

High Wycombe Society

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UNDER THREAT

See H7 enquiry report
overleaf.

NINETEEN SEVENTY THREE ENDED FOR THE SOCIETY IN A CRESCENDO OF PLANNING ACTIVITY - of greater significance to all of us than anything before. We begin this newsletter therefore with Planning Group's four-part report:

'Change and Choice'

Firstly, the Structure Plan. We have solicited views from local Residents' Associations and formed our Policy, which has been sent to the County Council in response to the County document "Change and Choice". There was a good turn-out for the Public Meeting at the Town Hall on 19th November, when Hugh Osborn made it clear to the County Planning officials that we could only support Strategy II, which means limiting growth in the Wycombe District to existing commitments, and encouraging growth in the North of the County at Milton Keynes.

A very significant statement was made at the Public Meeting by Mr. Knowles, Deputy Planning Officer for the County. He stated that the "High Wycombe Planning Review" document published in 1969 (which first made reference to "H" or Housing Areas) was now dead. This was not a planning policy document, but one produced to encourage local participating in possible changes in the Wycombe Area. The feedback and ideas received by the County Planning Department made it clear that many of the possibilities, such as relief roads and "H" areas, were contrary to local opinion. Mr. Knowles made it clear that no planning policy for the District would be finalised until the Structure Plans had been agreed. Within this framework the new local Planning Authority would draw up a local District Plan, which would become the planning policy for the Wycombe District. It was stressed that local participation was vital for the success of such local planning.

The Current Major Problems

We wonder whether it is because of the progress now being made towards the Structure Plan, or because of the imminence of the new Wycombe District Council, that we have experienced a rush of new applications for development and appeals.

There are 4 major schemes now facing us:

H.7. - Appeal held for use of AONB agricultural land at Terriers/Hazlemere for private speculative development.

H.3. - Compulsory Purchase Order and outline application for development at Bellfield.

H.2. - Lord Carrington wishing to sell his land for development by the local Councils at Cressex.

Gomm Valley - Compulsory Purchase Order and outline application for extensive development by the local Councils.

Although we agree that there is a need for a certain amount of low-cost housing in Central Wycombe (ideally to bring back life to our "deserts"), we cannot see justification for all these large developments now proposed. Wycombe's facilities and amenities^ are limited and already congested. How can we possibly cater for another 15,000 people? Surely we must bring pressure to bear on the planning authority to make sure the District Plan is developed sensibly to meet our needs. It must not be pre-empted or eclipsed by further ad hoc schemes.

The H.7 Campaign and Enquiry

We stated in our letter to the Secretary of State for the Environment concerning the II. 7 . Appeal:-

"We and our Affiliated Societies in the Wycombe District want to see some positive and effective planning, and development for the benefit of all.

Wycombe's present dilemma is that its centre was once a thriving and balanced community. Due to lack of proper planning, we now have an imbalance and lifeless "deserts" in the centre. The only way to overcome this is by sensible planning. We are most encouraged by the Structure Planning methods now being adopted and believe this is the only way for success. Your policy, which rightly encourages local participation, must, in our view be put into practice" .

We gave our support to the group of Residents' Associations in the campaign launched to defend the precious countryside in the Terriers and Hazlemere areas. The Action Committee which was formed embraced representatives of these Associations together with

those of the A.404 Action Committee, the C.P.R.E., Chiltern Society, and the High Wycombe Society. The Action Committee was very ably stirred into action by Peter Stoker, who is also a member of the High Wycombe Society. He not only gave evidence regarding the traffic aspects, but above all ensured that there was a properly co-ordinated approach by objectors at the Inquiry. For this purpose legal and technical advisers and Counsel were retained. This all cost a great deal of money, and Norman Waterman was a key figure in the fund raising and in gaining public support. A sum of £2,000 was raised. A public meeting was held in Hazlemere, when 500 local residents gave their backing for the campaign. Peter and Cliff Prout also organised a march through Central Wycombe to draw public attention to the campaign. Cliff also carried out a great deal of publicity work. A large number of others contributed their time and money, notably Brian Tomkins and Vic Gee of Hazlemere Residents' Association, Clive Bray of Brands Hill Residents' Association, Mr. Alexander of the C.P.R.E., Peter Mould of the Chiltern Society, and Hugh Osborn of the High Wycombe Society. Special mention is made later of the notable achievement of Mrs. Hoare, a local resident. Barbara and Roger Rippington of the High Wycombe Society carried out a survey of the significant trees and took some fine photographs, which were enlarged in splendid fashion by Alan Hutchinson and submitted to the Inspector. Lorna Cassidy gave evidence concerning the historical and archaeological importance of the area, as seen through the eyes of an artist, and included her own sketches of the four farmsteads, some of which we reproduce here.

Lesson for the Future

It will be seen from this report, which only skims the surface, that an appeal of this nature needs an enormous amount of work, much of it against the clock. Apart from continuing pressure for proper planning, we must have an efficient planning organisation to fight future planning appeals. The H.7. campaign should set the pattern. We believe it is necessary to draw together all local Residents' and Tenants' Associations, so that we can work as a team at short notice. Initially it is recommended that:

1. Each Association should appoint a Planning representative.
2. Each representative should make contact with our Planning Group Secretary - Mrs. R. Shooter (Tel. 26964).
3. Our planning Group will advise representatives of current planning applications, and will bring all together to agree upon the strategy for dealing with major planning applications and appeals.

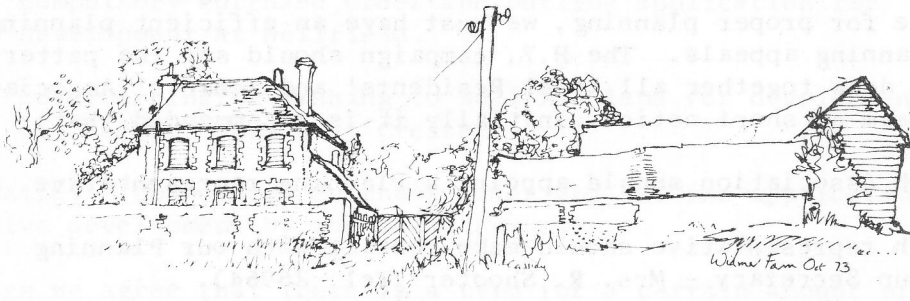
It is essential that we are well organised to deal with the new Local Planning Authority when it comes into operation from April, 1974. The local District Plan for the Wycombe District must reflect our needs and wants.



Mrs. Heather M. Hoare and the battle for Grange Farm and Widmer Farm

Heather M. Hoare was born and bred in the neighbourhood, and her mother used to collect milk from Grange Farm when she was a little girl. Heather realised when the H.7. battle loomed that the two farms were not listed. She then fought a continuous and very- wearing battle, determined to succeed where others had failed. She managed to interest Mr. Michael Gilman, the County Historic Buildings Officer and Mr. Elvey an expert in such buildings and a fellow member of the Bucks Archaeological Society. The fact that Grange Farm was of mediaeval "cruck" construction was a factor which persuaded all three that the battle must be won. In order to photograph the "cruck" construction, Mr. Gilman had to be higher than the upper floor. Heather nobly volunteered to act as a step ladder. Mr. Gilman was understandably reluctant, but realising the depths of her feelings, agreed, and the vital photographs were taken. These, together with Mr. Elvey's detailed survey, were sent to the Ministry, and to Mrs. Hoare's joy the Inspector announced on the first day of the Inquiry that both farms had been listed.

This account is necessarily brief. Much more could be told of Heather's tremendous efforts to save a part of our previous heritage. Our community is indebted to her - and to her long-suffering and sympathetic husband'.



Trees Group Report

Our efforts this year will be concentrated initially on our local woodlands and we hope to interest local Residents Association's and schools in 'adopting' their own nearest wood for interest, exploration and enjoyment. If enough of those who live in the vicinity of the woods are alert to their value and the pleasure they offer much can be done in vigilance and care to safeguard them.

For example we welcome information on the Mattress Man who drops his inexhaustible supply of old bedding in every wood. It is suspected he is of the same kin as the Bedstead Man, although this is as yet unconfirmed. We have a good body of helpers following his trail, and if anyone can help us to anticipate him and point him in the direction of the nearest refuse tip this will be helpful.

After many enjoyable walks of the H.7. area we have been gratified to become acquainted with this delightful rural pleasure ground. A true beauty spot for picnic lovers, walkers and family outings. We hope our evidence of the value of the superb hedges and individual trees there, and as well as Cockshoot Wood itself, has given weight to support for retention of the area.

Anthony Smith writes:

Unpleasing Diversion

The Water Group held a special meeting in November to discuss the plans of the Thames Conservancy for the Wye at Loudwater, which had been brought to the notice of the Group by Mr. Taylor of the Loudwater Residents' Association River Group. Mr. Lucas and Mr. Bennett, the Land Drainage Engineer and the Senior Engineer respectively to the Thames Conservancy were kind enough to attend the meeting so that members could put their views and hear something of the future aims and thinking of the Thames Conservancy.

Members' concern arose from the intention to completely re-route the Wye across the Lammas Land at Loudwater, thereby cutting off the big loop that runs through Snakeley and Hedge Mills. The proposed new cut would leave the old channel just above Snakeley Mill and rejoin it by Clapton Revell, and was objected to on two grounds: the loss of the old channel which has a great deal of natural charm, and the loss of much needed amenity space if the Lammas Land is to be bisected by the new channel.

Flooding

Mr. Lucas was clearly of the opinion that re-routing the Wye was the only possible solution to the problems of the river at Loudwater. He instanced two cases of flooding in 1967 (in one case Messrs Railko was flooded to a depth of 16 ins. and a great deal of damage was done) and averred that the capacity of the Wye is now becoming inadequate to deal with sudden rises in the flow at times of heavy rain and storms. The position has become worse in recent years firstly because there has been a definite increase in the number and severity of cyclonic storms, and secondly because intensive development around Wycombe has meant that much less rain can sink through the ground to the aquifer: instead it is run off through the drains into the river to cause Mash Flooding. The problems at Loudwater are intensified because of the constricted river channels beneath Snakeley and Hedge Mills; hence the intention to bypass them entirely, whilst allowing a minor monitored flow through Hedge Mill for its own needs.

Other Ways

— There was considerable discussion over the points that Mr. Lucas had raised. Members were not entirely convinced that the proposals embodied the only possible solution; for example the culvert at Snakeley Mill could be opened up now that the Mill is scheduled for re-development in any case, thus removing at least one of the constriction problems. It was also pointed out that the flooding referred to was the result of exceptional circumstances: the motorway was under construction at the time and soakaways to allow for run-off had not been completed; such conditions would be unlikely to occur again. The possibility was suggested of a smaller channel across the Lammas Land, which would act merely as an overflow when the water rose above a certain height. This would permit retention of the present channel and would not result in the same loss of amenity space as the Thames Conservancy plan. To many of our members this still appears to be the best compromise solution.

Ominous future

However, there is at the moment a legal dispute over the ownership of the Lammas Land through which the new cut must pass' it is claimed both by Hedge Mill and as common land by the Parish Council. As the Thames Conservancy cannot implement their plan without the owners' permission, the whole plan must remain in abeyance until the legal wrangle is resolved. This must delay any material action for possibly two years, but it remains an ominous future for those of us who love the river in its natural state (present drought notwithstanding) and a final death plan, should it come to pass, to the hopes of Loudwater Residents for a reasonable area of open space for recreation within the village .

Town & Country
Planning Amendment)
Act 1972 -

A formidable title for a very wise and timely piece of legislation.

One of its provisions is the protection of buildings in Conservation Areas which are not scheduled. Our new District Council will be responsible for compiling a list of such buildings which give character to our Conservation Areas. These buildings on their own might be considered undistinguished, but taken as a Group or a whole street they blend very happily together and also enhance the impact of the scheduled buildings. We hope to help with this work and are confident that the District Council will adopt a generous attitude. Inclusion on the list does not mean that a building will be protected indefinitely or be the subject of fierce public inquiries, but it does enable much greater thought to be given to demolition and replacement. Above all it will prevent sudden demolition without permission, which is now legal. The Society does not think it would be wise, or even possible, to keep a Conservation Area as a museum piece. There must be change, but it must be gradual and for the better. Many towns have suffered wholesale destruction even worse than High Wycombe. By sensible use of the new Act these widespread acts of vandalism could soon be a thing of the past.

Chequers Appeal Fund

The Treasurer reports that he has called upon various members of the Society who agreed to act as guarantors in the event of the Appeal Fund falling short of the final amount required. He hopes that in due course he will be able to repay them in full or part, and to this end the Society hopes to arrange fund raising activities, perhaps in partnership with the Chiltern Society. There is an opportunity here for members to identify themselves with a struggle that has captured the imagination of Societies throughout the country. Help us to meet the outstanding debt of £400, and reduce the burden on guarantors, by sending a donation to J. Cottrell, 13, London Road, High Wycombe. The Chiltern Society has agreed to meet half the debt, so any donations from members will also help them by reducing their commitment.

The restoration of Nos. 19 and 20 Easton Street

Mr. Hodson, who is mentioned above, has carried out a remarkable restoration of the above properties, rescuing them from what seemed inevitable demolition. We asked him to contribute an account for the Newsletter, and we print below the first part of this. We will publish the rest of the account in our next Newsletter.

When Jack Scruton asked me to write a feature on the restoration of 19 and 20 Easton Street for the Newsletter of the High Wycombe Society, I was pleased but my first words to him were "How much do you need". I could write a book". But sitting here with a blank piece of paper in my typewriter and my fingers hovering over the keys, I just don't know where to start.

The Toll House

Quotations we have received from two large contractors are fantastically high. (£6,588 and £7,517). The delay in getting quotations and the high figures indicate, we think, the reluctance of the larger companies to do this kind of restoration while there is so much more profitable construction work about.

A local builder, Mr. Douglas Hodson, who is completing a most sympathetic restoration of two listed buildings at 19/20 Easton Street, has just had a look at the Toll House and has promised a more realistic quotation based on a simplified specification and allowing for some work to be performed by voluntary labour by members of this Society and the Cricket Club.

Meanwhile, on the subject of grants towards the cost, the Society expects a favourable reply from the County towards the end of the present month. The Borough will consider a grant when they have evidence in the shape of a more realistic estimate, and we are also putting our case to the Pilgrim Trust, who have indicated interest.

I suppose the best place would be at the beginning but when I think back to the beginning it's like looking back into the Dark Ages. Indeed it was very dark and gloomy in 19 and 20 Easton Street when I first purchased them two years ago. The two buildings looked like derelict slums. One side of No. 19 was shored up to stop it collapsing and completely exposed to the elements having lost it's supporting neighbour (Leslie Baker's Dental Surgery) to the "Bulldozer Brigade". The front plate glass windows had been smashed and these were boarded up. Practically every window was broken.

The only 'bright' place in the two buildings was the little front ground floor office of No. 20 where I had been running my flooring business since 1965. Despite the fact that the window seemed to be getting continually smashed by drunks and vandals it had an individual charm about it, and when my lease expired in 1968 I was reluctant to leave the premises.

I made approaches to the new owners, the G.P.O., for a renewal of lease and was given what seemed like a stay of execution knowing that at any time the bulldozers could be snapping at the buildings like wild dogs. Then I heard a whisper that somebody somewhere was objecting to the demolition of the buildings, so I stayed put and hoped.

The next thing I knew was that a man from the Ministry was asking me if I would like to buy them as they were not going to be pulled down. I was overjoyed. I managed to arrange the financial side of things, and after what seemed an endless transaction hampered by long drawn out Ministry procedure the two buildings were finally acquired in January 1972.

Little did I know what I was letting myself in for. A preservation order was immediately placed on the two buildings and I knew I would have to "have a go" at restoring them.

I had been associated with the Building Industry for 14 years and had a fair working knowledge of most trades. Also I had a love for "old things" and sensed that 19 and 20 Easton Street could be restored to their former beauty despite the fact that woodworm and death watch beetle were crawling out of the walls, and some of the oak timbers were as soft as cork due to dry-rot, wet-rot and every other form of wood attack'. Fungi grew from the timbers under the valleys of the roof like something out of Quatermass. The so-called experts from the Chequers enquiry would have doomed the building without bothering to even hold an enquiry on this.

It was an absolute shambles. Pigeons were nesting in the top rooms and plaster was falling from the damp walls; ceilings were sagging, and the roof leaked. Where do you begin - At the beginning.

Undaunted, I decided to strip the building back to its shell, but before starting this, I had the roof seen to first. It was stripped back to the rafters, felted, battened and re-tiled with the same tiles except for replacements for damaged and broken ones.

Work then began on the rest of the buildings and gradually as we pulled away layers and layers of wall-paper and inch-thick plaster, the building began to reveal itself.

It was timber framed and in remarkably good condition. Beautiful oak timbers and beams showed their faces which had been covered for centuries. Wattle and daub panels were discovered. A beautiful old inglenook fireplace was found all bricked up behind a Victorian one. A fascinating main beam still in its original bent tree trunk state was discovered in one of the top rooms. We marvelled at every find.

Others more knowledgeable about historic buildings were soon on the scene: Mr. Gilman from the Bucks County Council Historic Buildings Department; Mr. David Atwell G.L.C. Historic Buildings and the late Mr. Ewart Steevens from the High Wycombe Society.

The building was put to be 400 years old - late Elizabethan.

I was now even more determined to do a full restoration job and at my own pace, with the help of my own labour force - none of whom had ever worked on old buildings before, we set about the task.

European Architectural Heritage Year.

The report referred to in our last Newsletter has now reached 20 pages, and has been completed in draft form. It is a comprehensive guide to the opportunities for improvement throughout the Conservation Area, and the surrounding territory, and we hope to discuss this document with the Local Authority in the very near future.

Two Exhibitions

A display was staged recently in the Borough Library introducing the public to the Society's hopes for the forthcoming Heritage Year activities in the town. This was the work of Tony Clowes and Roger Henderson, and we would like to pay a tribute to the original and witty approach to this subject.

A more detailed Exhibition is being planned as part of the Wycombe Arts Festival, to be held in the Guildhall from 4th to 16th March inclusive. The Society has been fortunate in past Festival Exhibitions in help which has been received from members who volunteered-> to man them. The Hon. Secretary would be very pleased to receive names of members who will be willing this year to carry out one or more stints of two hours during the period 10. a.m. to 6 p.m. (The Exhibition will be closed on the Sunday).

For your Diary

We are holding our next Quarterly Meeting for members and Affiliated Societies at 7.45 p.m. on Friday, 8th February, 1974, in the Guildhall. Details are given in the letter attached.

On Friday, 8th March, at 8 p.m., the Trees Group has arranged an interesting evening in the Friends' Meeting House, 25 London Road, High Wycombe when Mrs. Susan Cowdy will talk and show slides about woodlands and wild life. Mrs. Cowdy is a well known Naturalist, and is the Secretary of the Bucks Branch of the Bucks., Berkshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists' Trust. Refreshments will be served. Members outside the Trees Group will be very welcome.

We are holding our Annual General Meeting on Friday, 26th April, in the Guildhall, beginning at 8. p.m. Apart from the important Elections and Annual Reports, we hope to show a new film about Transport Problems called "Going Places".

Canal Trip

Derek Woods is arranging another Canal trip on Saturday, May 18th. A coach will leave High Wycombe at a time to be decided later, and will proceed to Newbury. We will then travel up and down the beautiful Avon-Kennet Canal, in a barge pulled by almost the last Canal horses, and then return by coach to High Wycombe. If any member is interested in this trip please phone Derek at High Wycombe 20284, or write to him at 19 Adelaide Road, High Wycombe.

Footpath Walk

Ron Sims has arranged another attractive footpath walk for Easter Monday, 15th April, and he hopes that many members and their children will come along. The walk is as follows:

Meet at 10 a.m. at Harrison's Car Park (off Coates Lane). Walk through Tinkers Woods to Downley and on across Naphill Common to Walters Ash and Speen, stopping for lunch at King William IV public house, where sandwiches may be eaten in the garden. On through Piggott's Wood to Pipers, and return through Brand's or Four Ashes. Distance: Uncertain, but about 12 miles. Please make a note in your diary. Picnic lunch and stout shoes essential.

STOP PRESS

Members will be interested to hear about an important new series of evening lectures organised by the Workers Education Association (WEA) which will be held at the High Wycombe College of Technology starting next month.

The title for the course is 'OUTLOOK FOR WYCOMBE' and the programme consists of six separate though related lecture/discussions on a whole range of local environmental issues as follows:

- 1) 13th February - Introductory lecture by Patrick Reyntiens (Society President)
- 2) 20th February - Planning
- 3) 27th February - Historic Buildings
- 4) 6th March - Road Traffic
- 5) 13th March - River Wye
- 6) 20th March - Trees

Further details will be available from the College and in the local press nearer the time. Speakers from the Forestry Commission, and County Planning and Road Traffic Engineering Offices are expected to take part as well as informed specialist members of the Society.

Try and come along to one or more; there's a lot of interest here for us.

Trees for Sale

Thanks to the co-operation of the Borough Council (not to mention the imagination and initiative of the Trees Group), the Society will be running a charity stall under the Old Market House in the Town Centre on Saturday 2nd March.

For sale will be a great variety of very young deciduous trees 12-20 ins. high, ready for transplanting now. Prices will be reasonable; all profit will be used to purchase larger, more mature trees for the Society to locate at selected sites around the town.





Looking forward. . .

Next newsletter has a feature on playgrounds

