



HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

(Registered with the Civic Trust)

NEWSLETTER NO. 56. AUTUMN 1984.

Hon. Secretary:
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JONATHAN PORRITT.

At the High Wycombe Society Quarterly Meeting held in the British Legion on Thursday, 20th September, 1984, a large, attentive audience heard Jonathan Porritt, Director of Friends of the Earth, expound the deficiencies of conservation in this country, with particular emphasis on acid rain and agricultural waste.

Mr. Porritt regretted the slowness of the Government in committing itself to investigating acid rain, and questioned the sense of its spending £5m to duplicate research which had already been undertaken in Sweden demonstrating the link between acid rain and environmental damage. Only after attending an international conference devoted to the subject did our Government Ministers begin to show concern having learned that Cologne Cathedral is being reconstructed completely, stone by stone, since much of the original is irretrievably destroyed by acid rain. Attention is now focussed on our historic buildings badly affected Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, and many others.

In 1982 the Friends of the Earth named the CEEB "Polluters of the Year", to which their response was that control measures would add 20% - 30% to the costs of electricity.



Two years later we have the recently published House of Commons Environmental Committee Report which names the CEEB as prime culprit for polluting the air with sulphur dioxide, one of the main contributors to acid rain, but cost of control measures seems to have dropped, the Government claiming this would add 6% to the price of electricity and the CEEB saying the increase would be approximately 10%. Whilst such arguments continue, this country is blamed for 60% of the pollution in Scandinavia, due to the direction of trade winds, and buildings, forests and lakes are destroyed and poisoned. Mr. Porritt made a plea for a different interpretation of wealth, where quality of life would be valued more highly than profit, and he questioned the necessity for constant growth in industry.

Turning his attention to agriculture, Mr. Porritt said that 6 - 7 million tons of straw were burned in this country each year, at an annual cost in damage to the environment, to wildlife, hedges, trees and loss of produce, of £500m - money which could be put to more constructive use. The audience were clearly in agreement that smuts from burning straw have been a considerable nuisance in the Wycombe area in recent years. Research has demonstrated that straw could be purposefully used for such as animal feed or bedding, for straw fibre or biogas. The agricultural industry's over dependence on pesticides, inorganic fertilizers and mechanical vehicles was deplored. The blame, however, lay not with the farmer, but with the system of grants and subsidies, which encourages land management on a large scale and ownership by large corporations. This causes small farms to be driven out of business and results in unemployment and destruction of rural communities, besides the loss of well tended meadows and forest.

Eloquently Mr. Porritt urged consideration for the art of good husbandry, for life lived in harmony with the earth. We need to consider more fully not just the present, but the longer future and the legacy we leave for following generations. The difficulty of the task was not glossed over, and questions following revealed that the audience had much to consider and think about.

PAUL'S ROW GARDEN.

How many of us, I wonder, whilst undertaking the chore of shopping, or waiting for a partner (always late), long for a green oasis, somewhere to rest our feet, relax our mind, and contemplate. We have tried to provide one in the Paul's Row Garden, sandwiched between Keen's Photographers and the Angel Pub. Created from a derelict building site approximately 10 years ago, the High Wycombe Society has maintained this garden through winter frosts and summer drought, and although in times of few volunteers it has warranted criticism --- litter is a constant problem ---- we feel it is worth working for. With recent new recruits (more are always welcome), the garden has new hope and vigour. Look for the bulbs in Spring - crocus, muscari and snowdrops were planted recently. The rockery needs improving and we want a sturdy tub. If you have time, ideas or material (plants, tub, soil, rocks) to offer, please contact me on High Wycombe 26616.

THE GLOVES.

Are your tiny hands frozen, or did you, in a fever of passion, throw down two gauntlets? Was an iron fist concealed inside the woolly glove, or were they used to conceal green fingers? (If the latter please join the Garden Force above). Perhaps they were dropped as a cue to an admirer --- pick up gloves and follow me! Whatever the reason a pair of woolly gloves left behind at the last Quarterly Meeting await their owner. Beige in colour with fair isle round the palms - gallant Jack Scruton has them in care.

Barbara Rippington.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND THE CONSERVATION AREA.

The need to be constantly vigilant to protect listed buildings and the Conservation Area is illustrated by some recent planning applications.

McDonald's Hamburgers. 41 High Street.

Having gained planning permission to occupy this listed building, McDonald's sought to draw attention to the building by the insertion of an illuminated fascia and the dreaded big M's, plus an illuminated hanging sign. We opposed the applications and we are pleased to record that the District Council has refused them as being most unsuitable for this listed building.

Automatic Telling Machines for Building Societies.

Local Building Societies are very anxious to insert these machines within reach of the general public, but they can be disfiguring, especially when the building is a fine one. Two applications for these machines by the Halifax and the Woolwich would mar their High Street frontages if given approval. The Halifax building at No. 35A is a very fine brick and stone structure, and the insertion of a machine will harm its character. The one at the Woolwich (No. 29) should certainly be resisted as it will have a serious effect on this listed building.

Leicester Building Society. No. 39 High Street.

Have you noticed the illuminated lettering on the inside of the windows of this very distinguished listed building, and the boards hanging on the railings, telling the world that this building is occupied by the Leicester Building Society? These and other window displays harm the character of this fine building. They were placed there without planning permission and the Leicester Building Society refused to remove them, forcing our District Council to undertake the lengthy and tedious enforcement action.

The Grapes. No. 4 High Street.

This solid and familiar Victorian building has now ceased to be a pub, having been bought by a large development Company. An application has now been submitted for its demolition and the substitution of a kind of replica, with shops and offices. We have opposed the demolition and we hope the District Council will refuse the application. The same Company is confident that it will soon buy the Antelope, the delightful listed pub in Church Square. The Company claims that it will 'refurbish' the building, and we all know what that usually means! Perhaps Wycombe will achieve the unique distinction of losing all its pubs. The Red Cow, The Red Cross Knight, and the Exchange will disappear due to developments around Frogmoor. The loss of the Grapes and the Antelope in addition means that the situation is now very serious. If wealthy development Companies persuade brewers to sell, there seems to be little anyone can do to keep the building as a pub.

Jack Scruton.

PLANNING.

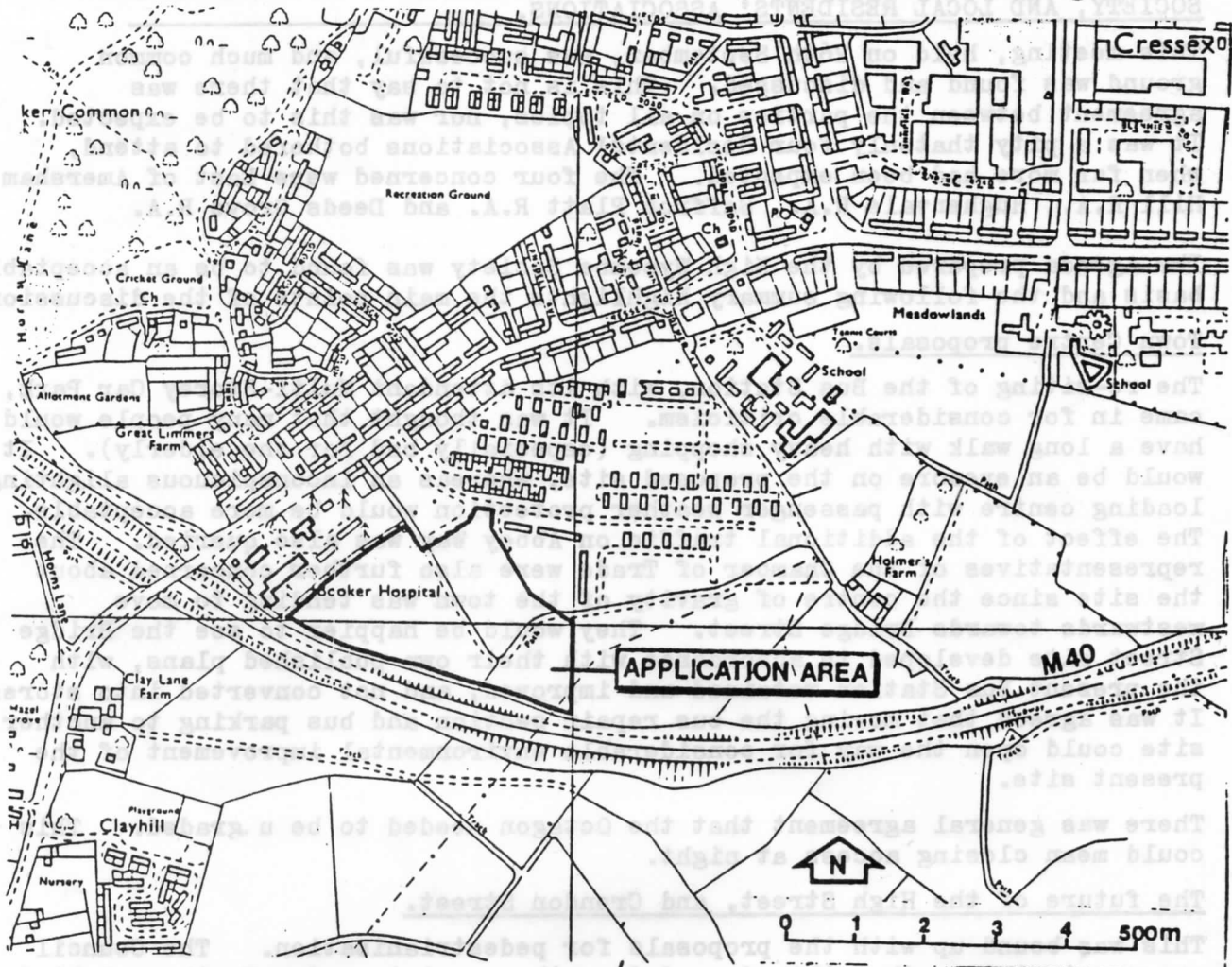
There is no doubt that the most important role for the Society lies in taking an active interest in planning. This taxes our limited resources to the utmost, and it is tempting to think that we could perhaps switch our attention to tasks which are less demanding. However, we intend to continue our interest, choosing carefully the issues which are important. It is easy to give the impression that we are continually in opposition and never support anyone. This is quite untrue, of course. We have often supported plans which we think are beneficial, many of which have been introduced by the Wycombe District Council - such things as the General Improvement Areas for the Western and Eastern Areas, improvements to the River Wye, and those parts of the Town Centre Strategy which will lead to environmental improvements and pedestrianisation. We have often supported the District Council at Planning Inquiries and in opposing appeals to the Secretary of State. However, there have been times when we have opposed plans which we believe to be harmful. In particular we have opposed the move of the Bus Station to a place behind the High Street, and the plans to build the so-called Northern Relief Road.

We must not shrink from this kind of opposition and we certainly didn't with regard to the recent application by the District Council to build an industrial estate to accommodate High Tech. enterprises on land at Cressex near to the motorway. This application is causing concern because of its flagrant disregard of the County Structure Plan and the environmental changes which would occur. Our misgivings were shared by the County Planning Officer and by the Wycombe District Manufacturers' Association, but the County Councillors concerned preferred to ignore these, and listened instead to a hastily contrived device of our District Council. This did not try to refute the very serious objections; instead it gave a "firm commitment" that when the Local Plan is prepared, there will be some form of compensation, in that unpleasant industry in the town centre will be persuaded to move away and housing might be substituted. This kind of delusion has been held before, but as the Manufacturers' Association knows, it would be an unlikely possibility. Even if it could be achieved, it would still leave an industrial complex at Cressex on the doorstep of the Holmer Farm estate, the inhabitants of which have little or no idea of what is planned, and the consequences for them.

This kind of application is far too serious to be given the go-ahead when the Local Plan will be considered soon, and which will involve detailed discussions about the town's future. If major departures of this kind are allowed, they will not only destroy the validity of the Structure Plan, but will also leave nothing to be resolved by the Local Plan.

As the application is a major departure from the Structure Plan, the matter is being referred to the Secretary of State. We hope he will call in the application for a Public Inquiry.

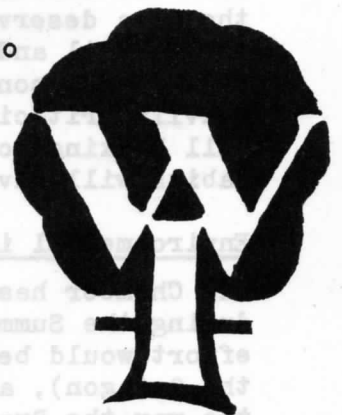
Map of Cressex area, showing the proposed situation of the High.Tech Industrial Estate near to Holmer Farm Estate. See article on Page 4.



AFFILIATIONS TO THE SOCIETY.

Recently the Women's Institute movement decided that they should take a wider interest in environmental matters, and to lend their widespread support to improving the quality of life throughout the country. As a result of this decision, and because Terriers and Totteridge W.I. had joined without being approached, we wrote to the Headquarters of the Women's Institutes in this area and we were given permission to seek the support of the local Branches. As a result, the following W.I. Branches have become affiliated members and we welcome this support. We are sure the affiliations will provide us with important local support and knowledge, and in our turn we are sure we can help the various W.I.s. in their work to improve the environment.

Downley Evening.	Loudwater.
Hazlemere Afternoon.	Booker Afternoon.
West Wycombe.	Booker Evening.
Naphill Afternoon.	Hazlemere Evening.



We are also pleased to welcome the affiliation of the recently formed Saffron Platt Residents' Association. They will act as watchdogs of this key area, which covers the G.I.A. recently adopted by the District Council, and also includes a vital part of the Conservation Area.

Janet Tully.
Membership Secretary.

MEETING BETWEEN THE HIGH WYCOMBE CHAMBER OF TRADE, THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY, AND LOCAL RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS.

This meeting, held on 26th September, was successful, and much common ground was found and discussed. This is not to say that there was agreement between the parties on all topics, nor was this to be expected. It was a pity that only four Residents' Associations bothered to attend, when far more had been expected. The four concerned were East of Amersham Hill R.A., Hughenvale R.A., Saffron Platt R.A. and Deeds Grove R.A.

The Agenda prepared by the High Wycombe Society was found to be an acceptable basis and the following summary highlights the main points of the discussion.

Town Centre proposals.

The re-siting of the Bus Station, with its attendant Multi-Storey Car Park, came in for considerable criticism. It was thought that many people would have a long walk with heavy shopping (especially bad for the elderly). It would be an eyesore on the proposed site, whereas an inconspicuous alighting/loading centre with passenger weather protection would be more acceptable. The effect of the additional traffic on Abbey Way was also queried. The representatives of the Chamber of Trade were also further concerned about the site since the centre of gravity of the town was tending to move westwards towards Bridge Street. They would be happier to see the Bridge Street site developed in accordance with their own published plans, with the present Bus Station retained and improved, and not converted into stores. It was agreed that moving the bus repair section and bus parking to another site could open the way for considerable environmental improvement of the present site.

There was general agreement that the Octagon needed to be upgraded. This could mean closing access at night.

The future of the High Street, and Crendon Street.

This was bound up with the proposals for pedestrianisation. The Council was now insisting that this depended on the provision of a Northern Relief Road and the changes to Frogmoor. Freeing the High Street from traffic had general approval, but the Chamber drew attention to problems of access. The Society and Residents' Associations expressed worries about the spread of banks, building Societies, Estate Agents and Offices in this area, and the new threat of the disappearing pubs.

The future of Frogmoor.

This was discussed in some detail and there was general agreement that the area deserved considerable improvement. Plans had been drawn up by the Council and it was agreed that these should be supported. The area will change considerably, with the new Sainsbury Store (which has been heavily criticised by the Society for its design), the extensive new shopping mall linking to an enlarged Marks and Spencer. The effect on shopping habits will have to be seen.

Environmental improvements in the Town Centre.

The Chamber has made efforts to improve the appearance of the High Street during the Summer with flower baskets on the lamp standards. A special effort would be undertaken for Christmas to improve window displays (including the Octagon), and provide festive decorations. The Society criticised the way the Brand image used by multiples disfigured the town centre, and the poor quality of some fascias using plastic materials and garish colours. The Chamber thought that it was inevitable and quite natural for multiples to use their brand image, and that in the main they had acted rather better than in some towns.

There was general agreement that the town centre would be greatly improved by attention to better paving, improved street "furniture", landscaping, and improvement to the market stalls.

Provision of an Arts Centre.

This is rather a touchy subject, since many people are doubtful if such an amenity would ever realize its full potential. However, there is nowhere now in Wycombe where theatre or films can be shown satisfactorily to an audience, or, for that matter, any live performance, apart from the Town Hall, or sometimes the Parish Church. The Society was of the opinion that the proposed new bus station site was the ideal place for such a civic building. The Chamber had considered some provision ~~for a bridge~~ in their plan for Bridge Street. There was no general consensus.

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We feel that this kind of discussion is worth having and we would like to thank the Chamber and the four Residents' Associations for taking part. It seems essential that as many views as possible are discussed about the future of our town before its future is set literally in concrete. We look forward to more discussions in the future, with perhaps an Agenda devised by the Chamber of Trade.

Ted Kearney.
Chairman.

The TREASURER.

With the departure on early retirement of Mr. A.C. Flint, Manager at the Midland Bank, Cornmarket, we lose our Treasurer; in his place we are very pleased to welcome his successor, Mr. Ken Attack.

It is time that we acknowledged the support the Midland Bank has given to the Society by allowing its Manager to be our Treasurer. Apart from knowing that our/your monies are in good hands and well managed, these good people have always taken a keen interest in the work of the Society and attended meetings and social events whenever possible. Thank you Midland for listening to our plea many years ago and we look forward to welcoming Mr. Attack during his stint with the Society.

Evelyn Roe.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS.

We have had quite a good response to our appeal to members who had not renewed their subscriptions, but unfortunately there are still an uncomfortable number of 60 in arrears. Are YOU one of the guilty?

We are into the second half of our financial year and we need our members' subscriptions in order to carry on with our work. Postal charges have increased recently, and telephone charges are to go up soon, so you will understand that your financial support is vital if we are to continue as an active, caring Society.

Janet Tully.
Membership Secretary.

TREES AND WATER INTERESTS GROUP.

Work has commenced on the next phase of the Pann Mill Project. The Mill site has been resounding to the clatter of hammers and chisels, as the willing band of volunteers have been stripping the lime scale from the water wheel. The sluice gate, located immediately in front of the wheel, has been removed for repairs, and a temporary trash tray, formed from chestnut palings, has been erected upstream, adjacent to the Thames Water Board bridge and main culvert for the stream.

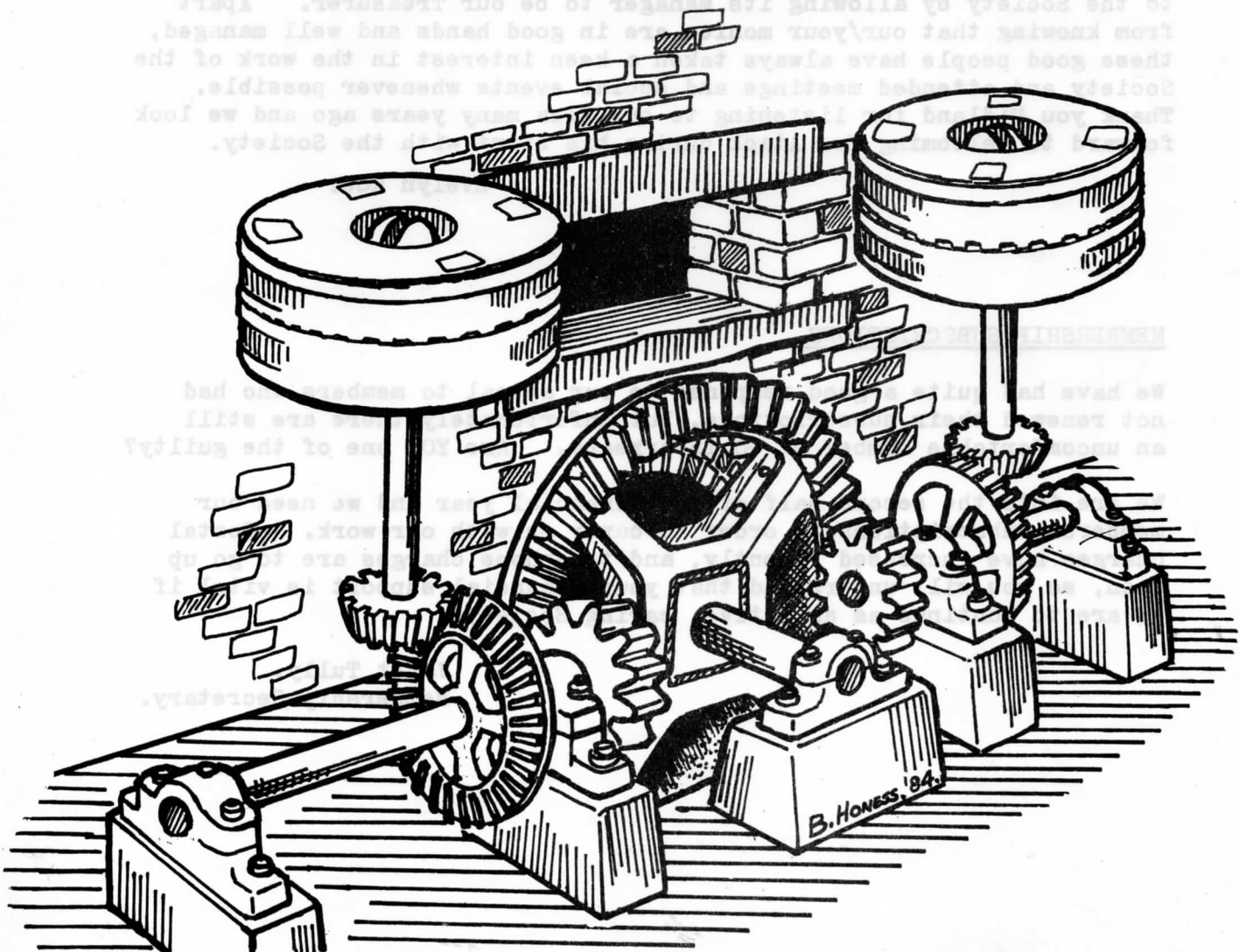
The timbers and components of the Hurst Frame, which will bear the weight of the mill stones, have appeared on site by kind permission of Chris Wallis of the Chiltern Society.

It is likely that a temporary workshop and materials store will be needed on the Pann Mill island, when the internal machinery renovation commences in earnest.

Technical assistance has been sought from a number of local engineering companies, and one particularly well-known name may yet figure on our notice board of accreditations for work done and services rendered.

Any new volunteers wishing to participate in this exciting project, should contact Chris Woodman initially, on Tel. number High Wycombe 28106. In the coming months there will be many challenging tasks for those members of the Society who want to "see a slice of the action", under the supervision of our resident engineer, Brian Honess - well he does go home, sometimes!

Roger Lawson.



RESIDENTIAL INFILL AND BACKLAND DEVELOPMENT.

The most recent figures which I have seen, indicate that around three million new homes will need to be built in this country by the end of the century, in order to cope with the demand. If development is not to be carried out on green field sites, the pressure to build within existing suburban and urban areas on infill and backland sites will be enormous. High Wycombe will not escape the pressure which this situation will place on potential sites of this type.

Given the abysmally low standard of design of most speculative housing since the war, it is critical that such infill and backland development proposals are monitored very carefully if they are to enhance rather than degrade an already impoverished built environment.

Residential developments will need to be designed more sensitively to deal with matters such as overlooking and overshadowing of existing dwellings. The buildings themselves will need to be considerably more attractive to look at. Existing trees will need to be retained, and generally speaking the planting of new trees and shrubs will be necessary to soften and screen the new buildings. The scale of such developments will need to be sympathetic to the surroundings, and the roads and pavements more carefully considered in respect of layout and surface finishes.

All of these things are generally ignored by most speculative developers, mainly because they require considerable thought, design skill and money. Fortunately, Planning authorities now recognise their responsibility in this area, and usually attach conditions to the planning consent requiring the developer to submit his landscaping scheme to them and have it approved before the commencement of building work, but continued pressure from Societies such as ours is essential if the standard of these developments is to be raised.

I believe it is right that an Amenity Society should vigorously oppose those schemes which ignore these additional constraints, and give support to those schemes which respond sensitively to their sites and surroundings. If you believe, as many do, that it is impossible for modern residential development to respond in this way, then may I suggest a short trip to the village of Bledlow, where, opposite Lord Carrington's house, you will find one of the best examples, in my opinion, of modern infill housing in this country. This particular scheme represents the standard by which I believe infill and backland development proposals should be measured.

Malcolm Barnett.



A CRY FOR HELP.

The Society has built up a good reputation for the variety of its activities, and in particular we are proud of our record of fine speakers. We are particularly anxious to provide a lively programme in future, and to do this we now need a Programme Secretary. This post is not too arduous, is interesting, and gives great scope for individual initiative. We would be delighted - and relieved! - to have a volunteer to fill this post. There would be a very gentle introduction and much help given. The Hon. Secretary would be very pleased to hear from a Society member willing to have a go.

Future Programme.

Wednesday, 23rd January, 1985
in the Royal British Legion,
St. Mary Street, High Wycombe,
at 8 p.m.

Mike Farley, Field Officer, Bucks
County Council, will give an
illustrated talk about Archaeology
in Buckinghamshire, with a title
of his own choice.

Tuesday, 23rd April, 1985, in
the Royal British Legion, St.
Mary Street, High Wycombe,
at 7.45 p.m.

Annual General Meeting of the
Society to be followed by
entertainment and refreshments.

Tuesday, 11th June, 1985, in
the Royal British Legion, St.
Mary Street, High Wycombe.

Brian Williamson, Field Officer of
the B.B.O.N.T., will give an
illustrated talk about B.B.O.N.T. and
its Reserves.

At a date to be arranged -
possibly in September or October,
1985.

Edward Cullinan, well known architect,
will talk about his work and
architecture in general. Further
details in our next Newsletter.

MARJORIE NASH.

Before starting the main business of the Quarterly meeting, the Society had a little of its own business to attend to. Marjorie Nash, one of our two Vice-Presidents, had just reached her 80th Birthday, and in recognition of this, she was presented by our other Vice-President, Kathleen Peatey, with a delightful little painting by Lorna Cassidy.

Marjorie has been active in local affairs all her life, and has been a strong supporter of the Society, and this of course she continues to be. Having been born in Wycombe and lived here all her life, she has seen massive changes take place, and yet despite that, she remains a perpetually cheerful person! We congratulate her on reaching 80 years, and wish her every happiness for the future.

AND FINALLY We are always interested to know what our members are thinking about the various issues that affect the town of High Wycombe. If any members want to comment on any relevant subject through the medium of our Newsletter, please write to the Hon. Secretary. We do not presume that everyone agrees with everything we print. If you disagree about opinions expressed, why not write and tell us? (We would also welcome comments in our favour!). If there is something happening to the environment in your area which has escaped our notice, please let us know.

Anna Birks.
Editor.