

# Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society

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[www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://www.taplowsociety.org.uk)



# Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society

*Formed in 1959 to protect Hitcham, Taplow and the surrounding countryside from being spoilt by bad development and neglect.*

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Website Adviser & Newsletter Production:  
Andrew Findlay

Contact address: HTTPS, 21 Byways, Burnham, SL1 7EB

**Front cover: Dunloe Lodge after the fire (Fred Russell)**

## Editorial

We are supposed to be apolitical in our society but we cannot ignore the simple realities that it is governmental edicts that govern the way our society functions. Government policies are implemented by local councils, government policies decide that (for example) Regions will exist and so change the way planning works and, whether we like it or not, government policies affect each and every one of us by the mechanisms set up to implement them.

Knowledge of these policies is vital to amenity societies like yours since without this knowledge we cannot effectively represent your views to the local authorities. So, whether your political sympathies lie to the left, right or middle (whatever that means these days), it is useful now and then for your newsletter to examine some of these policies inflicted upon us by government.

In this context I decided to read an imposing document, issued by Ruth Kelly, in her role as head of the Department for Communities and Local Government, called 'Strong and prosperous communities – The Local Government White Paper' – all 247 pages of it. The whole document is littered with motivational words like 'leadership', 'empowered' and 'efficiency', so I felt suitably 'inspired' to write this editorial.

As with all documents of this nature it's best to speed-read it the first time to get the flavour and

the first thing that struck me was that the authors clearly believe the world was created in 1997 and that it consists only of cities and urban communities. To test this impression I carried out a word search and discovered that the word 'countryside' is not mentioned once! Obviously this is not an approved government word, so I tried 'rural' and got precisely 18 hits, each one of which was in a throwaway phrase like this following gem, (referring to migrants in section 8.41): 'Migrants are performing key tasks in our public services. They are also working on our major construction sites and in rural areas, for example in agriculture and tourism'. Seven instances of the word were in just two short paragraphs. I also carried out a search for instances of the word 'agriculture'. It is mentioned just once in the whole document – and that's in the example quoted above. As an example, in another article in this issue, I report on a specific case in which the British farming community is being actively downsized to accord with the EU CAP policies. Perhaps I've got this wrong but I thought that 'local government' and 'communities' were both terms that apply to rural areas such as ours just as much as to the cities and city-regions in our country.

*Fred Russell*

# Recognising Locally Important Sites for Wildlife

[ We are indebted to Joy Marshall for doing the research which unearthed this project. These sites do not receive any statutory protection like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) but are included in local planning documents (Local Development Frameworks). This restricts development that would significantly harm the site. The value of LWS designation is highlighted in Government Planning Documents (e.g.PPS9) Ed.]

The Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Wildlife Sites Project is part of a national scheme to recognise and protect nature conservation sites that are important locally or at a county level, known as Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs). In the past they have been called County Wildlife Sites or Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

They support a diverse range of valuable habitats, such as hay meadows, ancient woodlands and chalk grasslands. All of these habitats have decreased in extent over the past 50 years due to development pressure, agricultural intensification or lack of appropriate management. Local Wildlife Sites can act as wildlife havens, providing corridors and 'stepping stones' for animals, birds and insects, and may even support uncommon species.

In the 1980s sites of potential nature conservation interest were highlighted, and are known as Biological Notification Sites (BNSs). These sites continue to be reviewed and surveyed by the project officer, in order to assess their habitat condition. BNSs that have

sufficient wildlife interest are put forward to the Sites Selection Panel and are assessed against specific criteria. Sites that pass are designated as non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites and are recognised in local planning documents. The Wildlife Sites Project works with other conservation organisations to help landowners manage these sites to maintain and increase their wildlife interest.

Since 2000, two Local Wildlife Sites have been designated in Taplow Parish: Trumper's Field and Maypole Hill (Cliveden Estate), both species-rich grasslands. The remainder of the Cliveden Estate and Taplow Court are being assessed in 2007. Other BNSs in the parish include Bristles Wood, St Nicolas' Churchyard, Wooburn Common, Sheepcote Wood Copse, Homer Wood and Amerden Gravel Pits.

The Wildlife Sites Project is part of the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership, a group of statutory bodies, local authorities, conservation charities, special interest and community groups. The partnership is responsible for delivering the the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, which sets out targets for enhancing and protecting priority wildlife habitats across the county. For more information visit:

[www.bucksinfo.net/wildlife](http://www.bucksinfo.net/wildlife)

For information regarding the Wildlife Sites Project, contact Michelle Dublon, the project officer, on 01296 382705.

## Index of Newsletter Articles

For some time I have been meaning to provide a comprehensive listing of all the significant articles that had appeared in your Newsletter over the years. In the event I was unable to trace copies earlier than Issue 28 (Spring 1974) but at least I have the complete set from that date. Anyone having pre-issue-28 copies I'd be glad to

take them off your hands for the archives.

The early Newsletters were fairly basic: the articles were mostly in the form of Committee Reports and few were attributable to individuals. It is interesting to observe the evolution of the house style over the years and I've no doubt it will continue to evolve. For instance, the

editorial made its first formal appearance in Issue 35 in 1978 and signed articles as a regular feature appeared from about Issue 50 in 1985.

The index is on the website:

[www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://www.taplowsociety.org.uk)

Do have a look – maybe it will stir some old memories.

*Fred Russell*

# Crossrail: Its Impact on our Skylines

In the spring of 2005 I included a brief article on the impact that the Crossrail project could have on Taplow. This was a fairly low-key article, since at the time there was considerable doubt that the project would ever get off the ground, either in terms of funding or approval.

The initial consultation period ended in May 2005 and consisted for us around here, as far as I could determine, of a three-hour exhibition in Maidenhead on one day in February 2005. Crossrail claim that of those who visited their information centres 95% were in favour of the project. (Query: where are these 'Information Centres'?)

The nearest I found to a final word is the following:

Prime Minister Tony Blair said at a meeting to discuss Crossrail held at 10 Downing Street on 7 March 2007: 'This Government is absolutely committed to Crossrail, so I am delighted that we now have a robust and cost-effective scheme that will deliver benefits not just for the capital but for the whole country. We will work with the Mayor and with business to secure a final funding and financing package.'

The Maidenhead Civic Society made very detailed representations and some important

concessions were achieved. The prevailing thought is that the electrification is going to happen and there's nothing more we can do about it. However, I make no apology for bringing this to your attention again since I firmly believe we need to raise the level of awareness of this project to the riverside dwellers, for it is they who are to bear the major impact of its construction phase and the ongoing environmental effects. There will also be a more general impact on the Parish from the work on the railway station and the road traffic levels that could follow. More information on this subject can be gleaned from Jon Willmore, who is currently running the Taplow Rail Users Group (TRUG), and the exhibition room at Taplow Station, which includes much about Crossrail.

The enabling bill was presented to Parliament in February 2005. The following extract is from *Hansard* (4 April 2005) in which Home Office minister Tony McNulty stated:

'The main construction of Crossrail can not start until the necessary powers are in place. A hybrid bill seeking such powers was introduced in February 2005. Previous experience with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link suggested that the Crossrail bill would not complete its passage [through Parliament] before 2007. The assumption remains that the Crossrail service would start in 2013.'

Let's look at some of the facts so far. Each train will be more than 200 metres long and will be made up of 10 carriages and carry about 1,500 people in quiet, climate-controlled conditions. We can expect about 12 such trains an hour running along the embankment and over the Brunel Bridge. The trains are designed to travel at up to 100mph but I imagine that this speed cannot be maintained in the approach to Maidenhead station.

The actual electrification will be carried out by 25kv overhead line equipment (OHLE), generally in the form of 6-metre-high gantries from which catenary wires and contact wires will be suspended. This technique will in turn require that some of the bridges on the route will have to be raised or the track lowered to accommodate the gantries. There may also be parapets raised along the track for 'public safety reasons'. In the Maidenhead Civic Society newsletter of July 2006, Tina Sell, who was very

## You need a new Editor

After 9 years as your editor I feel the weight of history on my shoulder and I feel called upon to pass the burden to younger or more able shoulders. I have greatly enjoyed the job which gave me many an interesting insight into Taplow's history and personalities, an enjoyment which I hope was passed on to you in the pages on your Newsletter. I have no doubt your next editor will have the same pleasure that I did in meeting the many people who have contributed to the Newsletter over these years and in doing our collective bit in helping to preserve this little bit of our 'Sceptred Isle' called Taplow.

*Fred Russell*



actively involved in the petition process, included a diary of events leading up to the petition, which made interesting reading. Personally I was concerned at the comparative ignorance of the project by English Heritage, and their slow response. In the end it seemed their main objection was about the design of the gantries on the Brunel Bridge.

I have read with great interest the part of the 'Crossrail Assessment of Impacts on Heritage and Landscape' that covers the western section of the line, basically from Maidenhead to Heathrow, and the following comments are relevant:

- The extent of vegetation along this section of the the route is good, with belts of mature tall trees and understorey planting located on the embankment slopes which generally contains views towards and from the railway lines and will restrict views towards the proposed OHLE from adjoining business/industrial areas, housing areas and users of local roads and footpaths.

I interpret this to mean that that my main fear for this section of the work will not be realised – namely, that tall trees and electricity gantries do not normally co-exist comfortably with each other – and that Crossrail will not be removing the tree cover from the area directly facing Ellington Road. This tree cover is vital to the residents since it acts as a backdrop to the houses, which are in a Conservation Area.

- The River Thames Maidenhead Bridge (Brunel) and the adjoining Conservation Area have a moderate sensitivity to change.
- The Maidenhead Bridge Viaduct is a Grade II listed structure and the proposed OHLE will have a moderate or low magnitude of impact on setting of this structure of high sensitivity, resulting in a significant level of impact on its landscape/townscape character.

The wording here seems a little ambiguous to me. I take it to mean that the gantries will

have a moderate effect but since it is a sensitive structure, this translates to a 'significant' impact...

Further reading produced the gem that if you view the gantries from the side their relative infrequency means they are not too obtrusive, whereas from the point of view of a train-driver they would look like a series of portals ahead of him. This piece of sophistry might satisfy the planners but it fails to amuse me. I think those gantries are going to ruin the appearance of that old bridge to everyone.

I really don't know of anything that can be done about it since the period of petition is now over, but there are still two options; either to stop Crossrail at Slough or to transfer the overhead gantry electrification to track power when the trains reach visually sensitive areas such as the embankment and the Brunel Bridge. I am assured that the technology exists which can automatically switch from gantry to track power.

I can only end this article with the following quote from another Crossrail document:

- It is proposed that the OHLE over Maidenhead Railway Bridge will use masts with wires suspended from cantilevers, since these will be visually lighter structures than the gantries to be used along other parts of the route. The masts will, however, have a significant adverse landscape impact: they will affect important views along the river and the character of the river corridor; they will affect the setting of the Riverside Conservation Area; and they will affect the setting of the listed railway bridge and the setting of the adjacent Grade I listed road bridge.

So the bottom line is that the riverside dwellers must protect those embankment trees, make sure they are kept healthy, and see if the ivy growing on them can be removed before it destroys the trees.

*Fred Russell*





# Acid Test for the Jubilee River

## An unqualified success?

Opinions are still divided over whether the Jubilee River is a success or not. While it was hailed as the saviour of over 1,000 Maidenhead homes in the floods of January 2003, residents downstream in Wraysbury and Datchet had a very different view. There, 500 homeowners faced catastrophic flooding and pointed the finger of blame firmly at the Jubilee River which, they said, had dumped excess water literally on their doorsteps, causing huge amounts of damage and rendering homes uninhabitable.

Amongst all the resulting tears, recriminations and conspiracy theories ('Why the Environment Agency wants the Jubilee River to fail...'), some facts emerged. Investigations revealed that the channel was carrying only around two-thirds of its original planned capacity. Some experts consider that this is due to the innovative 'soft' design of the drainage scheme, one of the largest ever built, which despite including highly unusual engineering features such as a convex weir, apparently facing the wrong way, is astonishingly natural in appearance. This makes it very difficult to predict the capacity of the channel. In addition, it was discovered that the

clay core of the channel was already breaking down, making further work necessary to ensure that the flood bank would not fail. At the beginning of this year, Ian Tomes, area flood risk manager for the Environment Agency, told the Maidenhead Advertiser that the remedial works had now brought capacity up to 'almost its original design'. When the flood warnings sounded last month, it seemed that this was to be the first real test of these improvements. So, would it pass this time?

The answer appears to be a qualified 'yes'. There was no serious flooding of the area downstream from Maidenhead. Even Wraysbury escaped. Local news media quoted one resident there as saying: 'Events of last week... with the Jubilee River successfully carrying vast amounts of water safely downstream past Wraysbury to the sea... must surely show [it] has been a resounding success.'

However, the overall situation was very different from the conditions that brought about the flooding in 2003. July's heavy rainfall over the western side of England meant that the Thames filled up at an alarming rate near its source but this time there was enough capacity lower down in the valley to avoid flooding. By the time the predicted Upper Thames 'surge' arrived in Berkshire, flood warnings on tributaries such as the Kennett, Loddon and Thame had been reduced and the floodplain around Windsor and Maidenhead had not become saturated either by floodwater or fresh rainfall. No flooding, here, then – but no real test of the Jubilee River either.

Meanwhile, improvements are still being planned to ensure that the channel is fully ready for flooding in the future. Three options are under consideration: waterproofing the river face of the existing embankment, rebuilding it, or installing a line of steel piles to strengthen it. The Environment Agency says: 'Although we are concerned enough about the condition of the flood bank to carry out this work, the chances of it not doing its job are very slight.' Let's hope they complete the work before a real test comes along.

*Gill Holloway*





# The Great Fire of Dunloe

...and none dare call it arson

It is curious how a fire could spontaneously start in an old property without mains gas or electricity in weather so wet that flood alerts are operative on the Thames only 20 feet away from the site. We speak, of course, of the fire at Dunloe Lodge, which happened at the end of July. There was a similar mysterious fire in Mill Lane to the south of Dunloe Lodge in February, which necessitated evacuation of nearby residents for 48 hours. In this latter case, residents were assured that the fire had started on a boat with faulty electrics when it was apparent that the fire had actually started in a portacabin nowhere near a boat. Given the opening comments of this paragraph it is hardly surprising that even the police suspect arson. So what is going on? In the case of the portacabin fire no arson was posited by the police and therefore no forensic examination carried out; in the Dunloe case it is assumed that arson took place but, at the time of writing, no forensic examination has taken place on the grounds that it is unsafe – even given the existence of CCTV evidence that it is highly probable that arson did take place. Yet, following a serious hotel fire in Cornwall in August, forensic examination began almost immediately the fire was out. Judging from the photographs, Dunloe looked by far the safer option to investigate.

This fire represents the loss of still another of the great houses in our parish. John Brushe, the Conservation Officer for South Bucks, was hoping that the present owners would restore the property to its former state. The house has an interesting background; it was formerly known as Millstream and acquired the name Dunloe Lodge following its purchase by the 5th Earl of Clancarty (family name Trench), apparently a descendant of Mary Tudor, whose other title was Viscount Dunlo, and who died in 1929. He married a music hall actress whose stage name was Belle Bilton but who was more formally known as Isobel Maud Penrice Bilton, Countess of Clancarty. The Earl's fifth son, William Francis, became the 8th Earl and gained an interesting reputation as a flying saucer proponent – he was firmly convinced they came not from space but beneath the

Earth itself. He founded a UFO study group at the House of Lords, and introduced *Flying Saucer Review* to its library.



Dunloe Lodge in its heyday

Possibly the owner of these properties is not terribly concerned about the origins of the fires since the whole area is earmarked for a major redevelopment programme anyway. The police would therefore be glad of a reason not to spend their valuable time investigating fire damage, which is unlikely to trigger a criminal or insurance investigation. No arson, no crime, doesn't go on the record, no comment.

*Fred Russell*



# Involving the Community – the South Bucks Way

Consult the public, say the Government – or 'Have your shout', to quote the peculiar vulgar phrase used by our District Council. The rules of engagement for the consulting exercise are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement – the SCI. The SCI devised by South Bucks District Council has been granted the imprimatur of the Planning Inspectorate against strong representations for changes and additions. The rules are now set in concrete. We shall have to shout much, much louder if our future concerns are to be heeded to even a miniscule degree.

Before endorsing the District Council SCI, the Inspector appointed by the Planning Inspectorate 'listened' to a three-hour presentation by the Taplow team headed by Mary Trevallion, Chairman of our Parish Council, and comprising Professor Bernard Trevallion, Richard Dawson and Karl Lawrence. The main thrust of the Taplow concerns was the minor role assigned to democratically elected parish councils in policy and planning decisions in contrast to the major role played by nominated non-elected organisations, quangos – most especially the Local Strategic

Partnership – and individuals. This was manifest in the dismissal of our Parish Plan as an offering of 'evidence' with no special significance. In addition, the presentation covered many points of procedural detail, the provision of information, time schedules and the language of the Statement.

After several weeks 'consideration', the Inspector accepted just one of the points made by the Taplow team. He told the District Council to remove the phrase 'to reduce consultation fatigue'.

*Karl Lawrence*

## Significant Planning Applications

**07/01557/FUL** 16/08/2007 Old Court Hotel, Bath Road

Block of 11 flats with associated car parking and landscaping to replace (non)existing building. We now have Happygrid Ltd who appear to have taken over from the late unlamented Mr Hussein. The kitchen is a space in the dining/sitting room area this time so visitors can get to talk to their hosts while the cooking is going on. 28 car spaces for 11 flats is a remarkable amount of space allocated to cars these days – or are there some interesting changes to the plan ahead?

**07/01329/CAN** 05/07/2007 New Taplow Paper Mill Ltd, Mill Lane

Felling of 8 various trees and other crown lifting and pruning work. Taplow Riverside Conservation. Seems a curious thing to be doing when Watchtower (or whatever they are called) have yet to make a formal application for anything. No TPO to be made. (Rumour has it that Windrush have been given notice to quit so things are hotting up.)

**06/01838/FUL / 07/01194/RC / 07/01129/FUL** Land at Cliveden Stud, Cliveden Road

Polo pitch, all-weather exercise track, irrigation pond and hardstanding, from developer No.1. From developer No.2 we get: 'Removal of conditions Nos 5 and 6 of planning permission ER/01466/68', closely followed by 'Change of use from agricultural workers' cottages to guest accommodation'. All refused. I would expect this to go to appeal and we will need to support the Council's stance on this one when the time comes.

**07/00524/TPO** 07/03/2007 The Dropmore Estate, Heathfield Road, Dropmore

Fell 10 beech, 10 chestnut, 7 oak, 4 larch, 3 pine, 2 cherry, 2 yew, 1 holly, 1 ash, 1 lime and 1 other broadleaf. That makes 42 trees. Isn't this is rather a lot? Consent granted.



# Visit to Dropmore

An open day at Dropmore House took place on Thursday 26th July, to give local residents some idea of the progress being made on the restoration of the old house and its conversion to apartments. Mr Brushe, the Conservation and Design Officer for the District Council, together with the architect representing Corporate Estates, George Kalopedis, organised and led the guided tour. Your Society was very well represented on this walkabout.

Dropmore, the former home of Lord Grenville, was built in 1792 and involved the architects Samuel Wyatt and Charles Heathcote Tatham in various additions to the property, including a 60-ft-long library. As a result of the fire in 1990, nearly 50% of the main building was destroyed and rendered totally uninhabitable.

Mr Brushe visited the British Library to research Samuel Wyatt's plans to ensure that the restoration was as complete as practicable, included replacing the existing concrete Victorian columns with the original Tatham fluted columns. We all agreed this would be an imposing entrance to the house. English Heritage were concerned about the negative effect of lots of cars parked in front of the building and insisted that an adjacent underground car park be constructed.



Member Brenda Hickman and your chairman, Euan Felton, at Dropmore

Interestingly (and unusually, we were told), underfloor heating will be used throughout the house, even under the stone floors. The builders, MP Bros, have created

mezzanine floors, carefully disguised from the outside view, to partition some rooms. The tour then took in the Dairy Court, a Grade 1 listed building, the greenhouse and the Stable Court. From this position it's possible to see the famous pinetum. It appears that the heath land has re-established itself and will be left as a feature.



The main entrance to Dropmore showing the original Victorian concrete columns still in place

There are a number of other buildings on the site including Oak Lodge and Cabrook, which will be restored from drawings by architect John Buckler held in the British Library.

Clearly the conversion of the building into apartments will make it impossible to adhere to the original floor plans or those of 1907, but there is little doubt the general appearance of the property will make it (as another builder puts it regarding a large development in Maidenhead) the place that's going to be the place to be.

*Fred Russell*

*[I am indebted to Joy Marshall for the use of the meticulous notes she kept during the visit.]*

# The Planning White Paper

## No power to the people

This article represents a personal view but one which appears to be shared by many others.

The Planning White Paper entitled 'Planning for a Sustainable Future' (Cm 7120) comprises 221 pages plus photographs, homilies, rhetoric and a few self-congratulations. It does not resemble white papers of the past which were terse, to the point and unequivocally stated policy in specific terms and clear English. Nevertheless it is better than the equally lengthy Communities White Paper which represented an exercise in confusion.

The purpose of the Planning White Paper is given in the Forward, under the imprint of four Secretaries of State, as '...to streamline further the process of town and country planning, improve the ability of local authorities to shape their local communities and ensure that there is a stronger approach to supporting sustainable economic development alongside work to tackle climate change in a way that is integrated with the delivery of other sustainable development objectives'. In reality the paper is primarily about a more centralised way to deal with major infrastructure projects in which local government and local communities will have significantly less influence in decision-making. The proposal is to establish an Infrastructure Policy Commission with overriding powers over all major infrastructure projects. The effect may well be to adversely impact on the natural and built environments. A large number of national conservation and civic charities have called for government to reconsider its proposals for 'speeding up' the planning and building of projects such as motorways, ports, waste incinerators, runways, reservoirs and supermarkets, which are contained in the white paper, so far without effect. Cm 7120 is, inter alia, in response to recommendations in Kate Barker's 'Review of Land Use Planning' and Rod Eddington's 'The Eddington Transport Study'.

It would appear that the White Paper has been constructed without benefit of a rigorous analysis of the facts, governance, systems of public participation and the development planning process. It is fatally flawed for the following reasons:

- The focus by Barker and Eddington as sole authors is too narrow for subjects of considerable breadth and complexity, despite consultations.
- The alleged delays in the planning system are based on misconceptions.
- Current practices regarding community involvement as introduced by government are ineffective, top-down and not democratic.
- Successive government interventions have made the planning system more complex and bureaucratic.
- The relationship between the planning system and economic growth appears to have been misinterpreted.
- Whatever the intention, proposals in the White Paper represent a further centralisation of decision-making.

Complex, multi-objective issues such as those addressed by Cm 7120 need an interdisciplinary and inter-departmental approach such as that afforded by a Royal Commission or some such structure rather than by individuals who appear to share the preconceived views of government.

Major delays are mostly the result of practices by developers or other initiators and not the planning system as experience shows. These include time-tabling to accommodate the rhythm of development financing or for purposes of negotiating a more beneficial planning permission (to the developer), as Taplow Parish's experience with Cliveden illustrates. Major infrastructure projects and supermarkets require very careful consideration if they are to be compatible with economic, social and environmental desiderata. Consultation should not be truncated. Delays to public infrastructure projects are mostly to do with the internal procedures of the initiators. Central to the government approach would appear to be the view that the planning system is for the benefit of the developer: a major misconception; it is to ensure that the community at large and future communities enjoy a balanced economic, social and physical environment which is sustainable.

On community involvement HTPS is particularly concerned with that involving parishes and parish communities. Planning Policy Statement 1 saw parish and town councils as pivotal using the parish plan as a vehicle for



dialogue and consensus. The role of parish councils was the subject of a statement by the, then, Minister for Planning at the 2006 NALC conference who stated 'Local councils are the cornerstone of democracy...I believe the role of town and parish councils is essential. There is a genuine intention of enablement from the government...'. In the event, regulations under SI 2004 failed to support policies in PPS 1. Neither Cm 7120 nor the Communities White Paper rectifies this situation. As a result, arrangements for parish level engagement is limited to a top-down, tick-box form of consultation in which output and outcome are under the control of district or county. The point to be made is that proposals under the White Paper which limit consultation start from an unacceptably narrow base at the local level. Democracy is largely dependent on provision of checks and balances. The effect of this White Paper is to remove a significant number of both.

Cm 7120 gives the impression that the planning system constrains economic growth, contrary to the statement in PPS 1 that planning delivers significant economic benefits. The national economy is represented by more than financial and fiscal factors. Society, social issues, the environment and the spatial organisation of all these are integral parts of the economy. Research has shown that sustainable economic wellbeing is equally dependent on environmental, social and locational issues as on financial and fiscal issues. The paper would suggest that government sees the former as overriding the latter. Unless all factors are given appropriate

weight, which is the prime purpose of the planning process, the economy as a whole will suffer, which would appear to be the end result of current policy.

There has been a dramatic shift to centralised control over the past two decades. This has been achieved through government procedures, financial controls and somewhat spurious forms of management and even more spurious forms of monitoring and evaluation. The proposals represent further centralisation and limit effective community involvement. This appears to be contrary to government statements made elsewhere.

However there is a good argument for the formation of an Infrastructure Policy Commission but its role should be for rationalising and coordinating infrastructure projects cross-departmentally and for purposes of assisting parent departments who should remain the executive authorities but committed to the implementation of rationalised and integrated projects. It should not be promoted as a super-department, the like of which have failed in the past and which duplicate effort, set aside existing expertise, complicate working arrangements and increase costs. Current procedures for community and departmental involvement should be retained. In my view, the Planning White Paper, as it stands, is unacceptable on grounds of good governance, effective planning process, economy of working, public participation and the effective involvement of parish and town councils for purposes of reaching consensus.

*Bernard Trevallion*

## The Ubiquitous Chip

A spy chip in your wheelie bin! You read it here first!!  
*[Issue 85 Spring 2006. Ed]*  
And where next for the ubiquitous chip? Built-in on your car to tell the law-enforcement authority where it is – and where it has been? Tailored-in on school uniforms for parents and teachers to keep track of

the wearer? Integral to every item on the supermarket shelves to prevent theft and to enable the one-minute checkout of a fully-loaded trolley? Bound-in on every book to ensure an accurate bestseller list and to find a title in shop or library within seconds? Many more – very many

more – are within the scope of the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. All will record more information to add to your identity profile set in the giant database in the Westminster sky.

*Karl Lawrence*

# All Nations Bible College in Taplow

## Bible college had an historic home

*[This article by Leonard Miall was discovered in an old copy of the magazine Round and About, and, I believe, adds something to our knowledge of our parish. Ed.]*

I read in *Round and About* of Mrs McGavin's inquiry about the All Nations Bible College at Taplow. I think I can help you with the history of the establishment, though I know very little about the college itself.

Taplow Hill was the name of a large house behind the brick wall, which ran along the south side of Rectory Road, Taplow. (It is not to be confused with Hill House, on the corner of Rectory Road and Berry Hill, which was once the home of the poet Walter de la Mare.)

Tony Packe, a distinguished senior resident and historian of Burnham, tells me that Taplow Hill was bought in 1860 by his grandfather, Charles Pearce-Serocold.

It made a comfortable home for his wife and 10 children, as well as for their 12 servants. In 1893 Mr Pearce-Serocold built what was called The Red Cottage at the other end of Rectory Road, diagonally opposite St Nicolas Church, as a home for three of his spinster daughters. Two of them subsequently married, and the third, Miss Marie Serocold, lived there until her death in 1948.

Charles Pearce-Serocold died in 1904, and the property was inherited by his son Oswald, who dropped the use of the name Pearce, and lived there until 1940. Faced with the prospect of having a large number of munitions workers from the new Slough Trading Estate billeted in his home, Oswald Serocold decided to put Taplow Hill on the market and to move to Maidenhead.

The house was then acquired as a rest and rehabilitation centre for Dutch merchant seamen. They had courageously sailed their ships to England to continue the war on the Allied side. Their exiled monarch, Queen Wilhelmina, was living at Stubbings, Maidenhead Thicket, and the headquarters of the Dutch High Command was temporarily at Maryfield, on the north side of Taplow.

When the Dutch merchant seamen returned to the Netherlands in 1945, Taplow Hill became the All Nations Bible College, with Mr Brash Bonsall as its head. After the death of Marie Serocold, The Red Cottage was used as a hostel for some of the students at the All Nations Bible College.

By August 1953, however, the college had become rather short of students, and they decided to let The Red Cottage. At that time I





was returning to England after having been for several years the BBC's news correspondent in Washington, but I did not yet know what my next job was going to be. My late wife's parents, who lived at Bourne End, rented The Red Cottage in August 1953 as nearby temporary accommodation for us.

The secretary of the All Nations Bible College, Miss Desborough, was then residing in a caravan in the garden of The Red Cottage. It had typical institutional furniture, and each room was labelled with a biblical name such as Tarsus or Nineveh. The bathrooms were Mediterranean I and Mediterranean II.

The Bible College was still functioning after Mr Brash Bonsall ceased to be head of it in 1952. In 1953–4 my two elder sons enjoyed attending 'Sunshine Corner', an evening bible class for children conducted by the theological students

before they went abroad as missionaries. It had a song which is still remembered:

*Sunshine Corner, oh it's jolly fine. It's for children under ninety-nine!*

In May 1954 we bought Maryfield (the former headquarters of the Dutch High Command, which had subsequently been used as a nurses' home for the Canadian Red Cross Hospital at Cliveden), and moved out of The Red Cottage. It was then sold as a private home and re-named, first The Red House, and later St Nicolas House. Taplow Hill, the home of the All Nations Bible College, was then pulled down, and replaced by a Span housing estate called Cedar Chase (not Cedar Close), named after some very fine large cedar trees in the grounds.

*Leonard Miall*

## The Rise of the Urban Farmer

As a member of the Planning Team of the Chiltern Society, I recently attended a society meeting where we were given a briefing by some local farmers about the serious problems farmers have in living with the CAP regulations, which seem to specifically single out the British farmer for unfair treatment. Nearly half the EU budget is spent on the CAP. The main speaker – a farmer – pointed out, as just one instance, that under CAP rules farmers in England are 'permitted' to produce only about 80% as much milk as we consume whereas France, Germany and Ireland can produce more milk than they need. Result? Supermarkets are buying the European surplus cheaply and offer English farmers a knock-down price for their milk. In consequence, dairy farming in this country is in serious decline. I have heard that in many cases a farmer's income has dropped by 90% over the past decade. I'm not sure how much farming is done in Taplow but I suspect that this rings a bell somewhere in the parish.

The farmers are encouraged by the government to diversify in order to help them pay their bills but a strange anomaly then emerges: the Planning Officers are refusing to give them planning permission to do so! The apparent reasons for this are not surprising to us veterans of HTPS. Planners tend not to know

very much about farming issues and they apply urban-dominated thinking to rural problems. In the case of the meeting I attended, the Chiltern Society were approached by a group of Wycombe farmers for help in getting their applications for diversification considered in a more knowledgeable way by the Wycombe planners. It seems it is extremely difficult to get to talk to any planner in that district about their special needs. The emerging South East Plan is seriously out of touch with countryside issues and contains hardly any reference to farming. The trouble is that diversification requires a change of use of farming land, which usually means a permanent loss to farming and is almost always in Green Belt areas. It's a real problem because neither we, the HTPS, nor the Chiltern Society want to see permission granted to use Green Belt land for development, yet, thanks to the CAP, we are losing farmland at an appalling rate as farmers finally give up the struggle to try to earn a decent living. Diversification by definition takes the farmer's eye off the primary business of farming and most farmers would tell you they would far rather farm their land than run a bed and breakfast business.

*Fred Russell*

# Beating the Bounds

The discovery of an old boundary stone on the river bank opposite Gaiety Row, marked 'MB 1934' (one of two such it is believed), sparked the investigative instincts of our special correspondent, Joy Marshall, the other day. She was curious about its provenance and talked to the Ramblers about its possible origins and passed the material to your editor. It seems that this stone is the last remnant of a Maidenhead Boundary Walk in 1949 and makes one wonder, 'Did the walkers walk on water too?' It also makes me wonder if Taplow residents ever walked their boundaries.

We need to go back to rather ancient times to find out where the custom of Beating the Bounds originated. Originally the custom came from Europe.

It was initiated by the Archbishop of Vienna in the year 470 after terrible plagues and minor earthquakes had caused much hardship among the people. He ordered special prayers, asking God's blessing on their crops, to be recited as the villagers processed around their fields. The custom spread rapidly around Western Europe, and by the eighth century was established in Britain.

In days that offered little excitement to ordinary people, it can be imagined that processions around the countryside in lovely spring weather were very popular. In fact, not only the fields were blessed: in seaside districts the parishioners would troop down to the waterside and bless the water and the fishing boats and pray for a good fishing season ahead. These processions were also useful in showing people their parish boundaries and as time went on, these boundaries became even more important as administration was changing. So, the custom of 'beating the bounds' grew up to show everyone, and especially the younger members of the parish, where the boundaries lay.

At the boundary-marks of the parish, such as a pond, a big tree or a rock, the parson would stop and read the Gospel, and when this had been done the boys of the parish suffered some indignity to imprint the boundary-mark on their minds. Sometimes they were bumped about,

pushed into the stream, turned upside-down over a fence or hedge, thrown in a bramble-bush, or beaten with willow wands. The willow wands used both then and now come from the straight suckers of a pollarded willow. Stripping the soft bark from the outside reveals the beautifully smooth white wood of new willow and it is from this action of removing the bark that we get the title of the country dance 'Strip the Willow'.

In later years the parson was replaced by the local mayor who made a speech at the start of the boundary walk to explain the ceremony and to refresh people's memories of where the boundaries were. Youngsters would join in the fun and carried pennants, with MB in blue letters – presumably

meaning Maidenhead Boundary (or Borough?). In those happier days, *only 34 years ago* (1973 being the last time that Maidenhead carried out the ritual) – the mayor ran the risk of being grabbed and 'bumped' on a milestone. It may be assumed that the '1934' on the Gaiety Row boundary stone is the year of manufacture since in 1934 four dozen such milestones were delivered. In the 1949 perambulation only 27 of these stones were found. I wonder if they counted our two?

*Joy Marshall & Fred Russell*



# AGM

**A reminder that your AGM will be held in the Village Hall at 8pm on October 12th**



# Musical Chairs at the Mill?

*[Bob Dulson, who is a member of the Maidenhead Civic Society, prepared this article and kindly gave his permission for it to be used in this newsletter. To amplify a little, Bob organised a meeting called the Mutual Interest Group consisting of representatives from the Civic Society, HTPS, EDRA and river users groups, not to mention contributions from the Environmental Agency. Ed.]*

Readers may have seen reports that the Taplow Mill site, which includes Skindles, is on the market – again. Last August, mill owners St Regis caused ripples across the river by selling the 48-acre site to Watchword, a small company of property speculators in an unconditional sale, reportedly worth £30 million.

To try and make sure that this important and environmentally valuable area of Thames riverside is protected and improved, the Civic Society has been liaising with colleagues in the Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society, local residents and the River Thames Society.

With the backing of amenity groups like ours, South Bucks District Council moved swiftly to extend the Taplow Riverside Conservation Area to include the part of the site which borders the Thames. The Area has recently been the subject of another character appraisal consultation to which the Society has made a submission.

English Heritage was also alerted and, we were pleased to hear, granted Grade II listed status to Glen Island House that St Regis has used as its HQ. Originally it was a

'gentleman's residence', built in 1869 by Irish baronet and man of renown, Lt Gen Sir Roger Palmer who rode with the 600 in the Charge of the Light Brigade.

The site also includes four other buildings of architectural and historic significance as well as Skindles. These include a remarkable U-shaped stabling and carriage building, built in 1880 that bears Palmer's initials.

Now, however, the whole is being sold again, through the London offices of King Sturge, one of Europe's largest independent property consultants.

Their full-page colour advertisement in *Estates Gazette*, the journal of the commercial property sector, at the end of May proclaimed: 'The property benefits from significant water frontage to the River Thames and Jubilee River.' The existing buildings extend to 15,802 sq.m. and, according to the advert, there's scope for 'extended

development incorporating residential, commercial, hotel and leisure, health care facilities, care homes and retirement village developments'. Though, with the site being in the Green Belt and the flood plain, it was careful to add: 'Subject to the necessary consents'.

The illustration in the advertisement seemed to imply that the site might be subdivided but the agents told us that this was not their intention, although it would depend on what potential purchasers had to say. King Sturge had talked with SBDC who had given an indication of what they want to see... 'something different from what's there now!' A shortlist of possible buyers has been drawn up and early feedback suggests a leaning towards care homes, a hotel and homes for the elderly – but, sadly, nothing specifically water-related.

*Bob Dulson*

## A Gravelly Grumble

Even Taplow Heights, alias Rectory Road, did not escape the effects of the flooding. Our aged soakaway system was completely overwhelmed, so that gallons of water gushed up out of the manholes in spectacular style. A huge torrent flowed straight down the drive, taking most of the gravel out on to the road and depositing it across the tarmac. It was just as my geography teacher described the formation of the Ganges delta.

*Gill Holloway*

# Taplow Green Pond

The poor state of Taplow Village Green has been the cause of some concern recently. Successive very dry summers and the pattering of many tiny feet left their legacy on the thin layer of topsoil, with large bare patches appearing and weeds taking over the grass that remained.

A new mowing and feeding regime, instituted this year by the Parish Council, has gone a long way to improving matters, and this summer's appallingly wet weather did much to restore the Green to its full glory. However, the exceptional rainfall also brought a new problem to the surface – literally – as a stream of water suddenly appeared, threatening to flood the threshold of the Village Centre, and turning

part of the eastern side of the Green into a swamp.

With no clues as to the source of the water (and fearing the worst), Taplow Parish Council were forced to fence off the affected section whilst investigations were carried out. Tests for sewage contamination proved negative and further analysis showed that it was fresh, clear groundwater – so leaks from Thames Water's pipework could be ruled out. The evidence suggested that the most likely culprit was likely to be one of the many springs that rise on the high ground behind Taplow Village and meander, unseen, down the hillside, occasionally appearing to form boggy patches in gardens and permanent streams down tarmacked roads, even in the driest weather.

There is, however, another, less well-known, factor that is probably contributing to the problem: a large pond once existed at the top of the Green, roughly halfway between the barns at the top of the Green and Old Cottage. It is clearly marked on the Ordnance Survey

map of 1875. When the school was moved to its present site, in the early 70s, the pond was drained and the springs that fed it were ducted into a series of underground conduits designed to disperse the water into a soakaway under the Green. Unfortunately, it appears that the deep band of clay that sits beneath the Green meant that this soakaway would never operate properly.

For many years, this did not cause a problem. But over time, most of the land that once surrounded the pond was built over. The school expanded and more buildings were put up; at the same time, the car park was built and a new approach road put in; later, School House

and the Reading Room were both extended, and with each addition, the permeable land was reduced and the run-off increased. The heavy rains of last autumn were the final straw: the whole system became overwhelmed by the sheer volume of water.

Taplow Parish Council were hoping for a dry summer, in order to observe what would happen under different conditions, but this was not to be. They are now considering installing a French drain – a trench, filled with gravel, to act as a soakaway – but it is feared that this may not provide sufficient drainage, given the thickness of the clay layer in the sub-soil.

The present situation is more of a nuisance than a danger; but more than one person has had to attend a church service with feet soaked to the ankles, having strayed into the boggy ground while walking from the car park to the lych gate. Until a solution is found, the barriers look set to stay.

*Gill Holloway*



Editor: Fred Russell

White Heath, Ellington Road, Taplow, Bucks, SL6 0AX. Tel 01628 672457

E-mail: [editor@taplowsociety.org.uk](mailto:editor@taplowsociety.org.uk)

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