



Registered Charity No. 257897

HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

(Registered with the Civic Trust)

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NEWSLETTER NO. 66 SPRING 1987

THERE ARE 51 WEEKS IN A YEAR—AND ENVIRONMENT WEEK!



Saturday 25 April-Monday 4 May 1987

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT WEEK is the main event in the year which all Amenity Societies try to participate in.

See inside this Newsletter for details of OUR SOCIETY'S CONTRIBUTION.....



IT'S RIGHT UP YOUR STREET!



Local Walks for National Environment Week

Spring is sprung! Why not get out and explore some of the delights and treasures of High Wycombe, so often overlooked or taken for granted! We are repeating the Town and Water Trails, which proved so popular last year.

As before, the walks will follow the trails, published by the Society. So that members may join both walks, we are organising them on consecutive Sundays.

The Town Trail starts at the Parish Church porch and includes a short guided tour of the church. The Water Trail begins at Pann Mill, on the corner of the Rye, following the Dyke towards the waterfall and returning along the Wye.



The two trails will take place on Sunday 26th April and Sunday 3rd May. Both walks start at 2.0p.m., finishing about 3.45p.m. at Pann Mill, where refreshments will be available.

Bring your family and friends.

Everyone welcome!

Barbara Rippington and
Annie Woodward



We're Running a Stall

The Society will be running a stall in the churchyard of the Parish Church on Saturday 2nd May from 8.30a.m. to 1 p.m. as part of our contribution towards National Environment Week. The town will be crowded on this Bank Holiday weekend, and it will be a fine opportunity for publicising the work of the Society, and, most importantly, for recruiting new members. Come and support and tell your friends.

We shall be selling Society publications, second-hand books and, as a special attraction for passers-by, home-made cakes and sweets, which are always popular. The Parish Church Restoration Appeal will be selling some of their items alongside, and it is proposed to donate the day's profits to this appeal. (see Newsletter No. 63 Summer 1986 for information on the appeal).

To be successful, we shall obviously need a lot of help from members, both to provide a plentiful supply of cakes and sweets, and to look after the stall. If you are able to help in any way, please get in touch with John Gore on H.W. 26671 or Evelyn Rowe on H.W. 32575. Then we can work out a rota and be sure that there will be enough to sell. We will gladly reimburse you for the cost

of the ingredients, if you wish. Cakes and sweets may be delivered to Evelyn Rowe, 3 London Road, on Friday 1st May if you are not able to take them to the stall on the Saturday morning.

John Gore

And Surveying the Town Centre

Our newly formed Historic Buildings Group will carry out a study of the town centre and will prepare a survey report for discussion with the Wycombe District Council Conservation Officer.

Jack Scruton

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Social Events

By the time you read this, the Music Hall, held on 10th April, should have been a resounding success! I am most grateful for the enthusiastic support of Committee members in selling approximately 90 tickets. However, I have been disappointed by the lack of response from members in general. There may be two reasons. Firstly the date might have been inconvenient. Secondly (perhaps more likely), you did not want to come anyway.

This is not intended to be a reproach. I am seriously wondering whether, as an Amenity Society, we should be expending large amounts of time and energy in organising social functions, which members do not wish to support, or whether we should confine ourselves to activities concerned with the environment.

Do, Please, let us know your views - what types of social activities, if any, would you like the Committee to provide?

Annie Woodward

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Historic Buildings Group

It has been felt for some time that we should establish once more a Group to deal with Historic Buildings and kindred subjects. A successful group existed for a long time within the Society, and our efficiency has suffered since it folded up. As a result of an earlier appeal, Mr. Max Hale volunteered to be the Secretary of a new Group. Encouraged by this we held a meeting of those interested on 31st May, and a new Group has now been formed. The Group hopes to deal with a variety of topics, but as a start the members will carry out a survey of the town centre during Environment Week. The result of this will be discussed with the Conservation Officer of Wycombe District Council. Hopefully it will lead to a variety of improvements. Anyone interested in this new Group should communicate with Max Hale, 51 Keep Hill Drive, High Wycombe HP11 1DT. Telephone - High Wycombe 25575.

Paul's Row Garden

Thirteen years ago the High Wycombe Society created a small green oasis in the Conservation Area on what was a derelict building site. The rubble heaped together was covered with topsoil and grassed, turves were laid to create a lawn and Gean and Norway Maple were planted. An Elm plank, reminder of the ravage of Dutch Elm Disease, provided a seat, and the Paul's Row Garden, complete with name plaque (later stolen) was well used and appreciated, especially in the summer. It was particularly well patronised by overflow from the tarmac forecourt of the Angel pub adjacent, to which our "gardeners" returned hundreds of glasses. We could have returned hundreds of biros to the Betting Shop too!

Wild cats had a regular refuge at the rear of the garden, and the only unwelcome visitor was a parked motorbike which was graciously moved off. Crocusses in the lawn have been a pleasant show in early spring.

In recent years the garden has shown need of improvement. The seat was destroyed by an unlawful tree felling when a fence was erected for the pub. We were left to arrange the removal of the fallen tree and the mess. Sadly, just as reconstruction work was being undertaken by a group of young people from the Roundhouse, under the direction of Mrs. Croxon, we have to say goodbye to our garden. The District Council now wish to terminate the license in order to build a new public hall there to replace Newlands Hall, which is to go in the Octagon renovation.

We are sorry to lose this small valuable space, but, as in most things, creation was more enthusiastic than maintenance, and appeals for volunteer help received little response from our membership. It was fun to hear the clatter of the lawnmower so close to the centre of town.

Barbara Rippington



Wycombe Arts Festival

In March we had great pleasure in welcoming Brian Lymbery, the Deputy Director of the Civic Trust to speak to Members and friends on "A Future for the Past" as the Society's contribution to the Arts Festival.

After a giving a brief outline of the history of the Trust and its objectives we were enthralled by a most ably presented display of slides of buildings and scenes of note accompanied by an impeccable commentary. With 1000 societies affiliated to the Trust they have an unrivalled knowledge of the problems confronting the amenity and environmental movement. His reminder to "Delay not, to do well" is very appropriate but reminds us all the more of the pressures the Society is under and the great need for more manpower resources to respond.

Mr. Lymbery is going on to join the environmental UJ Project 2000 and we shall watch with interest the progress of that new organisation. A vote of thanks to Mr. Lymbery was heartily endorsed by the well attended meeting.

Evelyn Rowe



Wesley Church

The long struggle by the Wesley Church to carry out developments at their site in Priory Road has now drawn to a close. The earlier schemes to build a massive office block, rivalling Thame House, was refused, and in this we supported the District Council.

The latest scheme, which has won approval, conforms in part with the Local Plan, as it provides for some housing, which is a good idea in this town centre position. Where the approval exceeds the Local Plan is the permission given for a small speculative office development in place of the old Manse. It is claimed that this is needed in addition to the housing in order to provide the funding for radical changes to the Church to provide a new hall, the existing one having gone beyond repair after a long period of neglect and two fires. The interior of the Church, which is a fine example of Victorian galleries and pews, is to be removed, and the building used as both Church and hall.

The Church authorities, during previous conflicts, used the quality of the interior to support the application for the enormous office block. It was referred to as "breathtaking". It is difficult not to become cynical when studying the present approval. As two Church buildings will be demolished and the third will become a shell, the District Council ought to alter the boundary of the Conservation Area. This boundary was extended deliberately in order to include the three Church buildings because of their "Group Value"!

Jack Scruton



The Chiltern Society Small Woodland Project

In three and a half years the Chiltern Society Small Woodland Project has given advice to 130 woodland owners and worked in 63 woods. During the same period it has planted 14,000 trees, nearly 6,500 of them this winter.

In 1982, when it became apparent that despite the publicity given to the plight of Chiltern woodlands, nobody seemed prepared to take remedial action, it seemed appropriate that the Chiltern Society should take the initiative. After a year of negotiating for grant aid and planning the Project came to life on 22nd August 1983. The Chiltern foresters had told us that the most endangered areas were the small woodlands scattered over the Chilterns and this arose mainly from the failure of owners to manage their property. Clearly it was not possible for the Project to put right all the years of neglect and that the course to take must be the motivation of owners to do the job themselves. This was accepted as the Project's objective.

John Morris was appointed as Project Officer and his job was to seek out owners of small woodlands (not exceeding 10 hectares), advise them as to the correct management procedure and as to the grant aid available. A small work force was set up to demonstrate the methods advocated, in part to encourage the owner in whose wood we worked and in part to attract the attention of other owners. The work undertaken has been in small areas scattered widely over the Chilterns.



The difficulties encountered have been many and varied - the need to train the inexperienced work-team in the ways of forestry, the short-term basis of employment within the Community Programme (from whence we derive our team), the need to arouse the woodland fraternity as to our existence and, then, as to the help we could offer. All of these were obvious from the outset but the loss of tools costing £2000 through a series of burglaries was not expected, nor were the many other incidents that beset us.

In addition to the aid from the Manpower Services Commission we have depended on grant aid from the Chiltern local authorities, the Countryside Commission and donations, the latter mainly from the owners we have helped and the Chiltern Society. In three years we have spent £155,000; which is not very much with which to maintain a work force of 14 people, a vehicle, office equipment and all the tools and supplies required. Transport is a major expense. Imagine the cost and problems in sending the work-party with tools and several hundred young trees for planting in some distant woodland.

During the fourth year the tempo of activity has markedly increased so that there is now enough work to cause pressure and thoughts of the possibility of future changes in the methods we employ. Most of the work would not have arisen but for the Project; owners are undertaking jobs that would otherwise have been left undone and we hope this will lead to increasing work for local contractors.

What of the future? The Project is supposed to end in August 1988. There is an obvious need for it to continue, probably for a very long time. We are investigating the possibility of continuation and of the form it will take. There are many questions to be answered. Whatever happens there will still be urgent need for work within the Chiltern small woodlands if they are to be saved from disaster and, with it, a sad change in the face of the Chiltern landscape.

Charles Mills
Vice Chairman, Chiltern Society



Planning

The Future of Development Plans

The Government are seeking to streamline the existing strategic development planning procedures to speed up the revision of strategic development plans. Their proposals are set out in the Consultation Paper 'The Future of Development Plans' published in September 1986. Some of the proposals have merit, but others have raised fears in the minds of environmentalists. Possibly the most controversial is the one to abolish County Structure Plans. The long-established two-tier planning structure, whereby the County Councils prepare County Structure Plans, and District Councils follow up with Local Development Plans conforming with County strategy, would be replaced by a single-tier structure. County Councils would then produce policy statements, but District Councils would take over the major strategic planning role, and the sole strategic planning document would be the District Development Plan.

The High Wycombe Society, along with many other amenity societies both national and local, is extremely concerned about the possibility of this proposal becoming law, and we have written to the Secretary of State for the Environment expressing our misgivings. With the increasing pressure for the development of huge out-of-town retail and leisure complexes, not to mention green-field housing schemes, and at a time when it appears that more and more of our so-called 'redundant' farming land may become available for ill-considered development, this is not the moment for weakening our long-established planning system. Responsibility for long-term strategic planning decisions should be set at a higher level than Districts, which inevitably have fairly narrow short-term interests. Also, we believe that the existing two-tier system provides a valuable check against possible irresponsible decisions by Districts, in the same way the the House of Lords provides for useful 'second thoughts' on some legislation rushed through the House of Commons.

We hope the Government will respond to amenity society representations and ensure that strategic planning, which will affect our national heritage and the beauty of our countryside for decades ahead, if not for ever, is not rushed, but made subject to the widest possible consultation and agreement.

John Gore

We are pleased to include this item from Gloria Leflaive:

So Who Will Protect Our National Heritage?

The scale of opposition to Mr. George Suter's unpopular golf scheme at Hughenden and Naphill is unprecedented. The District Councillors say they cannot remember any other local plan provoking so many written objections. Opponents (described as 'a few green-eyed people' by Mr. Suter) include Bucks County Council, The Countryside Commission, The National Trust, The Chiltern Society, The Open Spaces Society, The Council for the Preservation of Rural England, The Ramblers' Association, Hughenden Parish Council, West Wycombe Parish Council, The High Wycombe Society, and Downley Preservation Society. In addition, over the last 18 months, hundreds of letters of opposition have been sent by individuals and 10 Residents' Associations have also objected.

In spite of this the Wycombe Planning Committee voted 15 to 10 to progress this scheme. Arguments have included precedence, bad business decisions, diseases of cattle, access roads and just about every red herring a clever lobby could throw in - except what the public care about.

So why the decision? What is the big deal for us the public?

A positive case by contrast is very simple and very strong. It is the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The AONBs are a National Asset, not just of local importance, and there aren't many of them. The Government equates them with National Parks, such as the Lake District. Golf courses are attractive enough in the countryside generally. But would anyone seriously suggest putting golf courses in Langdale or Borrowdale? Any why not? The words used are 'manicured' or 'suburbanised' landscape. If it is wrong for the National Parks, then, according to the Government, it is wrong for the Chiltern AONB.

Most people who live in the AONB are aware of their good fortune and can imagine the likely consequences of the sinsensitive attentions of developers and their allies. Certainly the Department of the Environment made no bones about throwing out a similar golf course scheme this year for the Kent Downe AONB.

In the end the real issue is whether we care enough to save this unique National Heritage for our children, and to say 'NO' to any development liable to erode progressively the beauty of our very special CHILTERN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY.

Gloira Leflaive

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Affiliated Societies

We are pleased to welcome the affiliation to the Society of the recently formed Coningsby Road Residents' Association. This energetic Residents' Association is most concerned about the serious environmental pressures on the road from developments on back land, as well as flat conversions. Further activities, such as improved local amenities (road cleaning etc.), a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and Social and Information Services are also planned.

We also wish to extend a warm welcome to the Terriers Evening Women's Institute, recently affiliated to the Society. Since the Women's Institutes' recent national commitment to become more involved in the community, we have been pleased to have affiliations from 10 local Institutes. The Society is at present concerned about developmental pressures in the Terriers area, in particular, Gerald's Road.

Annie Woodward

Can the Phoenix Rise Afresh?

At last! The Wycombe District Council has declared the Hughenden Road an 'Area of General Improvement'. But has this measure come soon enough to salvage anything of value from the mess which exists, particularly towards the lower reaches of the Hughenden Road.

In the High Wycombe Society's response to the Town Centre Strategy document published towards the end of last year, the Society described this area as a 'disaster zone'. Obviously we were not alone in this opinion and the Council has decided to act.

Residents were invited to a meeting chaired by Councillor Peter Cartwright to announce the declaration of the G.I.A. A booklet has also been issued describing the intentions of the scheme from which I quote the following passage: "The Council's proposals for improving the environment of the area, include the rebuilding of front garden boundary walls to properties fronting Hughenden Road and certain other roads in the area, together with other improvements to the frontages of these properties, including proper provision for car parking".

Members of the audience did raise the question as to why residents had been allowed to remove their boundary walls in the first place simply to accommodate a parked car in what was a front garden. "Additionally", the booklet continues, "investigations will be carried out into other ways in which parking problems in the area can be resolved, together with the possible introduction of one-way traffic schemes. In addition to these major environmental improvements other works of landscaping and tree planting are being considered". Gardens have great visual impact on their surroundings and can add immeasurably to the environment, so let us hope for improvements here.

So also can waterways, and in this area we are fortunate to have the lovely Hughen brook running from its source at Spring Rising just at the foot of Cryers Hill down through the National Trust and Hughenden Park grounds and then on through, behind the back gardens of the houses flanking Hughenden Road, eventually being culverted as it nears the town centre. A lot of its route is followed by a public footpath much used by the town's residents, but where it is bordered also by factory premises it appears to be treated like an open refuse tip. Could it once again become a thing of beauty for the town's benefit?

The booklet also states "With good co-operation between the residents and the Council, the area can be made a much more pleasant place in which to live". Dare we believe that the decay is to be halted? I for one very much hope so, and I am sure we all wish the Council every success in its endeavours.

Colin Adams

Alan Weyman and Friends

Alan Weyman is very well known on the musical entertainment scene in the High Wycombe District and much sought after by amateur musical societies. His charisma couples a magnificent baritone voice with dynamic stage presence, which he has used in an extensive range of roles.

When not performing in 'set pieces' Alan's love of music brings him and his friends together from time to time to perform a selection of songs of their own choice. We are very lucky to have persuaded him and his friends Barbara Brown, Jackie Jackson and pianist Paul Beechey to present for us an evening of popular songs from musical entertainment and light classical repertoire, which will be varied, entertaining and fun.

This is to be on Friday 12th June at the Royal British Legion, St. Mary's Street at 8 p.m. Tickets £2.00 excluding refreshments. We know this will be a very popular event, so book your place early - bring your friends.

Barbara Rippington

John Lewis Partnership

The application by the John Lewis Partnership to establish a large shopping complex on land overlooking the M40 in the Booker/Cressex area does not meet with universal approval. The Society has expressed deep misgivings about the very considerable traffic and other problems which will arise if approval is given. One of our members, Ken Barclay, is a local resident fearful of the future, and the following contribution from Ken gives his impression of the serious problems which lie ahead.

"Growing Mini-town will have everything"...

(This is a quote from a Bucks Free Press feature article last year). We who have to live in the Boom Town feel it should have added "including traffic jams, congestion, poor environment, noise, pollution and danger". The Mini-town referred to is actually Booker, still a relatively quiet residential area on the southern edge of the town. However the Wycombe District Council is intent on changing all that for a bag of gold. Our fields and recreational areas are highly prized commercial development areas. Never mind the old, the young, the families. Forget the Cressex Master Plan - the Council can and is making millions from our green fields. As a short term measure, the Council will never have it so good, with £6 million from ASDA, £8 million from Booker Business Park, £7 million from John Lewis. The Council has just about sold all the fields we had, and now the residents have the rest of their lives to "enjoy" commercial development, wholesale outlets and Super Stores. Whatever happened to Planning? Whatever

Whatever happened to Planning? Whatever happened to local people's expectations? Whatever happened to High Wycombe?

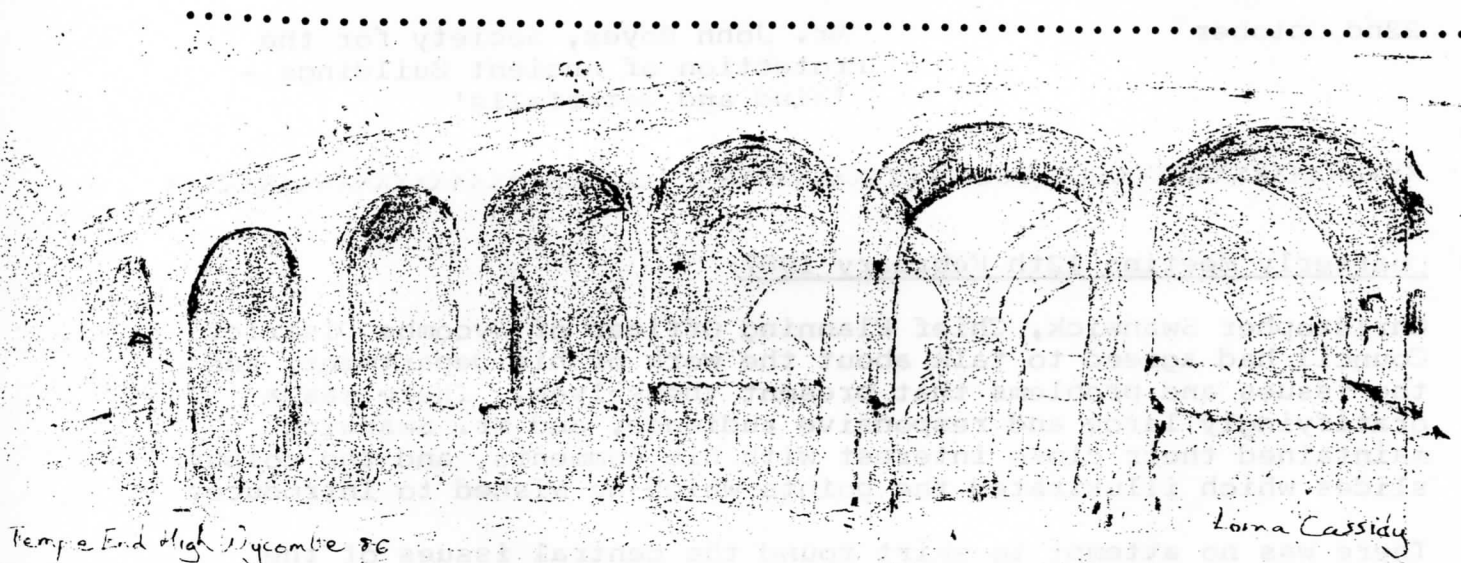
Ken Barclay

Ted Kearney

Our President, Ted Kearney, died on 29th March, after a long illness. He had struggled bravely but the mounting odds proved too much for him. Ted was Chairman of the Society for many years, and he was an example to all of us, with his dedication to our aims and his ability to draw the best out of those who worked with him. No matter how hard pressed he was with other commitments, he always made a strenuous effort to attend Committee and Society meetings, and he made many major and skilful contributions to our projects and exhibitions. We will miss Ted so much. Whenever we thought about him, we thought too of Lottie, his wife and loving companion. Her great qualities and courage are so well known to us, and these she demonstrated so wonderfully during Ted's illness. This has been a difficult time for her and we are sure that their many friends will provide some kind of solace during the months ahead.

Jack Scruton

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Frogmoor Viaduct

Sadly, we will be saying 'goodbye' to the Frogmoor Viaduct this summer. It is coming down at a cost of £100,000 to make way for the new Frogmoor Relief Road.

Lorna Cassidy organised a good fight to save it, collecting hundreds of signatures (and we thank all of you who sent yours in), but despite a plea to the authorities, it has to be demolished.

I went along with Lorna and Frances Alexander to meet the highway engineers at County Hall, Aylesbury, and we were admitted to the engineer's office promptly and treated with great sympathy and understanding. They really don't want to pull it down, but there are standards to which new roads have to be constructed. A dual carriageway must have two carriageways, and each must be at least six metres wide and have sidewalks, and these just will not fit between the arches of the old disused viaduct. Furthermore, the District Council have begged for this new road, and they have all been talking about it for nearly 20 years, so it is time they got on with it (well, when they have the funds). And they do realise that there are probably lots of people who don't want the new road, but the District Councillors have approved it, so it has to be.

That is the official view, and at the time of writing it prevails. Lorna is going to present the petition to the District Council, and ask them to reconsider. I'm sure we all second that.

Anna Birks



Future Programme

28th April in the British
Legion Hall at 8 p.m.

Annual General Meeting, followed by a
talk about Urban Wildlife sites by a
representative of BBONT.

27th April - 5th May

Town and Water Trails on 26th April
and 3rd May. Town Trail meet at the
Parish Church at 2 p.m. Water Trail
meet at Pann Mill at 2 p.m.
Stall at the Parish Church on 2nd May
from 8.30 a.m.

12th June in the British
Legion Hall at 8 p.m.

Musical Evening with Alan Weyman and
Friends - Tickets £2 each from
Barbara Rippington H.W. 26616

22nd October

Mr. John Boyes, Society for the
Protection of Ancient Buildings -
'Wind and Waterfalls'

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Quarterly Meeting 12th February 1987

Christopher Swanwick, Chief Planning Officer of Wycombe District Council had agreed to talk about the work of his Department, and the issues and problems that present themselves. There was a gratifyingly large and responsive audience, and Mr. Swanwick maintained their close interest with his comments, and the colour slides which illustrated the points which he wished to introduce.

There was no attempt to skirt round the central issues of the town centre Octagon refurbishment, the Arts Centre site behind the High Street, and the continual and unremitting pressures placed on the local environment by planning applications. Indeed the central theme was (in essence) 'continuing change and how to face up to it'. Mr. Swanwick did not deny that disastrous, or at best, dismal planning decisions had been made in High Wycombe (albeit largely before his arrival at W.D.C.).

Nevertheless, he presented a robust brief on his Department's attempts to produce a coherent Area Plan, and to oppose the least acceptable, and to modify and/or accept the planning applications with inherent merit. The town centre shop fascias were discussed, with photographed examples, to good effect.

The present Government's attitude to Planning Policy, and the problems inherent in the farmlands, which are likely to be surplus food production requirements, were also noted and illustrated, with particular regard to the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Green Belt.

The evening concluded with pertinent questions which Mr. Swanwick answered briskly with a welcome frankness. We are grateful to him for giving up his time to the Society, and Jack Scruton's Vote of Thanks had accurately and amusingly referred to the bustling activity in the Planning Department, and the predominance of charming lady planning assistants to deal with the uninterrupted flow of callers and enquirers to the office.

Roger Lawson