving millstones) made from pitch pine was delivered on July 9th. Catherine Kraft has donated this as a memorial to her late father Walter Kraft who was legal adviser to the High Wycombe Society and a great friend of our founder Jack Scruton.

Part of a stone crane was given to us by Ford End Mill at Pitstone and we have adapted it to fit ours, with help from Jarvis Engineering. We will need the crane to lift and turn our stones when they are worn and need 'dressing' again.

Margaret Simmons is our resident gardener who works tirelessly to keep the grounds lovely at every season, and Sheila Bristow has joined us to make a video of the ongoing restoration work.

Last month we took time out after a morning session to accept an invitation from Roger and Judy File for drinks at Bassetsbury Mill. The old mill is separated into four homes now and a pleasant hour was spent on the mill island looking at their newly refurbished wheel and bridges, and getting to know the neighbours. It was a welcome opportunity to learn more about another Wye mill.

In 1993 and 1995 two archaeological digs were carried out at Pann Mill, the results of which have been published this year and are available to be read in High Wycombe Library. Briefly, the contents include the Resistivity Survey, the Site, excavations, dating, historical notes, the finds (11 pages) and the deposition of finds. I can supply a copy to interested parties (01494 523968).

### Can you help?

Pann Mill was originally a three-storey building with an attractive Georgian house attached. It was demolished in 1969 since when the High

Wycombe Society has worked towards restoring the water wheel and gears, together with renewing the remaining mechanism.

None of us has restored a mill before but we are a friendly bunch of five regulars who meet each fortnight on a Sunday morning for a spot of carpentry, light engineering, painting etc.

We would so much like another pair of hands on site, where there are jobs to suit all. You would be most welcome, whether for an hour or four, to help us meet our goal of grinding corn in Millennium Year.

If you care to call me on 01494 523968, I will be very pleased to tell you more about our project.

*Myra King*

### A Pleasant Sunday Afternoon

The weather for our visit to Roger and Frances Wilding's Wildlife Garden on 25 July was really perfect. It's really a kind of 3 in 1 garden because behind the lovely flowers and shrubs of the front garden lies what a well loved English garden usually does look like – lawn, pool, flower beds rich with colour, perennials, shrubs and trees giving welcome shade, but it was a special joy to see all this knowing that beyond lay part 3 – the wildlife part, cool, mysterious and even secret. This is where birds and bees and animals and butterflies are encouraged and where they must indeed feel much at home: a wealth of grasses, wild flowers, sweet smelling herbs and log piles and compost bins, shady and silent and wonderfully undisturbed growth.

Members of the High Wycombe Society were happy to explore this haven along narrow paths and tracks and an added delight was the display of photographs and sheets of information so that we could see what a wildlife garden was all about, and we were much helped by Roger and Frances who were on hand to explain and inform.

The Crafts display was indoors and the linens and pictures and basket work and ornaments were all for sale as were many plant cuttings. Tea was the one thing needed after all this and this too was provided!

About 20 members and friends took advantage of the invitation and we owe the Wildings many thanks for their kindness – and all sales money came to the High Wycombe Society.

*Olivia Price*

## Heritage Group

### Join us!

The aim of the Heritage Group is "to conserve, preserve, record and protect our heritage". The Group's past work has included recording the town's listed buildings, taking note of their interesting features, mounting exhibitions, liaising with the Council on all matters regarding heritage, and attending the Town Forum (see below). Pauline Cauvain, leader of the group, advises that there is an endless list of things that could be done by the group if they had people with the right interest and ability.

To offer your services to the Heritage Group, call Pauline on 01494 529224.

## Town Forum

The Heritage Group represents the High Wycombe Society at the quarterly meetings of the town forum, which was set up by Wycombe District Council some 5 years ago to promote and discuss projects and ideas for the benefit of the town centre, covering an area from the Oxford Road and Frogmoor down to Pann Mill.

The forum is made up of representatives from many different groups within the town, such as the market traders, Pensioners' Voice, Shop Mobility, Youth Action, Desborough Road Traders and many more together with various members of the Council. Topics discussed range from the Western Sector development and pedestrianisation to CCTV, entertainment, traffic, the preservation of our heritage etc.

The problems facing any council in managing a town are vast, and it is only when you become involved that you realise its scale. Many of us who feel strongly about proposals that the Council plans to carry out too often just say to themselves, "What can I do?" Well, there is a lot you can do. Write to the Council, or to us so that we can take the problem up. We cannot always change things, but we like to try.

**Pauline Cauvain**

## Quarterly Meeting

### Pub Signs

On 19 May, the Society was treated to a most interesting talk on pubs, given by David Cohen.

Pub signs were born as a result of Ale Houses in Britain having no individuality. The signs are peculiar to this country.

Mr Cohen gave us examples under various headings. The pursuit and arrest of criminals gave us *The Copper* in Bermondsey, meaning to 'cop' or catch; also the *Wig and Pen* in Truro. For trade and commerce we were told of the *Carpenter's Arms* at Windsor, the (Tin) *Miners' Arms* in Cornwall and *The Pineapple* in Bristol Docks.

Under the heading 'Religion', there were the *Adam and Eve* and the *Cross Keys* for St Peter.

Regarding the representation of our own culture, we have *The Hit or Miss* for Darts, *The Chequers*, *The Bowling Green*, and *Never Say Die* commemorating Lester Piggott's Derby win of 1954. Will Shakespeare of *The Pen and Parchment* and the *Sir Henry Irving* both show our love of the Theatre. Also *The Punch and Judy* of 1662 – apparently 300 years on, fifty puppeteers attended a service there.

There are many historical names – among them Queen Victoria who was shown on a Penny Black stamp. One pub, *The Martyrs' Inn*, commemorates the Tolpuddle Martyrs after they were pardoned and returned home.

Some funny and unclassified signs appeared, such as the *Slug and Lettuce*, and the *Old Bull and Bush* on Hampstead Heath.

Perhaps I have erred on the side of giving the names, rather than the design, size and age of the Inns, but I was particularly interested and impressed with this aspect of the whole subject.

Mr Cohen gave us an enthralling evening which I am sure sparked off an interest in the subject in many of us.

**Elizabeth Rolfe**

### *More Scraps*

\* We have difficulty keeping up with the saga of the Abercromby Avenue cycleway (which, if I read it correctly, will go down the *middle* of the road!!). At a meeting of the joint Wycombe Transport Strategy Panel on 6 July (grievously disrupted by Abercromby residents), the County Council rejected any reopening of this issue. But a WDC Press Release issued on 19 July said that WDC Councillors Oliver and Cartwright would ask BCC for yet another review.

\* Although the County Council withdrew its proposals for traffic management in the Benjamin Road/Priory Road area following a poll of residents, the CC's aspirations live on! Papers for the WTSP revealed there will be consultation after the summer holidays on plans for a revised scheme.

\* The Council have declined to add anything to what they told us in the spring about the cricket pitch plans – how access is to be prevented during matches, and whether Town Green status would change anything.

## *"In My Opinion..."*

### **Local Democracy - Visual Experiences!**

I am writing in support of Councillor Mrs Frances Alexander's letter published in the Summer Newsletter. I write as somebody who is wholly supportive of the High Wycombe Society and am much encouraged by the tenacity and interest shown by its members. Councillor Mrs Alexander's letter, however, made the valid point that the views expressed by the Executive Committee and the individual groups do not necessarily represent the views of the wider membership. For example I consider that the high quality existing buildings should be preserved and enhanced. However, I also feel that new buildings should be designed by gifted radical Architects. One person's clash may be to others a stimulating visual experience. I remember being involved in the refurbishment of an existing building with a new modern front addition which was opposed by the High Wycombe Society. Whether the membership at large were canvassed for their views is debatable. The building went on to be built and was subsequently awarded the Malcolm Dean Design Award.

**Chris Shirley**

### **Local Democracy – a Reply**

In the Spring Newsletter, Chris Woodman praised "Local Democracy in Action" but asked, *inter alia*, how it could be that the Holywell Mead cricket pitch proposal had almost passed the public eye unnoticed. He also commented on the lack of continuing consultation by Wycombe District Council on the detailed plans for the Western Sector Development.

In the Summer Newsletter, Frances Alexander, a long standing supporter and member of the Society and now a former District Councillor, defended the District Council's record, asserting that it was up to concerned citizens to read every Committee meeting agenda to check for controversial items.

Chris Woodman put this suggestion to the test with the Council and our Hon. Sec. is now routinely receiving documents for meetings of the Council and its main committees. As it happens, these are usually issued only a couple of days in advance of the relevant meeting, but it is up to us to deal with that little problem.

But Frances also made a more pointed criticism of the way the Society is run: she contended that the Executive Committee (the "EC") and the Society's individual groups "do their own thing, without reference to the whole membership".

Factually, we can only agree with that statement. The Executive Committee is exactly that – an executive committee which, under our constitution, "shall be responsible for running the affairs of the Society, and may take decisions on its behalf", in accordance with the "Objects" of the Society.

The one sure way for any keen member to join this decision-making process is to stand as a candidate at the AGM, or to be co-opted between AGMs where a vacancy exists. That is the position today: we do have vacancies!

A successful candidate soon finds that the EC's scope to routinely consult the wider membership is extremely limited. The important issues to be confronted, particularly where local and national government bodies are concerned, usually come with tight deadlines. EC discussion, decision making and responsive action are all conducted within a timescale that, regrettably, inhibits a wider consultation. This was reviewed at our recent Planning Workshop (*reported on p.2 – Ed.*) and we could find no satisfactory way around this. Any rigid or prescribed system of mandatory consultation with the Society membership would inevitably inhibit or delay the planning and action to deal with the issues.

Much the same goes for the groups. They have considerable freedom of expression, but their work is closely monitored by the EC which receives oral reports from each group at its monthly meetings. And just as the EC is currently below its full strength, so all the individual groups are now seeking active members.

So the EC believes that the right course is for members with firm views to volunteer for EC involvement, or join the group that provokes an interest. But under our constitution, there is another possibility: any individual member can assert his or her principles by enlisting the support of 24 other members to require the EC to call a Special General Meeting.

We are a democratic Society: the EC will support any member with a valid cause, compatible with our aims and constitution, particularly if he or she is prepared to oversee or mastermind any action that the EC is convinced is necessary.

Howzat for democracy?

**Roger Lawson**

### **Our Villages**

I have just been reading the latest newsletter and came across Denise Lindsay's letter regarding Sands School.

I feel I must write to air my views. I have lived in Sands on and off for many years. I moved away for a few years but came back again because of the small family atmosphere of the area. In my very young days I can just remember the greengrocer's, "Slade and Ford", the local butcher's, "Stocktons", the local newsagent's "Mines" and the Post Office, the hardware shop, "Carr Bros", and the list goes on, but most of all, the little school where myself and my little brother went to school, where our mother went to school as well and many of our friends. I know the word is called Progress, but do they ever think what they are doing to our villages? I use as many of the local shops as possible now, but sadly have to go to Asda for the big shop. How nice it would be to put the weekly shopping order into Fords on a Thursday and have it delivered on a Friday evening. I for one would be only too grateful to pay a little extra for the personal service, but today you are just a number on the back of a supermarket saver card. I feel that if and when the school closes Sands will have lost the last bit of identity for the area. The school was always a landmark everybody knew. What monument are we going to use now when giving people directions. The Total garage? I don't think so!

**Mario Lindsay**

### Charity Market Stall, 10 July

What is hidden in your attic? Is your house cluttered? – Give to our market stall, where eager buyers swarm in with delight to snap up the treasures we have loved and fondly parted with. This is an experience of detached intimacy. We had quality goods, souvenirs, unwanted presents, loved but unused or redundant belongings, kitsch, each piece an aspect of Anon's life, discarded and welcomed to another's home. Thanks to the excellent organisation of Olivia, Ann and Annie, and our salespeople, it is an enjoyable event. The early traders – one reading his newspaper while waiting at 7.00am, were friendly, fair and helpful. In the past I have been suspicious of them, and guarded, but I recognise them now from previous years and find my mistrust misplaced. They accept our price or reject the object – bargaining isn't their line. Buyers are varied – it becomes a game, resulting in all players feeling they have done well. Certainly, the Society has, having raised £140 for our needy funds. This is an annual event – do you really want that toast rack, or the Ming vase? We shall be collecting again next year – skeletons excepted.

**Barbara Rippington**

### A Very Select Gathering?

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I would like to record thanks to the organisers of the Coffee Morning on Saturday 12th June at the Friends' Meeting House.

Special thanks are due to Barbara Rippington for being in charge on the day, to Gladys Pearson and her band of caterers and to Olivia Price and Ann Simone for organising the Bring and Buy. We also thank Julia Wassall for her usual warm welcome and help – we always feel very much at home in her 'house'.

Much effort is involved in these events and, although I am sure all who attended enjoyed the occasion, the low attendance raises the question of whether members do wish to socialise in this way.

**Roger Lawson, Chairman**

### *Bring: earrings... Buy: marble slab!*

I certainly left the coffee morning with a heavy load. As an inveterate hoarder, I had made a great effort to find items for the bring and buy. I was delighted to see that the system worked when I spotted Barbara Rippington, smartly dressed in elegant green suit and matching earrings (mine!).

As Membership Secretary, I enjoy social opportunities to meet members face to face. I am very familiar with the backs of heads, due to the membership table being at the back of the room at meetings.

Coffee, home-made cakes, friendly chat and the chance to browse through the bric-a-brac appealed to me, but not to more than 20 or 30 others. Maybe members do not wish to support coffee mornings. If not, please let us know what social events you *would* like organised. You may phone me, at any reasonable time, with ideas (01494 527978). We will consider your suggestions in the Membership and Publicity Group who organise the programme.

The event raised £64.53, a welcome addition to the funds. We are most grateful to all who donated the cakes. However, money is not the only consideration. If members do not get to know one another, we will never discover the strengths and talents in our membership.

Thank you, Barbara, for persuading me to buy the marble slab, to save it being carried anywhere else! I hope my pastry will improve!

**Annie Woodward**

## Notices

### Obituaries

Sadly the 4th of August saw the deaths of two members, Mrs Mabel Fisher and Mrs Kathleen Wiffen, both from loyal, long-standing High Wycombe Society families.

We express our sincere condolences to these families and their friends.

### Cholesterol – the Event

Olivia Price not only writes well about other people's gardens (p.8) but she has a glorious one herself. On 17 July, as usual, she made it available for the biennial cream tea for our new members. The surroundings were enchanting, the cream scones – which she made herself – were wicked, and a good number of lucky new members, as well as most of the Executive Committee, had a thoroughly scrumptious time. Thank you, Olivia!!!

Many thanks for your contributions, and apologies to those whose work has had to be held over to the next issue (in one case, for the second time) for lack of space. There's not even been room for pictures, artistic endeavours and general light relief this month. Material for the Winter issue should reach the Editor at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 November**, please.

*Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)*

### Mabel Fisher

Mrs Fisher was the sister of Charles Rush, Myra King's father, and many will remember her as Myra's Aunt Mabel. (Charles Rush was a Borough Councillor in Wycombe's first Labour Council after the war.) Mabel came from London during 1939 and settled in Jubilee Road. With her husband, Tom, she helped to form the High Wycombe branch of Muscular Dystrophy, which celebrated its 40th anniversary this year.

Following her son's death from the disease in the early 1960s, she became warden of the Totteridge Drive OAP Unit. She moved to the Park Street Centre, overlooking the Rye, as warden, when it opened in 1973.

### Kathleen Wiffen

Kathleen joined the High Wycombe Society in 1973 with her late husband, John. They were active members of the Union Baptist Church in Easton Street, being especially remembered for their hospitality. Until recently, Kathleen was involved in her W.I. Poetry Reading Group and will be greatly missed by her friends there. The family has supported the High Wycombe Society for many years. Kathleen's daughter Frances Wilding and her husband Roger continue to do so – we were most grateful to them for allowing us to visit their garden in July. Some years ago it was a real joy to see three generations of the family – Kathleen, her daughter Frances and grand-daughter Fiona, at a High Wycombe Society celebration. Kathleen's grace and inspiring love of nature are continuing in her family.

*Annie Woodward*

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### 1999

Thursday 14 October 7.45pm  
Reggie Goves Centre

Quarterly Meeting: Policing in the Community.  
Robert Beckley, Superintendent & Area Commander,  
Thames Valley Police.

Tuesday 19 October 7.30pm  
30 Wordsworth Road

Planning Group meeting. All welcome but please phone the  
Hon. Sec. beforehand on (01494) 532363.

### 2000

Wednesday 19 January 7.45pm  
Reggie Goves Centre

Quarterly Meeting: Mills and Milling through the Ages.  
Stanley Cauvain, Archaeologist and HW Society member.  
(Sherry, coffee and mince pies to welcome in the New Year.)

Tuesday 13 April 7.30 for 7.45pm  
Reggie Goves Centre

Annual General Meeting and Quarterly Meeting.  
Housing and Green Belt Development. Tony Bosworth,  
housing campaigner for Friends of the Earth.

Wednesday 17 May 7.45pm  
Reggie Goves Centre

Arts Festival talk.  
A Social History of the Furniture Industry. James Rattue,  
Wycombe Local History and Chair Museum.