

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 110

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The Western Sector

IN THE AUTUMN NEWSLETTER, the hon. secretary set out the current position on the proposed Western Sector development. This is a hugely important project for the future of our town. It offers great scope for enhancing High Wycombe's attractiveness as a place to live, to shop and just to enjoy ourselves. At the same time, like all major developments, it has the capacity for going wrong, for being detrimental to civic life, or just not being as good as it might be. Mercifully, there is no prospect of repeating the disaster of the 60s when a huge swathe of old Wycombe was swept away to make room for the Octagon and Abbey Way. There is very little in the area destined for this new development that will be mourned. But we might still find, looking back in 15 years time, that 1998/99 was a time of lost opportunities.

The latest plans were published some weeks ago in the Bucks Free Press. There are many differences compared to scheme selected from the three on which public consultation took place two years ago. John Gore set out a number of points which your Executive Committee felt were unsatisfactory as they stood. The main bus interchange is right at the western end of the development and a long way from the proposed food store. That is no help to pensioners with mobility problems, or who are perhaps just old, who need to come into the town by public transport for their essential provisions. Nor does it help the great majority of people who, we hope, will continue to use the shops in "old Wycombe" – the High Street, Church Street, Castle Street and Frogmoor. There are no plans for active leisure pursuits, or for public meeting rooms, and the housing element is limited to student accommodation.

In this issue, we have a report by the Chairman on a meeting about the proposals between the Society's representatives and those of the District Council. Whilst it is excellent that the meeting took place, we were given no encouragement that there will be further timely discussion with the public before – just possibly? – April/May 1999. Yet the next few months will be when all manner of decisions get "locked in". Furthermore the impression was conveyed that it is now all a matter for the developers, MAB, rather than the elected Council. That cannot be right. Of course, nowadays, schemes like this must harness private capital if they are to take place at all. But that does not mean that the Council has to abdicate its proper role of continuing to influence the plans for the common good.

Your Executive Committee does not pretend that it has all the right answers for the Western Sector. What we need is some genuine public discussion and debate before it is all too late. If *you* feel strongly about this, write to your Councillors, and leave them in no doubt about your views.

Chris Woodman



Registered Charity No. 257897

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

Honorary Secretary, John Gore, 30 Wordsworth Road, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP11 2UR. Tel: (01494) 526671

The Western Sector

Reporting back on what we have learned

A REFERENCE BACK to the Society Autumn Newsletter this year will remind members that John Gore had penned a concise view of our reservations about this development as it has been evolving, and publicised in the local press.

Indeed, John's letter to the Editor of the Bucks Free Press, published prior to the Wycombe Show, and our exhibition on the same subject in the Conservation tent, produced a welcome invitation to meet Councillor Stephen Billingham, chairman of the WDC Policy and Resources Committee, and also Lee Dawson, the WDC Head of Valuation, to discuss this major project.

Accordingly, John Gore, Pauline Cauvain, Frances Presland and the undersigned were able to repeat our concerns specifically relating to the furthestmost siting of the bus interchange, at some walking distance from the basket store.

We considered this store should sensibly be the most conveniently located town grocery outlet for bus passengers, particularly senior citizens, without resorting to shuttle buses. We can only state that our concerns were noted...

It is evident from our discussion that the chosen developer MAB Ltd are guided primarily by commercial viability considerations, and our pleas for more "active leisure" facilities have probably fallen on deaf ears. The domestic dwellings provision is largely centred on student accommodation on the Southern

(Desborough Road) border of the development area. Little prospect for family or affordable housing provision is evident. Councillor Billingham considered that further public consultation should be possible in April/May 1999, when the identity of key retail tenancies should have been established.

This informal meeting did not break new ground, but for our part we were genuinely appreciative of the time given up to us by Cllr Billingham and Mr Dawson to hear our considered representation, which we know from our Wycombe Show survey represents the views of many of the general public.

Roger Lawson
Chairman

Your comments

Regenerating the town...

THE WESTERN SECTOR plan has been designed to boost commercial opportunities in the town, and this a laudable aim. However, perhaps High Wycombe would benefit from a look at one of the deeper issues that affect it, which is the exodus of people who live in the town.

How many of us have heard the phrase, "at night High Wycombe is like a ghost town"? With the exception of the occasional meandering gang, this would appear to be true. With the advent of the Western Sector development, there was an opportunity to encourage a mixed development of shops, leisure facilities and homes, and indeed, in one of the three original plans particular emphasis was placed on providing homes in the area. Now we have plans for

student accommodation. Successful communities are more than just dormitories, and development should serve the full range of human needs and desires, rather than just provide up-market shops. The development requires open spaces, public houses, restaurants and public transport which are *distinctive to the area*.

The heart has been torn out of High Wycombe, and we and those who represent us seem to have lost the will to put it back. Small wonder there seems to be so much apathy amongst the people of High Wycombe. Yes, we can have a Super Shopping Centre but does this replace what we have lost? The town centre has become unpeopled, sterile and lifeless, however many stone balls, bollards and Whirligigs we have (at least the Whirligig provoked a public reaction!)

It is of course, no good placing the blame on anyone for the events of the 1960s, so what can be done to regenerate the feeling of the town belonging to the people of High Wycombe once again?

The Civic Trust, which is a national environment charity, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for people who live in towns, and hopes to encourage people to *want* to live in towns once again. Last year, to mark its 40th anniversary, the Trust began a campaign for National Urban Renaissance. It has fought against the image of urban living comprising traffic congestion, unreliable public transport, ugly new buildings and High Streets destroyed by out-of-town stores, by attempting to highlight the opportunities and identifying and tackling problems. In its report, "Going to Town", which was published in March 1998 in conjunction with the CPRE, it addresses the issues and offers solutions

Wycombe District Council has combined with MAB to produce the Western Sector plan, but perhaps it should have explored other options (which it might yet have the opportunity to do if the compulsory purchase order is denied) and sought other sources of funding, to develop the area for the benefit of the people of High Wycombe, rather than a developer who has no interest in the town beyond how much money can be made from it. Finance can come from many sources, which include the European Union, the National Lottery and of course private enterprise, which can serve their commercial interests and also serve the wider community by backing mixed developments.

There is a great potential for this virtually empty site to be used to attract a new resident population, which would transform the area and once again give High Wycombe a heart instead of a soulless collection of buildings run by those with no interest in the needs or welfare of the town.

It will be an irony indeed if those who have obstructed the Council for apparent commercial gain, end up forcing it into producing a plan which would be far more suitable for the area.

Frances Presland

Reference: Civic Trust and CPRE "Going to Town" March 1998 ISBN 0 946044 74 0.

... and the River

*Softly, the river flows
Unseen by naked eye
Banished to the earth below
A beauty, ne'er to die.*

BEING in a valley, High Wycombe is blessed with two streams. One of these ran into the town along the Hughenden Road and can still be seen today in a corner of Safeway's car park. In the past an offshoot of the Hughenden stream surfaced in front of the old theatre but today it is underground.

The other stream is the River Wye. Starting from West Wycombe it ran between the houses to the west of the town as far as Brook Street and thereafter wound its way in front of the houses along the Oxford Road, passing through Newlands to emerge in St Mary St. This stream was put underground when areas of housing in the Oxford Road and Newlands were redeveloped as we see them today. At the time there were many protests against the scheme but to no avail.

Now, with new development of the Western Sector looming once more, the Council is looking to enhance the latest scheme by resurrecting the stream, or creating an artificial one.

A number of suggestions for including stretches of open water have been made. One is to locate it in the centre of the proposed new complex and create a mini-garden. Another is to 'bring the stream back home' and open stretches at either end of the site facing the Oxford Road, while the latest idea is to have an open stretch in the middle of an enlarged roundabout in Abbey Way and allow people to cross this roundabout via a bridge.

What are your views on these proposed ideas? Do you think that it is a good idea to bring stretches of the river into the open again? And where would you like to see them? Would you prefer an artificial watercourse?

Please send any views to the Wycombe District Council, or to the hon. Secretary (address on page 1) or the Editor.

Please don't ignore this chance to help create a better High Wycombe. We need your views.

Heritage Group

STOP PRESS: The Town Mayor's calendar for 1999, with 12 views of Wycombe, is now available, price £5.00, from the Reception desk in the Council Offices, and from the Wycombe Information Centre, St Paul's Row.

Can you tell your Corinthian from your Ionic?

AT 2.10PM on Sunday 13 September, we three guides, Denise Lindsay, Annie Woodward and your reporter, were standing outside the Parish Church on our own wondering if anyone would be joining us on the Heritage Trail. Then, almost instantaneously, a dozen people arrived from all directions, including Thomas, aged 6¾, and his father with Thomas's younger brother on his shoulders.

Even in the church as we looked at the Shelburne Memorial, Thomas displayed an uncanny knowledge of High Wycombe's history and heritage. Then, in the High Street, he told us that the newly installed Whirligig represented the masks of Tragedy and Comedy. He also recognised William Shakespeare's face on the railings by the river opposite the Swan Theatre; and he knew that the poem carved into the paving stones in the newly re-landscaped garden by the Queen Victoria Road Bridge was a memorial to the man who saved The Rye (our own Jack Scruton, of course!).

Our amazement at Thomas's knowledge grew, but it really peaked in Easton Street when we heard him ask his father if the columns on the façade of Union Baptist Church were Corinthian or Ionic in style! I'm glad he didn't ask me! (They are, I



Then stand on one of the stones - cover one eye and see what it was like before it was improved!

find, on looking up the book, of the Ionic type.) It just shows how much you can learn by joining the Heritage Trail! The remainder of the tour past the ruins of St John's Hospital, to Pann Mill and back across The Rye to Wycombe Abbey was relatively uneventful.

Will Thomas grow up to persuade his contemporaries to share his interest in our heritage and the environment? We certainly hope so, and meanwhile we must seek to recruit more younger people to become members of our Society.

John Gore

Copies of the Heritage Trail leaflet, published by Wycombe District Council and prepared with the assistance of the Society, are available from the Tourist Information Centre and at Society events price 50p each.

Letters

The little garden which has recently been developed opposite the Police Station is a little gem although not at its best this autumn weather. In a recent copy of Community News (9 July 1998 p.6) it is referred to as River Park though there is no reference as to how it got its name and in my opinion this is a sort of "no name" for a place which is rather special and in any case is not really a park at all. Could members suggest something better to WDC?

Olivia Price

Editor's note: some time ago, members of the Executive Committee consulted officers of the Council about the possibility of a memorial to Jack Scruton MBE and were advised that these gardens would provide a very suitable opportunity. We had hoped that it might be called the Jack Scruton Garden, but after a good

deal of to-ing and fro-ing, we were advised that the Council does not name its open spaces and recreational areas after people! (Streets are a different matter, of course!) It was agreed, however, that a plaque should be placed prominently in the garden to record that the artwork is a tribute to Jack Scruton. (More about this in the next issue.) Your Executive Committee believes this is a worthy recognition of everything that Jack did for our town, and we are delighted that this has been agreed. But perhaps "River Park" does lack something!

Go on - have another!



The Society's meeting on 20 January, with a talk by Barbara Hurman (see back page), will also be our festive season meeting: a glass of sherry as you arrive, and a mince pie with your coffee. *Do come!*

Disappearing Pubs

HIGH WYCOMBE continues to lose public houses at a steady rate. Latest to fall victim has been the Saracen's Head in Green Street, which finally closed its doors on October 6th. This most grand of High Wycombe's Victorian pubs looks set to be turned into accommodation for students. There was an inn on the High Street called the 'Saracynhede' as long ago as 1418, but the modern version is only recorded in trade directories from the 1840s onwards. At that time the Saracen's Head was in Frogmoor; in the 1890s it moved out of the town centre to what was then a fast-expanding working-class district on the west side of the town, with a ready-made market. In recent years the Saracen's Head was well-used by the local Afro-Caribbean community, and indeed the sign was changed to give the 'Saracen' a more African appearance.



their ability to become quasi-restaurants or night-clubs; in older urban areas there is simply no need for so many drinking places (the Saracen's Head had the Half-Moon in Dashwood Avenue and the Queen in Victoria Street only a few hundred yards away). Only days ago a planning application to convert the Skinner's Arms in Bowerdean Road (formerly the Morning Star) into housing was received by the Council, so this pub may be the next casualty.

Museum staff will keep an eye on the sign from the Saracen's Head: we may be able to rescue it as we did the old Three Tuns sign a few years ago. Hopefully the new use of this site will respect the important and elaborate building of the pub rather than pull it down.

*James Rattue
Assistant Museums Officer
Wycombe Museum*

The closure of pubs seems likely to go on. Many are thriving, but this seems to depend on

Update from the Groups – Membership and Publicity

IT WAS the turn of the Membership & Publicity Group to give a brief review of their activities to the Quarterly Meeting on 20th October.

Ann Simone said that the Executive was the real "power house", but her Group often made suggestions, and reminders, which were reflected in the activities of the Society.

On Membership - they hoped to attract more members, in order to give strength to the aims of the Society. Annie Woodward, Membership Secretary, looked after the records, including subscriptions. Barbara Rippington, Ann was glad to say, continued her work as Programme Secretary. Although not always able to attend meetings, she did the donkey work following the Group's discussions on subjects and speakers for our regular meetings.

On Publicity, the Group was not complacent, and knew they could benefit from new thoughts - what should they publicise? how? where? One recent innovation had been the purchase of a Polaroid camera, so that photos could be sent immediately to the Press, with the write-ups about our activities. The Group has also started a Scrapbook, to contain cuttings from the Press, and details of our

activities, starting with the celebration of our 30 years as a Society. This would be on show at all meetings.

Small souvenir items were on sale at all events (and - she suggested - a small postable item might be an interesting gift at Christmas to show the High Wycombe connections!)

Ann highlighted activities over the past year, including a donation by a member of an oil painting of a dog; efforts had been made to sell this, and if anyone is interested, or could suggest how best to benefit from this kind donation, she would be pleased to hear.

Ann asked for suggestions for the future: not only subjects, organisations or speakers for the quarterly meetings, but what other activities might be of interest - should we again look into organising a coach outing, or a pub-walk? How about a keep-fit class; a collection of members' favourite recipes? Ann concluded that although not a recruitment campaign, she wondered whether anyone had been inspired enough to consider joining the Membership & Publicity Group! She would be delighted to hear from anyone interested. (01494 448773 - Ed.)

Wycombe Museum: New Displays

WE HAVE recently heard from the Museum that the final stage of the refurbishment which started in 1995-6 is scheduled for completion in February 1999. The new displays will include subjects such as:

- Items from the Museum's art collection;
- 'Your Case' – an area for community groups to mount small displays;
- Wycombe's Fire Service;
- Lacemaking;
- The Paper Industry;
- 'Coming and Going' – immigration into Wycombe;
- Market centres in the District;
- 'Coming to Town' – the role of towns as centres for trade, services and entertainment;
- Routes, Roads and Railways;
- Lost Landscapes – how development affects buildings and communities; and
- The Red Lion and High Wycombe High Street.

To give the 'Coming and Going' display a human touch, the Museum would like to hear from families who have moved into Wycombe this century and have lived here for at least three generations. They would particularly like to pick four families whose origins are Welsh, Polish, Asian and West Indian or African.

If you are able to help or have comments or items for display, please contact James Rattue on 01494 421896.

Planning: Deposit Draft Local Plan

READERS of the November 1998 *Community News* from Wycombe District Council will already know that the Deposit Draft Local Plan is about to be published and that there is to be an eight-week consultation period from 4 December 1998 until 29 January 1999. Any comments you may have must be submitted during this period using special 'representations forms' available from Council Offices and libraries, so if you feel strongly about any of the plan policies, do take action in good time. This plan will guide development decisions on land use up to the year 2011.

Controversial points in the plan will include some of the 11 housing sites, the two business parks and the four park-and-ride sites.

AXA Equity & Law have jumped the gun by putting in an outline planning application for redeveloping their site at St John's, Hazlemere for low-density housing, whereas the Council want it to be scheduled as a business park. The Society has submitted comments. We tend to agree with the applicant that the site is not ideal transport-wise for a business park, but, if the site is to be used for housing, we cannot go along with the thought of low-density housing. This would be a wasteful use of land. We already have a good complement of large houses in the district, so, to ease pressure on greenfield sites, we would favour a medium-density solution, whilst respecting the wooded nature of the site, of course.

ANTAS

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY is proud to have been one of the founder members of the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS), which was formed in 1994. ANTAS brings together civic and amenity societies registered with the Civic Trust, as we are, in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire – currently some 14 societies are members. The objectives of the Association are to provide a forum for discussion of matters of common interest, to assist member societies in their dealings with local government, and to liaise with and make representations to Government departments and other appropriate bodies on behalf of member societies. In particular, ANTAS' policy is to support member societies, if thought appropriate, in opposing proposals likely to adversely affect the Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, listed buildings etc, after due examination of the case and where a general point of principle is concerned.

A recent case in point was the decision by Hertfordshire County Council to go ahead with plans for up to 10,000 houses in the Green Belt west of Stevenage. Unfortunately, on this occasion, in spite of both a written submission to the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review and oral evidence to the Examination-in-Public by Anthony Wethered, ANTAS Secretary and a member of the Marlow Society, together with other powerful opposition, the Government has decided not to intervene and plans to allocate Green Belt land for the 10,000 houses have been confirmed.

Notwithstanding this setback, which we hope will not be used as a precedent, we feel sure that close collaboration between amenity societies in the North Thames area within ANTAS will yield overall benefits for us all.

John Gore

Country Matters

THE QUARTERLY MEETING on October 20th featured Richard Pushman, who spoke to us about issues concerning the countryside. Mr. Pushman is a member of Wycombe District Council for Naphill and Bradenham, as well as Hughenden Parish Council. He is also Chairman of both the Bucks Best Kept Village association and Bucks Community Action. The main theme of the talk was the latest Government Policy on the Countryside. The Rural Development Commission is concerned with providing housing, facilities and shops for those who live in rural areas – 1 in 5 of the population, in fact.

Problems associated with country life are a poorer range of local jobs, low wages, a lack of public transport, and the loss of village shops.

Also, there are 80,000 new homes per year being built on greenfield sites, which is equivalent to a town the size of High Wycombe. And I think we have all noticed that the standardisation of building design has led to loss of local character, as the vernacular seems to be sadly disappearing.

However, all is not lost, for some village shops have made a comeback, and the growth of tourism may provide employment in the future.

Mr. Pushman, who is a member of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, then showed us some slides, some of them of favourite local scenes.

There were several questions from the floor, and somehow we seemed to find ourselves discussing the apparently unstoppable growth of supermarkets, a trend which damages both town and country.

A vote of thanks was offered by John Mumford.

Denise Lindsay

A Mill for the Mill-ennium!

IT MAY SEEM to the casual observer that Pann Mill has been lying dormant for some years. On the contrary: much heavy groundwork has been completed over fourteen years to arrive at the present stage.

To summarise our achievements, we have erected a workshop, stripped, repaired and painted the waterwheel, and repaired damage by vandals. General maintenance has been

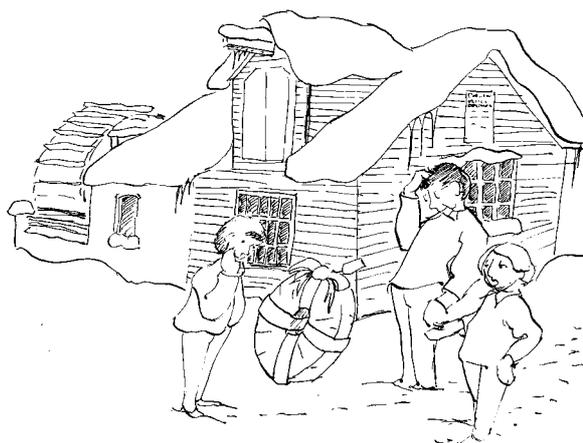
continuous and two archaeological digs have been undertaken on the site.

Inside the mill we have erected a hurst frame, coupled up new and existing machinery, together with the dressing and lifting of four millstones to the first floor. The carpentry work is ongoing, erecting safety railing and extending the stone floor as necessary.

It seems that we are now close to milling at Pann Mill for the first time for thirty years. With this in mind we have decided to produce flour in Millennium year and believe that our aims are easily achieved in eighteen months.

We intend to pull out all the stops to reveal the true potential of this mill, the last one that can be made to work on the nine mile stretch of river from High Wycombe to the Thames at Hedsor. We need all the help we can get and if you think you can help in any way, please contact me.

Myra King
Project Leader



* * *

High Wycombe Quakers 1650-today

The High Wycombe Quakers have asked for our members' support in connection with a permanent exhibition that they plan to set up in their meeting house at 25 London Rd, to be seen by anyone attending services and events there. They would be very interested to receive any written, visual or oral material relating to the Meeting Houses first in the old Crendon Lane, then in Corporation St. and now London Rd; the burial ground in Saffron Platt; to individual Quakers; or any related matter.

Please reply direct to Cally Trench at 18 Priory Ave, HP13 6SH.

High Wycombe–Bourne End Line Presentation

IT WAS opened by the great Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1854 and closed as part of the notorious Beeching cuts in 1970. Now, in 1998, the High Wycombe Society Transport Group firmly believe that the High Wycombe–Bourne End railway line (HBL) should be reopened to provide a frequent, economic and environmentally-friendly transport service between High Wycombe and Bourne End stations and the settlements along the route. To promote the scheme, the Group put on a presentation, backed by an exhibition, on 7 October in the Council Chamber, thanks to the generosity of Wycombe District Council. In the audience were representatives of rail and bus companies, the Rail franchising office, rail passenger interests, and County and District Councillors and officials.

Society Chairman, Roger Lawson, introduced the speakers, commencing with Elsa Woodward, leader of the Transport Group, who said that the High Wycombe–Bourne End line (HBL), operated as a light tramway system, offered a unique opportunity to reduce local road traffic (as required by the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997), and to reduce local carbon dioxide emissions (as required by the 1997 Kyoto Conference). The Parry People Mover (PPM), which the Group considered the best proposition for the route, took a minimum amount of land, allowed flexibility of route, produced zero local pollution and low noise and was affordable. Once in service and carrying several thousand passengers per day, it would make a major contribution to reducing congestion on local roads. The line would also facilitate access to the Chiltern Line with its connections to London and Birmingham, and to the Thames Trains and Great Western networks via Maidenhead.

The next speaker, John Parry of Parry People Mover Ltd, gave some details of his firm's vehicle. The basic vehicle carries 30 passengers, and two of these can be coupled together. It is driven by a flywheel, which is energised from a safe 70 volt DC electricity supply once every 2–3 kilometres. Thus the heavy costs of continuous electrification are avoided. Its installation cost per kilometre is, in fact, less than a quarter of that of the more conventional tramway system as running in Manchester. Energy costs per kilometre of running steel wheels on a steel track were significantly lower than for an equivalent road vehicle.

Civil engineer Christopher Wallis of the Transport Group described the economical bridge sections he had designed for use over both the London Road and Gordon Road crossings to take cycle and pedestrian ways as well as the rail track. He had surveyed the whole length of the track and was convinced it could be restored economically.

Signal engineer Colin Harrison, also of the Transport Group, described his design work to ensure safe running. Some level crossings would

be necessary, but road-type traffic lights could be used. Thanks to Brunel's broad-gauge design, the track was wide enough to take a two-way PPM plus pedestrian and cycle ways. Some single-track sections and some tight radii would be needed (for example, at diversions from the original track due to subsequent building), but these would not impede running. He envisaged a ten-minute service with an 18-minute run time between the termini and a maximum speed of 50 km/h (30mph).

Peter Cannon, an accountant with the Transport Group, considered the financial viability of the proposal and provided delegates with an estimate of capital costs and a projected profit and loss account. Assuming there were 2500 passenger journeys of four kilometres per day with fares set at 20p/km per adult, which is cheaper than current bus fares, a modest profit of £17,000 per year should be made, and the system could cope with up to 6000 journeys per day. He thought this should be attractive to both bus and rail companies as a profitable add-on activity. The HBL should also be attractive to residents along the route as more convenient for getting into town, particularly the rail station, without the problem of car parking. The reduction in pollution and congestion due to taking some 1500 cars per day off the road was a bonus.

A lively discussion followed with several councillors expressing the view that the HBL proposal was promising and should be worked up by transport companies and council officials to check its viability and traffic-carrying capability.

Since the presentation took place, sets of documents have been sent out to interested parties, and it is to be hoped that one or more organisations will follow up the idea. As an observer at the presentation, I should like to say how impressed I was at the work put into the proposal by the Transport Group. It would be disappointing to say the least if it does not bear some fruit.

John Gore

"In My Opinion..."

Decisions, Decisions

I WONDER how many members have ever read our Society's Constitution. Half a dozen, maybe? Well I have! What sparked me into asking our hon. sec for a copy was thinking about the lively correspondence in these columns a few months ago when some bold soul asked how far our chairman was entitled to state views in the name of the society. (Actually, Roger Lawson had gone out of his way to say that the views expressed were personal ones, but that's not the point.) And I wondered, what arrangements *does* the Society have for formally adopting policies?

This is no idle matter - whereas we may all be keen for the betterment of our town, it does not follow that we all agree on how that should be achieved. The whole transport area may well encompass a wide spread of views among the Society's membership on things such as pedestrianisation, the light railway project, park-and-ride, the Central Railway project and "positive parking". And then there is the whole business of shopping, supermarkets and the Western Sector development. We may not want to be like a political party - indeed our charitable status would be at risk if we campaigned politically - but isn't there a great deal of scope for us to develop our thinking together by debating, maybe even voting on, these matters?

So, where better to start than the Constitution? And, to be frank, I was surprised! The "Objects" of the Society are to promote and encourage the following by charitable means but not otherwise:

- (1) the protection and enhancement of the built and natural heritage of High Wycombe,
- (2) the adoption of high standards of architecture and town planning in the locality,
- (3) the improvement of the environment and the amenities enjoyed by local people, and
- (4) the stimulation of public interest in and care for the history and character of the town and its surroundings.

The document goes on to say that these objectives shall be pursued by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications and the promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.

And that's about it! Plenty about membership, and subscriptions, and electing officers, and borrowing money and things like that, but the only voting arrangements referred to are to elect the officers and members of the Executive Committee, and to amend the constitution. The nearest our Constitution gets to actually *deciding* something is a sentence saying:

"The Executive Committee shall be responsible for running the affairs of the Society, and may take decisions on its behalf."

Now, when you think about it, that can hardly be otherwise. The Society meets just four times a year, and important matters arise much more frequently than that. The EC *must* have executive authority if it is to react speedily and decisively when things come up. The EC is, of course, elected every year. The articles written by the officers and members of the EC in this Newsletter do a pretty good job of letting members know what is being done in their name.

Nonetheless (and this is definitely a personal opinion) I believe we could be doing much more. We don't in practice discuss in an organised way even the big issues like pedestrianisation and parking. We do less than we might to help the EC represent the membership. Debate can be *informative* because it can smoke out the arguments and show where people's interests lie, it would enable the Society's officers to *campaign* (charitably, of course) even more strongly and confidently on your behalf, and it would *liven up* the Society. It might even help attract more members.

I believe that this Newsletter could play an important part in this process, and that's why I asked in the last issue for more written contributions, and more controversial contributions. But we really ought to *talk* about these things too. Our Constitution may not say anything about resolutions, but is there really any reason why we shouldn't table and debate resolutions, whether at our Annual General Meetings, or our Quarterly Meetings? Votes could not, strictly speaking, bind the Executive Committee; but what EC is going to ignore the membership, knowing that it is due for re-election within 12 months?

Do you agree? If so, then what we really need is one or two people to come forward with strongly held views on real issues that affect the future of our town. The next Newsletter is the last before the AGM on 13 April 1999 and, as usual, will be accompanied by a letter giving details of the business. What better opportunity for you, the members, to decide the way ahead?

Chris Woodman

Notices

Obituary

It is with much regret that we record the death of the following member of the Society, and we would like to express our condolences to his family and friends:

Mr R N J Barraclough

Calling coffee makers and flower arrangers

Please could you spare a little time to volunteer for a simple task. Two people are required for our quarterly meeting to make coffee/tea at the Reggie Goves Centre. Provisions, instructions and dishwasher are provided. A simple flower arrangement/plant is also required for the speaker's table. There are already volunteers for coffee for the 20 January meeting but a volunteer florist would be appreciated. The following meeting requiring coffee and flowers is the AGM April 13th. Many thanks.

If you can help with any of these jobs please contact Olivia Price, telephone HW 527042.

That extra half mile

"Just up the hill" doesn't matter at all if you are already driving a car, but to the walker it can be just too much.

With over 400 members, I am always a bit disappointed that not many people attend our meetings, or join in our other activities. And I wondered how many would like to, but just

cannot make it without "wheels", or don't like walking down that road in the dark.

I didn't have a car for several years, and I know that it limited my activities.

So how about helping to limit car use, and start a car-share scheme? If someone would like to listen to one of our speakers, why not link up with someone who is driving to Reggie Goves?

So, if you would like to be a founder member of the "Carshare Scheme", either as a passenger or as a driver, why not let me know?

Ann Simone
01494 448773

Postmen's party

You may not be aware of how extensive the Society's army of "postmen" is: 25 individuals who deliver your newsletter through your doors, and three "top level" distributors who deliver the bundles to them. They save the society some £350 per year. On October 30th at Bassetsbury Manor, for the first time for at least 10 years, they were given a highly successful evening out. For us distributors it was a chance to make the acquaintance of people who are usually but fleeting glimpses. But everybody had the whale of a time. The Chairman gave much-deserved thanks for the wonderful cooking to a band of helpers led by Gladys Pearson and Olivia Price.

Chris Woodman

Many thanks for all your contributions (including Ian Barratt's artwork) this month. Material for the Spring issue should reach the Editor at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **19 February**, please.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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Wednesday 20 January 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre

Quarterly Meeting: *An Archaeological Perspective*
Barbara Hurman, Bucks Archaeological Society
Christmas/New Year meeting: sherry and mince pies – see p.4

Tuesday 13 April 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre

Annual General Meeting, topic to be confirmed

Sunday 9 May

National Mills Day, Pann Mill, 11am–5pm: mill art, composting workshop, plant stall

May (*date to be announced*)

Arts Festival meeting, to be confirmed

Saturday 10 July 8am-12noon
Little Market House

Charity Market Stall.
It's not too soon to start saving your contributions!