

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

NUMBER 107

SPRING 1998

Planning Policy Matters

Yes, Sir! It certainly does!

Greenfield or brownfield? The debate on where to build the 4.4 million new dwellings forecast to be required nationally between 1991 and 2016 continues both locally and nationally. Our Chairman, Roger Lawson, speaks up for sustainability and the protection of the Green Belt.

THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY contributes in practical terms, as well as by strong representation at meetings, to the work of the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS), which has evolved from the desire of civic/amenity societies in Bucks, Herts and Beds registered with the Civic Trust to work more closely together.

During 1997, ANTAS supported the very strong representations of Hertfordshire amenity societies and many environmental groups to oppose Hertfordshire County Council's proposal, in their County Structure Plan, to zone a large area of Green Belt countryside to the west of the A1(M) highway for new residential and industrial development extending towards Hitchin.

Your Society submitted its own letter of reasoned objections to Herts County Council as a matter of principle to help swell the heartfelt surge of opposition. Regrettably the County Council overruled these objections, and the County Plan retains the proposed development zoning. Subsequently, Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council incorporated into their forward plans a proposal to develop Green Belt land for resident

ial and industrial purposes, whilst hundreds of houses in inner city deprived areas are left empty (mainly because people don't want to live there!). This is far from being a sustainable housing policy. What is needed is for these older houses to be refurbished as a part of a comprehensive plan for upgrading the whole area.

All groups, societies and individuals with a positive environmental concern will deplore the fact that John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Transport, the Environment and the Regions has not called in the Hertfordshire and Newcastle plans for Public Inquiries, so they are now likely to go ahead.

There will now be general concern that the Government has gone cool on a sustainable housing policy, and will allow concrete to be poured ad nauseam for housing and industrial units over Green Belt acres to fulfil sensible pledges to provide good habitable domestic dwellings for those who need them.

The principle of sustainability, now widely regarded as the yardstick for assessing 'green'

(continued overleaf)



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

Registered Charity No. 257897

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

Planning Policy Matters

(continued from front page)

issues, requires any council, commercial concern or private person to consider the impact of their individual plans on land usage, transport, land fill/waste disposal and energy usage on the local, national and global environment.

Development of Green Belt acres cannot be justified when so many brownfield and rundown inner city sites can be recycled for the required housing and industrial units to support the community. However, it does require the allocation of money and resources to make this happen.

Will sustainability become an established policy, or will it prove to have been just another

empty slogan used by local and national politicians and civil servants to lull the populace?

Since this article was written, John Prescott has clearly had second thoughts. On 24 February, he announced new guidelines requiring 60% of new housing to be built on recycled land. (Not enough, of course, but a step in the right direction!). Also, housebuilders seeking planning permission for greenfield sites will in future have to demonstrate that there is no suitable derelict land nearby. Unfortunately, he is still claiming that as many as 4.4 million new dwellings will be needed up from 1991 to 2016.

Not in Anyone's Back Yard!

Friends of the Earth conference slates current housing policy

Ian Guy, who is a member of the High Wycombe Society Executive Committee and Chairman of Widmer End Residents' Association, reports on the recent Friends of the Earth Halt Greenfield Housing conference. Widmer End Residents' Association is, of course, as a member of GAG (Grange Action Group), heavily involved in the campaign to save Grange Farm from unwanted development.

THE HALL was packed with people of all ages and from all walks of life. They had one thing in common: alarm at the prospect of more and more housing on greenfield sites, and determination to stop it.

The keynote speech at the Friends of the Earth **Halt Greenfield Housing** conference in north London on 17 January was given by Tony Burton, Assistant Policy Director of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). He reminded the audience that the problem wasn't just housing. New homes meant new roads, new schools, new shops and new jobs. The inevitable result would be urban sprawl, merging quiet country towns and villages into a single huge conurbation. Meanwhile, the city centre would become increasingly unpleasant because of heavy traffic and pollution, homes deteriorating into slums, increasing crime and vandalism. In consequence, those able to afford it would want to move out to the new suburbs on the edge of the city and beyond, thereby helping to create yet more urban sprawl and inner-city decay.

Tim Akeroyd, leading the Case against Stevenage Expansion (CASE), gave an eloquent account of how this process appeared unstoppable. The first he knew of the proposed massive expansion of Stevenage into Green Belt land to the west of the town was when a reporter phoned to ask how he felt about it, seeing that it would affect his immediate environment. Taken

by surprise, he contacted Friends of the Earth (FoE) and CPRE and eventually organised a public meeting at Hitchin which raised £1000 and demonstrated massive support for a campaign to stop the expansion. The County Council issued a consultation paper which produced 4000 replies opposing the development and only ten supporting it. Yet the Council persisted in its plan, which went to an Examination-in-Public. The examining panel behaved "almost as if we weren't there", refusing to show any interest in the most eloquent arguments for preserving the Green Belt - it seemed that the future of Stevenage had already been decided by the builders.

...a network of campaign groups...
to convince politicians
that the countryside is worth preserving

It became clear at the conference that the only way to stop the advance of urban sprawl was to act nationally, forging links between groups acting in different locations. How this could be done was discussed in workshops within the conference. FoE is now organising a network of local campaign groups. Such a network should be able to convince politicians that the countryside is worth preserving, that a perceived need for more

(continued on page 3)

Not in Anyone's Back Yard!

(continued from page 2)

housing should not be the *only* consideration in deciding whether a particular development should go ahead, and that, just as roads generate more roads, so does housing generate more housing. Above all, a nationally coordinated effort would make the general public aware of the importance of the issue: the one thing a politician fears is losing the votes of the people who brought him to power.

There are already some signs that the depth of feeling aroused by this conference is beginning to be noticed by those in power. Basic assumptions on population growth and household formation – the rationale behind the projected 4.4 million new homes to be built by 2016 – are being questioned, and a closer look is being taken at the possibilities of building on brownfield sites

(disused factories etc) rather than greenfield. However, if the builders and planners have their way and continue to desecrate the countryside at the present rate, it is not inconceivable that they will be faced by the sort of direct action that has caused so much havoc to the trunk roads programme. In the latter case, it seems that each individual battle – Newbury bypass, Twyford Down – was lost, but the war as a whole has been won in the sense that environmental considerations are now being given a prominent role in deciding whether a new road scheme should go ahead. The same may eventually happen with housing: let us hope it won't have to go that far.

For more information about the Friends of the Earth Housing Network, call Paula Smith on 0171 566 1663.

Planning

House of Commons

Housing Inquiry

The House of Commons Environment, Transport & Regional Affairs Committee, sharing the widespread concern at the Government's forecast that 4.4 million new homes would be needed over the period 1991–2016, issued an open invitation for comments on the numbers of houses required and on their allocation. The Society responded, querying the figures, particularly for Buckinghamshire, and urging that more effort should be put into regeneration of urban areas to save building on greenfield sites. Such development would be more sustainable in that it would reduce car usage as well as conserving landscape and minimising the use of scarce mineral resources.

The Society's Transport Group also submitted evidence pointing out that a huge area of land currently being used for car parking for superstores, park-and-ride etc could be reclaimed for housing and other eco-friendly uses, by introducing 'bespoke' public transport and superstore delivery services etc to reduce private car usage. There was also scope for cleaning up contaminated land. A freeze on building on greenfield sites was proposed until all alternatives had been thoroughly explored.

Tannery Road Retail

Warehousing

We have objected to a development application to demolish some existing industrial warehouses in Tannery Road (off Comm Road, Wycombe

Marsh) and replace them with retail warehousing and a car park with 189 places. Such an out-of-town centre retail outlet appears to be contrary to the Wycombe District Local Plan by attracting customers away from town centre shops and by increasing the number of car journeys along an already busy road. The land should be put to a more sustainable use, such as housing.

Tesco Loudwater

We also objected to Tesco's application to add to their Loudwater store and to extend the car park size by 19% to 579 places. Again we said this would contravene the District Local Plan by further undermining the viability of local shops, and also the Wycombe Transportation Strategy by increasing the number of car journeys. What is ironical is that Tesco's already have planning permission to build houses on the land they now want to use for car parking. They also want to resurrect a four-year old planning application to demolish some houses to build a petrol-filling station. We think it is more important to keep existing houses and build new ones here to reduce the pressure to build on greenfield sites.

Western Sector Development

We commented favourably on the latest proposal to deculvert about 90 metres of the River Wye, but suggested that the position of a 50-metre stretch across the roundabout at the end of Oxford Street was not an ideal place for people to sit and enjoy the river. We again asked for more housing on the site, and for the bus station to be closer to the centre than Bridge Street.

January Quarterly Meeting

Pediments, Pilasters and Porticos

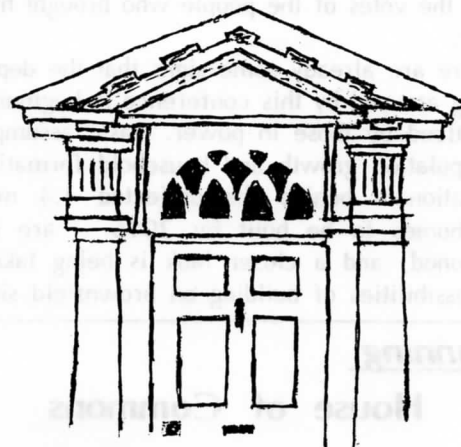
THE JANUARY Quarterly Meeting featured John Neale of the Georgian Group, who entertained us with a fascinating and very comprehensive talk on Georgian houses. This was a great treat for me, as I love Georgian architecture with its classical styles and perfect proportions – and there is still so much left to see.

Mr Neale began by explaining that the trend towards neo-classical design was started in this country by Inigo Jones with the Banqueting House in Whitehall, though of course true Georgian buildings date from the early-18th century, continuing through the reigns of the eponymous kings.

We were shown some wonderful slides, some of which featured houses in Amersham, Marlow and Beaconsfield. However, as our Chairman pointed out in his introduction, our own town centre is still rich in Georgian houses. And, even if they have been turned into banks and building societies, it is easy to imagine them as they once were.

The Georgians certainly knew how to make an entrance, for door casings were a very important feature of their buildings, enhanced by columns or pilasters, and, in the latter half of the 18th century, the front entrance door was often topped by a fanlight. Windows were arranged in perfect symmetry, with the longest on the ground floor, becoming smaller for the upper floors. Roofs were often hidden behind a parapet.

It was also interesting to learn that the Georgian Group was formed in 1937, after the demolition of much of the Adelphi development in the West End of London.



A Georgian fanlight

I think we all learned a lot at this meeting. I know I did, and I have made a mental note to look out for Georgian buildings in any town I may visit! After the talk, Mr Neale answered a few questions, and a vote of thanks was given by Frances Presland, who wondered if the general public in the 18th century really welcomed the then modern Georgian buildings!

Denise Lindsay

Questions & Answers

TWO LETTERS were received in answer to queries about road names in our last issue. Many thanks to Colin Kennedy and Malcolm Walker for their information. Youens Road, Booker was named after Frederick Youens, a Royal Grammar School boy who gained the VC posthumously in World War I. Fraser Road, Booker is named after Ian Fraser, also RGS, who was awarded the VC in World War II. He happily came back, and his valour was marked by a presentation at the school. It's nice to know that these two roads run into each other.

As for Rayner's Avenue – there is, as many of you will know, a Rayner's School at Penn/Tylers Green, at present administered by the London Borough of Camden. The house was built by a successful solicitor, born in High Wycombe,

called Mr, later Sir, Philip Rose. He bought a lot of land, and the estate stretched from Penn right down to the London Road, and the end of the road is marked by the rather strange-looking lodge at the end of Rayner's Lane. My informant urges us to have a look at the great bridge carrying the railway line across Rayner's Lane (blue engineering bricks) and the one across Gordon Road with its superb brickwork.

If you would like to know more about Sir Philip Rose and the family and its connections with the town you are recommended to read a small book in the High Wycombe Reference Library called 'The Rose Family, Rayners and Tylers Green' by Miles Green and Evelyn Clark. You will not be disappointed.

Olivia Price

Heritage

High Wycombe's Unique Weighing-in Ceremony

In our last issue, we reported the gift to the Society of five scrapbooks full of information about High Wycombe and its history. The Heritage Group has selected an item about the Mayor's weighing-in ceremony for this issue of the Newsletter.

THIS 'weighing-in' ceremony is believed to date back to medieval times (although it is sometimes attributed to Queen Elizabeth I herself). Discontinued after the Reform Act (of 1832), it was revived in 1892, suspended during the Great War of 1914-1918, and revived again in 1917. The heaviest weights recorded were in 1921 when Chief Constable W T Jones scaled 18 stone 4 pounds (116kg), and in 1960 when Councillor R A Wood registered the maximum of 20 stone 5 pounds (129.5kg). The weighing machine used in the 1909 ceremony had a capacity of 24 stone (152.7kg). The 1947 version (which remains in use) is of the jockey-scales type with a red plush seat suspended from an overhead dial, the whole hanging from a large brass tripod.

Whilst the local government reorganisation of 1974 changed the nature of the Council, this ceremony is still carried on by the Charter Trustees (District Councillors representing wards within the old Borough of High Wycombe), with the Mayor and Councillors still being weighed according to tradition.

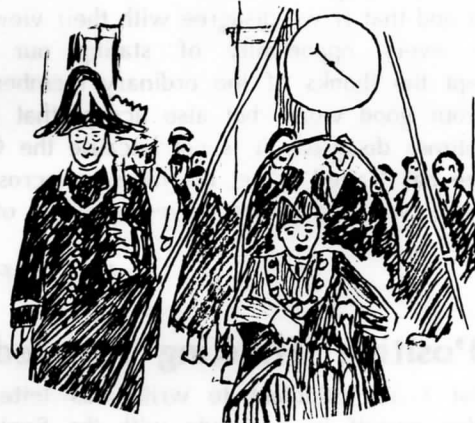
The acceptance and observance in earlier years of ceremonial dignity and precedence is perhaps advantageously outlined by the following extract from a description of the Corporation c1700:-

'The Mayor on Sundays and Public Days goes to Church and to the Town Hall in this order:- First goes the Beadle with his staff, then the two Bailiffs with white staves, then the Sergeant at Mace in a cloak carrying a large silver mace, gilt with gold; then goes the Mayor in his gown, always walking with a silver staff, made in fashion of a handsome walking stick or cane; anciently he used to walk with an iron staff in the same fashion; then goes the High Steward, if present; then the Recorder; then the Aldermen in their gowns two and two, according to seniority as Aldermen. The Town Clerk and such Burgesses as are present going two by two close the procession.'

At the end of a Mayor's period of office, after attending church, the Mayor and Corporation, preceded by a drummer who continued to drum the old Mayor out, would resort to the Guildhall to choose the new Mayor, after which, the corporation went in further procession round the

Market Hall; the new Mayor was drummed into office and the church bells pealed to let the townsfolk know an appointment had been made. A 'weighing-in' ceremony then took place in the Bar Iron Warehouse in White Hart Street.

There were procedural changes in later years: with the new Mayor donned in his robes of office, after lunch, the whole council would leave the upper room of the Gildhall and troop down to the yard in front of the Falcon where the weighing machine would be set up. Here, starting with the Mayor, all the Aldermen, Councillors and officers of the Borough Council would be weighed. As their weight was recorded, the mace-bearer would shout it out, adding the words 'and some more' if the (retiring) Mayor had gained weight over the year; or 'and no more' if he were the same or had lost weight.



The spectators would be waiting for the call, and if the words 'and some more' were heard, the person being weighed would be jeered as he went back to his place, for it was traditionally believed that he had grown fat at the expense of the ratepayers. If the words 'and no more' were shouted out, then cheers would be the reward.

In recent years, the weighing-in ceremony has been held on the evening of the third Thursday in May. This year, with pedestrianisation and the repaving of the High Street and Cornmarket area, a proposal has been mooted that the ceremony should be held on a Saturday, so that more people can attend and make it a more festive occasion. Watch the local press nearer the time for confirmation or otherwise. Editor.

Letters to the Editor

Preserve us from Political Correctness!

Preserve us from Political Correctness! Roger Lawson's "Chairman's Jottings" in Newsletter 106 said that if any member fails to agree with the policy of the Society, the Committee has not 'got the message across'. This conjures up the image of the heavies calling on the dissenting member to indulge in some brainwashing or, if necessary, expulsion, if not liquidation.

We are all grown up, and will, inevitably, have different views. We are united by our wish to keep the very best in our Town and to protect our environment. However, our preferred means of achieving this will vary. I for one have occasionally disagreed with the stance taken by the Society because I believe it will hurt the Town in the long run, but I know that it is my own fault if my views go by default.

We lazy members of the High Wycombe Society very much appreciate the work of Roger Lawson and his tireless colleagues who put in so much effort into the Society and our Town. We know that things would be a lot worse without them and that if we disagree with their views we have every opportunity of stating our own. Accept the thanks of the ordinary members for all your good work, but also accept that if we sometimes disagree, it is not because the Committee has 'failed to get the message across' but because we sometimes have opinions of our own.

Douglas Fraser

Positive Thinking Needed?

Whilst I am reluctant to write this letter and involve myself in a dispute with the Society, I am obliged to respond to the comments of Roger Lawson, Chairman, in the Winter 97/98 Issue 106 of the Society's Newsletter.

Without mentioning my name, Roger refers to a letter I wrote to the Bucks Free Press on 31 September 1997 expressing my concern for the disruption being caused, at enormous expense, with the enforcement of "Positive Parking" in High Wycombe; the pedestrianisation of the Town Centre, and the restrictions and cost of parking in High Wycombe's peripheral side streets.

In doing so I criticised those members of the High Wycombe Society who serve on the town Council for allowing this to happen and indeed supporting it.

It appears this comment of mine has made Roger reflect on whether the true message of

what the Society is all about is fully understood by members (probably me) and is the Society getting its message across to its members, because it appears that I am not in harmony with the Society's line of thought and policy.

Roger's 'jottings' posed the following.. "Do we get our Society's purpose across to members?" He then summarised the purpose as follows.. "Protecting the town of High Wycombe and its environs from thoughtless, and sometimes deliberate, despoiling of the town's buildings, streets and town character by a few who do not consider the needs of the many living in this area."

Hold on, Roger, stop there! Who thoughtlessly and deliberately despoiled our streets robbing us of our town's character in favour of the few and not the needs of the many living in this area? The Council and the High Wycombe Society did if they agreed with that policy.

The pedestrianisation scheme has transformed our town into an uncharacteristic and unreal ghost town during weekdays which converts into a cattle market of aimless pedestrians wandering up the centre of the High Street on Saturdays like a bunch of football supporters going to a match.

Convenient parking for the majority is now a thing of the past. We can no longer park in the High Street and pop into one of the many shops for a quick purchase. Who thought about the needs of the many here?

Was it necessary to pedestrianise and enforce Positive Parking Monday to Friday? Surely Saturday would have been quite sufficient. Was any thought given to that?

The complaints are numerous, and the general consensus of opinion among the public, shop and market traders is that it is a thoughtless, inconsiderate scheme.

Furthermore, I do not personally need to be reminded of what the High Wycombe Society is all about, especially by Roger's 'active members'. I take offence to that remark. I have been an active member of this Society for 26 years, spending a lot of time in the field cleaning up the town by restoring buildings in a very tatty neglected Easton Street. Two of these, 19 and 20, dated back to 1580 and were restored to their natural state, taking two and a half years of work; receiving a national award during European Architectural Heritage Year 1974, and are now High Wycombe's oldest fully restored buildings.

Conservation and preservation mean a lot to
(continued on next page)

Membership

From the Four Corners...

Membership Secretary, Annie Woodward, often receives letters from members of the Society, but one with a Senegalese stamp and a Dakar postmark was unusual to say the least. It was from Mr D R Snoxell, who happens to be British Ambassador to Senegal in West Africa, as well as being accredited to Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands – and, with Mrs Snoxell, a member of the High Wycombe Society.

Mr Snoxell tells of life as an Ambassador – a round of receptions, attending functions, calling on Ministers, receiving delegations, giving interviews, and entertaining (for example, 380 came to a reception to celebrate the Queen's Birthday last June). Then there is business to conduct with the Government of Senegal (in French) on all manner of issues, and reporting back to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. Happily, relations between Britain and Senegal are good.

Despite a poor environment and some primitive aspects of life, Mr and Mrs Snoxell are enjoying their stay in Senegal, and they are well received by the Senegalese whenever they travel around the country. We wish them continuing success in their life and work.

John Gore

Letters to the Editor

(continued from previous page)

me, but not at the total expense of the present. New and old must work together side by side, and High Wycombe is a poor example of that policy in its determined endeavour to dismiss and victimise the motorist. The car whether we like it or not is very much a part of our lives and won't go away. It has to be considered and included in our plans.

Maybe a little "Positive Thinking" is required!

Doug Hodson

Open Letter to the Chairman

May I refer to your 'Jottings' in the Winter 97/98 edition of the (always excellent) Newsletter? As an active member of the Society, I do of course wholeheartedly subscribe to the words you use to describe the Society's role.

However, I do not think it unreasonable that

Important Notice

30th Anniversary Celebration

COME and celebrate – we're middle aged! We don't ask for rubies or any other gift, but do come and enjoy with us the High Wycombe Society's 30th anniversary celebration.

This will take place in the attractive grounds of the Wycombe Museum, Priory Avenue, on Saturday 27 June from 7pm to 10pm. Seating will be provided, but if you have a folding chair or rug you could bring, this would be useful.

Come and celebrate!

Buffet refreshments of a high standard and a glass of wine or soft drink are included in the price of £12 per head. Tickets will be available at the AGM or from Ann Simone (Tel: 01494 448773) and Annie Woodward (Tel: 01494 527978).

Informality is the theme of the evening, a reunion of long-standing members and our newer acquaintances. Light entertainment will take the form of a printed quiz for those who wish for mental activity, and music will be provided by the Wycombe Savoy Opera Company.

We all have much to remember, much to look forward to: let's share it together!

Barbara Rippington

there will be occasions when members' views on particular issues do not coincide with the "official policy and practice". It would be like expecting one to approve of every item on a political party's agenda!

I do not necessarily think we are failing to get our purpose across to members just because two of them have recently gone into print with different views. It is surely better to come out and say what our concerns are, rather than just grumble away to our friends.

Ann Simone

The Chairman has certainly stimulated some reaction with his Winter jottings! Members and readers may wish to send us their views on pedestrianisation and positive parking: there must be some pros as well as cons. For the record, the Society has backed pedestrianisation of the High Street since 1971, when the Newsletter reported that letters had been sent to the Council and the local press to stimulate interest in the matter. Ed.

Spring Cleaning?

At the time of writing this, Spring has come very early – it's only mid-February, but I've been gardening, decorating ... and cleaning! Then I have to put back all the things I've temporarily removed, and I find myself wondering – do I really want this?

So, fellow members, you may find some of my past treasures on the Bring-and-Buy stall at our Coffee Morning on Saturday 30 May.

How about you? any unwanted items of bric-à-brac, craftwork, jewellery, pictures etc. could go towards fund-raising for the High Wycombe Society. Bring them along on the day, or better still, let Olivia Price have them beforehand, so that they can be sorted and priced. Contact her on HW 527042; Olivia will be happy to store items from now on. Collection can be arranged, too.

Ann Simone

Volunteer Focus

From time to time we receive lists of vacancies for volunteers for a wide range of interesting jobs from Wycombe's Volunteer Bureau. If you are interested, please contact Volunteer Focus on 01494 451700 for details or call at the Priory Centre 11 Priory Road weekdays 9.30am–4pm.

Wycombe Arts Festival

The High Wycombe Society
presents
Hidden Bucks III
by
Jean Archer
at
Reggie Goves Centre
on
Monday 18 May
at 7.45pm
Do Come!

Congratulations.....

...to Dr Elsa Woodward, who has been presented with a special Chairman's Award by retiring Wycombe District Council Chairman, Councillor Frances Alexander, for her contribution to the advancement of 'Green Transportation' in the District. Frances' theme for her year in office has been the promotion of Local Agenda 21. Elsa is, of course, the leader of the Society's Transport Group. She has produced numerous ideas for more sustainable transport, and has tirelessly campaigned and lobbied transport interests to advance the cause.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

1998

Tuesday 14 April 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre, Pauls Row

AGM followed by Society Groups reporting on their activities

Saturday 25 April–Saturday 30 May

Wycombe Arts Festival – see official programme

Sunday 10 May 11am–5pm
Pann Mill

National Mills Day: Pann Mill Open Day with Exhibition. Refreshments available

Monday 18 May 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre

Wycombe Arts Festival/High Wycombe Society Lecture:
Hidden Bucks III by local historian Jean Archer

Saturday 30 May 10.30am–12noon

Coffee Morning with Bring-and-Buy Stall
(Meeting place to be advised: see leaflet)

Saturday 6 June

Tour of *Hidden Bucks* locations: walk and pub lunch
(Time and meeting place to be advised)

Saturday 18 July 8am–12noon
Little Market House

Charity Market Stall

Saturday 27 June 7–10pm
Grounds of Wycombe Museum

High Wycombe Society 30th Anniversary Party
(See article on page 7 and also leaflet)

Tuesday 20 October 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre

October Quarterly Meeting: *Countryside Matters*
Speaker: Richard Pushman