



High Wycombe Society

HON

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NEWSLETTER No, 23 WINTER 1974/75

The Future of High Wycombe and District

Planning- applications of some magnitude pose serious problems for the Wycombe District and will most surely involve the Society and other organisations in an attempt to prevent High Wycombe becoming another Slough. In addition to large scale development at Cressex and at Bellfield, others are crowding upon us. Here are some of the more important ones.

Deangarden Rise

Although Ideal Homes have managed to build along the valley bottom over the last few years, they have been prevented from ruining the attractive slopes which lie between the houses and Deangarden Wood. This area is not only a precious amenity to Deangarden Residents: it is a pleasant stretch to look at from the other side of the High Wycombe valley, offering- some kind of relief from the mutilation of the northern slopes of the town. To develop the area for housing- would not only destroy something which is beautiful^ traffic problems would arise in the hazardous Abbey Barn Lane area, as the developers would need to cut a road into the lane. There are also problems of schooling. The Society and Deangarden Residents will support the local authority at the Public Inquiry on 21st January.

Loudwater

The Argyle Securities, having bought the old Snakely Mill site at Loudwater, applied to develop the attractive site for massive warehousing. The application called for the culverting of part of the River Wye and the demolition of the fine old Mill House. As a result of opposition from the County Planning authority, supported by the Loudwater Residents' Association and this Society, the application was refused and the Old Mill House was placed on the Statutory list of buildings of historic or architectural merit. Even more important, the County Planning Committee stated that there was a greater need for housing and that the land should be used for that purpose. This seemed at the time a most welcome and courageous decision.

Recently Argyle Securities submitted a new application - again for warehousing, but with a very limited amount of housing and without culverting the River. This application has received the approval of the Wycombe District Council and it has been indicated that the County Committee would not now wish to pursue the matter of houses instead of warehouses. The Loudwater Residents' Association and the Society's Planning Group are dismayed by the reversal of the previous County decision. We appreciate that there are certain financial difficulties, and problems connected with the old filter beds, but we believe something far better could have been wrought. We are of course pleased that our efforts and those of the local residents resulted in the preservation of the old Mill House and the River.

Gomm Valley

Although the Bucks County Council considered that the Gomm Valley should be placed in the Green Belt, the old Borough Council, and now the Wycombe District Council, consider that the land should be given up to housing. The current needs of local people are of course extremely important, but these needs can be satisfied by the completion of projects already under way or for which approval has or will be given, or by building in the right

places within the confines of the town. Above all we stand by the principle of limited growth in this area. This is one of the key factors in the preparation of a sensible County Structure Plan. To plan otherwise will create a large conurbation in the South of the County, destroy completely any character which our town still possesses, and swallow many places which should remain separate, such as Penn and Tylers Green.

The Gomm Valley is a most attractive tongue, which separates the built up areas of Cock Lane and Hammersley Lane and is the last remaining piece of countryside on that side of the town. It is agricultural land and it is becoming obvious that the need to grow as much food as possible is going to be the most important task facing the people of this country.

The Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Naturalists' Trust is also deeply interested in the area and in particular the need to protect their Nature Reserve and the unique chalk flora and fauna of this area.

All in all we feel justified in this instance in opposing the local authority and we believe that our Members and affiliated Societies will support us.

Hugh Osborn.

Coombe Farm. Hughenden.

Without a doubt there is a need in the District for low cost homes - this one can recognise and readily accept. It can also be recognised - but not so readily accepted - that until this need is, satisfied there will be pressures, pressures on such areas as Coombe Valley.

Situated approximately two miles north-west of High Wycombe, Coombe Valley is the subject of a local inquiry on 1st April into an appeal by Bovis Homes (Southern) Ltd to develop a golf course and housing on 221 acres lying between Naphill and Hughenden Valley.

Typically Chiltern landscape, and within the approved extension to the Metropolitan & Local Green Belt, the site is mainly farmland which acts as a natural break between the two villages; any such development as proposed would be completely contrary to the accepted and sensible policies presently existing.

With the intention of briefing council to represent them at the inquiry the Hughenden Valley and Naphill Residents Associations formed a joint committee to collect funds and have raised £1200 for the Coombe Valley Preservation Campaign.

The committee are seeking assistance, not financial, from anyone in sympathy with their objective, those who are concerned with the preservation of the Green Belt. Support can be provided by writing to the Secretary, Department of the Environment, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9LZ quoting reference number APP/2516/A/74/1929.

Clifford Prout.



A view from the Cricket Ground showing- that over 3/4 of the Toll House still remains.

THE TOLL HOUSE

A big question mark still hangs over the future of the Toll House.

The High Wycombe Sports Club (which incorporates the Cricket Club) has written to the High Wycombe District Council seeking to find their view on whether or not the building should be restored. Apparently the Sports Club's General Committee had recommended to their Trustees that in view of the condition, and possible danger of the damaged structure, the building should be demolished.

It will be recalled that the District Council said last June that they were not prepared to make a grant as they took the view that our proposals for restoration would amount to the building of a replica.

So far we have had no indication from the Sports Club as to the insurance position. Grants from the Pilgrim Trust and Leche Trust might, be forthcoming but these bodies have difficulty in making funds available to non-charitable organisations such as the Sports Club. In any event it is unlikely that such contributions as they could make, together with the funds we have already collected, would cover the expense of restoration.

We have now written to the Georgian Group to ask their opinion on restoring the building, and particularly on the question of authenticity. Admittedly the front - the part visible from the road - has been completely knocked down, but at least three-quarters of the structure does remain. Meanwhile we have strongly urged the Sports Club not to take any irrevocable step before a meeting of the interested parties, including the Society, has been called to discuss this difficult question in full.

What if, eventually, the Toll House has to be demolished? The Chiltern Society, we learn, are hopeful of establishing an open-air museum of architecture of local interest. Might the High Wycombe Toll House be rebuilt there using as much of the original material as possible? This must, however, be a last resort.



NEW LIFE FOR OLD JARS Clifford Farrant writes :

With recent experience of buildings literally disappearing from the town centre almost overnight, many members will have viewed with some concern the posting of FOR SALE notices on the former Colman's Stores premises in the High Street. Bad enough to lose the service offered by the useful little shop itself, but the loss of the building, with its unusual period fascia would be a blow at a time when more public interest than ever is being directed towards the unique architectural heritage we have around us.

Some fear certainly seemed justified when the building was given a change-of-use approval by the Planning Committee in November; it will no longer serve the community as a shop at all, for yet another Building Society is to take it over for office premises.

But architecturally the worst has not happened for at least the external appearance is to be preserved more or less intact - including- the key feature - those symbolic oil jars at either end of the name board (see Lorna Cassidy's illustration alongside). And thereby hangs a tale, for it transpires those jars are believed to be unique outside London.

By a coincidence an article appeared in the middle of last year describing some research carried out on the oil jar as a shop sign, and which was drawn to our attention when a member of the Society who had read the article (in London Archaeologist, Summer 1974) spotted Mrs Cassidy in the High Street with her sketchbook looking at the shop in question.

Many traditional trade signs are still to be seen of course; some like inn signs still mean more or less what they always did. while others have changed their meaning somewhat over the years (not many barbers double today as surgeons, which was the original significance of the 'bandaged' pole) and others still like the pawnbrokers¹ three golden balls, are sometimes found on premises no longer carrying on the trade for which they were originally the advertisement. Which brings us to the oil jars. It seems they signified what you might expect - an oil merchants and have a mainly 18th century origin, though some were still being installed as late as 1870. Where a projecting shelf allowed it, the jars were whole but if not 'half-jars' were used instead, as at Coltman¹s. For this purpose a single jar was halved by drilling a hole in the base and cutting down to this on either side with a saw (some saw, for they are real earthenware, not plaster replicas!)

Only twenty such jars were still in position in 1973 when the survey was carried out - and all were in London apart from our own. Interestingly too I notice a number of these were on premises still called 'stores'¹.

Many more are no longer to be seen - like those on the little hardware shop which somehow remained in the middle of Carnaby Street well into the 'swinging London' era until being pulled down in 1972.

All the more reason for looking after our own then. (I hope the Woolwich don't paint them white or something; they should be red really).

I'm sure Mr. Jowett to whom I am grateful for the article would be pleased to hear of any members who in their travels outside London may have seen others. You can contact him via the Secretary.

Planning Applications Watchdog

To some, the term "watchdog" calls to mind a loyal animal servant, one might say loveable rather than lovely: to others, a noisy, obtuse creature, evilly disposed to all except his master, to whom he presents a convenient target for the foot in times of frustration.

These terms do not describe the attractive and versatile Mrs Kathleen Peatey, whose function it is, by scrutinising the complete list of planning application and applications for alterations, to act as watchdog for our Planning Group. Perhaps this is why the Secretary chose me to write a few words on my own duties as the other watchdog - for the Buildings Group - specially concerned with planning applications for buildings which are listed or within the Conservation Area. So as not to pre-empt the material for a later article, I shall not say anything about Mrs. Peatey's invaluable work at this stage.

How does one ensure that the Society's voice is heard when alterations to buildings which are listed, or fall within the Conservation Area, are proposed? Firstly, we get to know of them through the public notices which must be inserted in the local press, and from the notices which have to be affixed to the affected buildings themselves. The watchdog must therefore comb the local newspapers for such public notices, which are dotted about each edition in different and unlikely

places. Of course, he needs to be fairly familiar with building's in the Conservation Area and to keep an ear open, too, for local information.

When a notice of intended alteration appears, the Society - like any other interested party - has 21 days during which it can make representations on the application to the Planning Officer and Architect of the District Council. So it is desirable to examine the detailed proposals and plans as soon as possible, then to visit the site to try to visualise the proposed alterations, leaving sufficient time for enquiries, discussion and consideration. I therefore present myself at the office on the second floor of Bellfield House, where one of the charming young ladies produces the files concerned.

One gains experience on the interpretation of plans. The end product has a habit of looking very different from the neat picture on the drawing-board.

Sadly, the Society is now without the benefit of Ewart Steevens' services as watchdog. A practical builder who has also trained as an architect, Ewart had an unrivalled knowledge of local vernacular architecture and a real feeling for brickwork and craftsmanship.

My practice is to take notes and rough drawings of any "doubtful" cases. These are discussed with the Secretary, and for technical help on really difficult applications we can call on Ross Britain or consult societies like the Georgian Group or the Victorian Society. At meetings of our Buildings Group the most important cases are discussed so that members can see that their watchdog doesn't get too far out of line I

Many of the applications for buildings in the central area are for new shop fronts or for illuminated signs. There is no code of practice to help us, though the Civic Trust has published a useful booklet showing good and bad examples. A shop front should not clash with, say, a Georgian upper storey, and one must take into account the surrounding buildings when making a judgement: it is not always easy to do this from plans. There are different views about illuminated signs in the ^ Conservation Area. We all agree however that there is a tendency for them to become too numerous, too large and too garish. They can also be a distraction to traffic, though this will not apply so strongly when our High Street is pedestrianised.

When we have decided, a letter is sent to the Planning Officer and Architect. The Society makes a practice not only of objecting where this is felt to be needed, but also of commenting favourably on good and worthy designs. This means that an opinion is given on almost every application involving a building which is either listed or within the Conservation Area. These submissions are put before the Planning Committee of the District Council when the application is being considered by them.

Sometimes the Planning Committee will reject a plan which is later revised by the applicant. The watchdog has therefore to keep an eye open for modified proposals.

It is gratifying when we find our proposals have carried weight with the Planning Committee. Elsewhere in this issue Cliff Farrant tells of an interesting incident concerning the proposed change to the front of Coltman's Stores in the High Street - this is one of the numerous cases in which action by the Society has been effective in preventing unsympathetic modification of an interesting and important old building.

EAHY Committee Walkabout

On Sunday mornings most of the population is either worshipping, sleeping, cooking or cleaning the car. So, with streets virtually empty, this is undoubtedly the best time to examine buildings in the Conservation Area.

A group from the newly-formed EAHY Committee has been at work on three successive

Sunday mornings listing improvements which can be made in the High Street, Church Square and Easton Street. This is the area scheduled for the "face-lift".

On the second Sunday, as a diversion from their programme, some of the group helped to provide the "customers" posed, under sunshades and surrounded by potted palms, at tables outside the Falcon Hotel. You will no doubt have seen the photographs in the local press. They took their seats with smiles which wore a little thin when it became apparent that the liquid in the glasses on the tables, in deference to the licensing law, was merely coloured water I

On the walkabout the emphasis was on listing those improvements regarded as immediately practicable, bearing in mind the need to enlist the cooperation of occupiers of property during a year which certainly will not be without its financial problems.

Though one passer-by clearly mistook the working group for a party of property developers, it in fact included councillors, an architect from the Council's Planning Department, an official from their Technical Services Department, and two members of the High Wycombe Society. This practical working together heralds a new era of cooperation between elected representatives, local authority officials and amenity society.

Walter Davies

Group Meetings

On 16th December we had a very pleasant meeting for the Group to hear Ross Britain talk about "The English Country House". It was agreed by those present that we ought to have further meetings of a similar nature. We have therefore arranged a meeting at the Friend's Meeting House, 25 London Road, High Wycombe at 8 p.m. on Friday 7th February, when Derek Woods will show some of his fascinating slides of Old Wycombe. We hope that as many of the Group as possible will come and anyone else interested in Historic buildings. Light refreshments will be provided.

Disraeli Monument

As a result of correspondence with the National Trust, the Trust has now agreed to carry out work to restore the Disraeli Monument. Repairs will be carried out to the stonework and to the pillars of the enclosure wall. Undergrowth within the enclosure will be removed. The Monument is an asset to this very attractive neighbourhood and we know that the Hughenden Park Residents Association will welcome its restoration. It will be a fitting contribution to European Architectural Heritage Year.

Trees Group

Much concern has been expressed recently at the loss of trees on the Rye. Fellings there have been mostly elms struck by Dutch Elm Disease, an elderly Horse Chestnut and a Lime damaged by the fellings. The Parks Department assured us that each tree felled will be replaced. Mr. Tootill, Borough Arboriculture, hopes to start injecting against Dutch Elm Disease in May 1975.

Less reassuring is the news that trees at Desborough Castle are to be felled. The Parks Department inform us that 80% of the trees there are in a dangerous condition and drastic felling will have to take place. The Trees Group met Mr. Tootill there in October to view the situation and exchange ideas but so far we have not succeeded in persuading the Council to replant - their reluctance due to lack of funds and fear of large scale vandalism - as has already occurred in this area. The Parks Department after consultation with the Forestry Commission has suggested that the area might be grassed, with seats and a few trees, an idea which gained approval from some, including

a local headmaster. The Trees Group view is that this is an important landmark, the stand of trees there present a fine sight from many areas of Wycombe, and every attempt should be made to replace them. Perhaps this could be a project for EAHY.

Barbara Rippington.

Historic Buildings Group

The Old Chequers Since we published our last Newsletter we have pressed the Secretary for the Environment for urgent action to ensure the Old Chequers is repaired using his powers under the new Town and Country Amenities Act. Sir John Hall our M.P. is now awaiting a reply to our letters to the Department and we expect a reply very soon.

Walter Kraft.

Quarterly Meetings

The last Quarterly Meeting of the Society was held in the Guildhall on Friday, 18th October, when Mr. Shelley of the Glass Manufacturers' Federation showed film and slides about Glass, touching at the same time upon recycling. This was followed by a panel of people interested in the problems of, and necessity for, the recycling of scarce materials. The panel was chaired very ably by Hugh Osborn, and consisted of Don Gresswell of the Chiltern Society, Mr. Shelley, Mrs. Imogen Bright of the Conservation Society, and Mr. Reg. Dapling, the Deputy Technical Services Officer of the Wycombe District Council. The many members and friends present asked a variety of searching questions. We feel that we must return again to this very important topic; perhaps the Society ought to find some way of taking a more active part. The only disappointment about the Meeting was the absence of nearly all the representatives of Affiliated Societies. We hope they will come to our next Quarterly Meeting on Friday 24th January. Details are given in the enclosed letter.

News from Affiliated Societies

We welcome the affiliation of a new Residents⁵ Association - the Sands Estate Residents' Association. We wish them every success, especially in protecting their locality against the periodical attempts to develop the attractive A.O.N.B. land in the vicinity. The Hon. Secretary of S.E.R.A. is:

Mrs. Jenny Waller, 84 Arundel Road, Sands,
High Wycombe. Tel: H. Wycombe 33087

List of Affiliated Societies

In view of the number of amendments to the List sent out with Newsletter No. 21 11 is necessary to duplicate an up-to-date list and this will be sent out in the near future. Please inform the Hon. Secretary of any changes which have occurred.

Mr. C.J. Rush

We regret to announce the death recently of Mr. C.J. Rush. Mr. Rush was a very valuable member of the Society and he also carried out much work for the community in other fields. We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife and family. His daughter Myra has asked to continue in his place as a member of the Society and we welcome this continued association with the family.