



Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society

Newsletter No. 80 - Autumn 2003

£2 for non-members

A Society, formed in 1959, to protect Hitcham, Taplow and the surrounding countryside from being spoilt by bad development or neglect



Dropmore Estate - an update

The latest proposal by the new owners envisages the concentration of building mass about the main house complex, with the demolition of existing sporadic developments within the estate, and the rebuilding of the main house together with a new wing to provide 54 apartments. The principal gardens about the house, the pinetum and the estate as a whole will be restored, hopefully to its original glory. In addition the 4 houses or lodges on the estate will be extended and restored as individual homes. Overall the total building footprint will be about equal to the existing buildings on the estate, which satisfies the District Council's concerns that the open and undeveloped character of the Green Belt is maintained.

This proposal is probably the best deal we can expect from this site, and is certainly preferable to the original proposals which involved the conversion of the main rebuilt house into a Leisure complex, the building of a Conference centre and several small housing developments scattered about the site, all of which would have seriously affected both the overall appearance of this once lovely estate and created a significant increase in traffic in that area.

HITCHAM AND TAPLOW PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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Editorial

Two of the major events over the past six months are the escalation of the Cliveden affair to national level and the emergence of a new Dropmore proposal. The Parish Council set up an action group led by Euan Felton, to try to force the issues raised by the Cliveden development ideas into the public arena and perhaps to get it called in by the Government. This approach is preferable to waiting for the planning application to appear, by which time we will have a few scant weeks to respond. They have succeeded very well in this endeavour with mentions in 'Breakfast with Frost', the latest recruit to our cause being the Evening Standard. This article included a picture of Euan and your very own Chair, Anne, looking suitably determined. Incidentally, I have a poster from the action group up on my gate but I see remarkably few others around, so if you've got one, flaunt it! The Dropmore architects have come up with a new proposal, which looks like a promising compromise between the District Council's requirements to maintain the Green Belt and the obvious need to do something with that site.

In the Spring edition I raised the spectre of the creeping regionalisation of England. I am sure there are many who wholeheartedly support the idea but I am not among them. The South East England Regional Assembly has 111 members made up of representatives from Local Authorities (77), the business sector (17) as well as social and environment 'partners' (SEPs)(17). I can find no evidence of elections to these posts, they are appointed by the local authorities. Planning decisions will more and more be made at these Regional Assemblies who will probably act as mouthpieces for the Government or, even worse, Europe. These are folk looking for work, and to

misquote a well known principle, work will expand to accommodate the available people. No wonder unemployment is coming down!

One fascinating output from one of the Assembly's satellites (Called RAISE) is the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which describes the business practice of acting in a responsible manner, both in respect of shareholder value and towards local and global communities. Corporate involvement with voluntary / community organisations (VCOs) is becoming increasingly popular, we are told, as companies realise the value of partnerships with their local VCOs. (Note: Not many people know that. I must ring up Michael Shanly and register us with his VCO policy board!)

In this issue you will find an article by Jenny Habib of the Chiltern Society. This describes the behaviour of companies who are not showing much CSR to their local VCOs, and who are selling off agricultural land to people who are told they only have to apply for planning permission to realise their dream of a home with a view. Its hard to recall a time when our countryside has been in such peril. Also in this issue, John Hanford raises the issue of whither goes our society in this brave new world. Set against the backdrop of the matters mentioned above, our local struggle to preserve the Parish from inappropriate and excessive development (and encouragement of 'good' development) seems pretty insignificant.

That said, without organisations like ours and the Parish Councils, real local needs and views would be completely lost between the incompatible mills of corporate greed and bureaucratic control freakery.

Village Green Party 2003

The Village Green Party this year took place on Saturday 21st June in glorious weather once again. After last year's Golden Jubilee Party the committee were somewhat apprehensive about the level of support this year, partly because the date was one week later. In the event we were delighted that over 500 people bought food tickets and many more attended. Thanks are due to our Parish Clerk, Lorna Parkins, who looked after the sale of the discounted tickets beforehand.

Our Chairman, Anne Hanford, allocated the various duties to a large number of willing helpers and was a constant presence to ensure that everything was alright on the night! The filled rolls of Ox Roast, barbecued lamb burgers and sausages all sold out by nine o'clock and the dancing went on until ten to the enjoyment of all.

The Raffle proceeds this year were donated to our local Charity, The Thames Valley Adventure Playground (TVAP) for the Disabled, who are celebrating their 21st Anniversary. Heather Lindsey persuaded willing donors to contribute some very attractive prizes.

A grand total of £1047.80 was raised, which will go towards the £5,000 cost of a newly developed therapeutic OptiMusic unit for TVAP's Bath Road Log Cabin. It is hoped that this will be in use by early next year. It consists of a circle of eight vertical down-beams of coloured reflected light, the interruption of which produces different musical notes. It can be described as a 'virtual keyboard in space' and produces incredible music through movement. It is thus an extremely

useful tool for rehabilitation and requires minimal movement and skill. It is therefore useful in all sorts of ways to help the wheel-chair bound disabled as well as other needy children and adults.

The committee would like to thank everyone who helped out in whatever capacity to make the 2003 VGP such a success and looks forward to seeing you all at the next VGP, which will be held on **Saturday 19th June 2004**.

Electric Gates at Sunnyside?

We have just been advised that Antler Homes' recent planning proposal contains remote electrically operated gates at its entrance. This cannot obviously be considered as it would lead to visitors parking in River Road and not on the site where spaces have been allocated. The Highways Authority may also have a problem with it being a very short distance from the notorious A4 accident blackspot at the junction with River Road / Mill Lane and the foot of Maidenhead Bridge. Vehicles waiting for the gates to open will obstruct other vehicles (particularly coupled with the car parking on both sides of the road). This junction is already very dangerous as drivers speed over the brow of the Maidenhead Bridge.

The site should not be gated at all - there were no gates on any of the previous submissions. This is a fundamental and unacceptable change

This issue has just been raised at the Maidenhead Regatta and is causing concern locally due to the already bad parking availability in River Road - a theme maintained throughout the history of the proposed development of this site.



Turning the meat for the Village Green Party. Cooking starts soon after 6 a.m. Fortunately we do not have to allow 20 minutes per pound!

A Bridge Too Far

Richard Dawson

Once again the Maidenhead Bridge and the highly congested A4 Bath Road are being threatened by the additional and continuous movement of heavy lorries transporting waste material.

Previous plans for transporting 'spoil' from the Jubilee River excavation via the Maidenhead Bridge and the A4 Bath Road were refused following strong objections from the local Residents Association, the Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society and the Parish Council. However, we are now threatened with the transportation of toxic waste material from Bagnells Pit in Maidenhead, which is being de-contaminated to make way for a housing development by the home builder Michael Shanly. The toxic waste, which dates back from the 1940s includes industrial waste, hydrocarbons, asbestos etc.

A total of 150,000 tonnes of this toxic waste is to be extracted and removed by road. The planned movement rate is 51 lorries of toxic waste being removed each day with an equal number of loads of de-contaminated soil being returned to the site. This will take almost a year to complete, working a five and a half day week and 8am to 6pm each day.

We have been informed that the toxic waste will be covered by tarpaulins but no mention has been made of the dust and spoil that will be attached to the lorries themselves. Interestingly, the same lorries will be returning with the de-contaminated soil for infill purposes. Will the lorries be decontaminated each trip?

Why should we be concerned about this transportation of toxic waste?

Firstly, it is toxic waste which is being transported by 51 lorries a day on an already over utilised main road within a totally built up residential area in Taplow. Secondly, the 51 returning lorries cannot be guaranteed to be totally free of toxic waste. Finally, the proposed route along the Bath Road via the Maidenhead Bridge to the M4 Junction 7, is a single carriageway road which is already saturated with traffic and one of these lorries breaking down will cause chaos. This recently happened to a lorry carrying gravel at the junction of River Road and the A4 resulting in 5 hours of blockage causing immense disruption and delay to road users.

Is there a solution to the problems mentioned above?

The answer is most definitely YES.

Two options are suggested by the developers. If Option 1 is used for the removal of the toxic waste, this will involve a temporary road over Bagnells Field which will join the A4 at the Maidenhead Police Station roundabout. Instead of turning left to Maidenhead Bridge, a right turn onto the A4 will immediately place the toxic waste lorries on a dual carriage way which can be followed continuously to the M4 at Junction 8/9, via the Maidenhead Railway Station and Braywick Road.

The advantage of this route is self-evident.

The number of residential properties within 30 metres of this route is 80% less than the alternate use of the A4 route through Taplow. Any risk of toxic waste material in either solid or particle form will be subsequently reduced by the same percentage. The added advantage is that the route is totally dual carriageway which will minimise disruption in the event of a lorry breakdown.

In conclusion, the more environmentally acceptable alternative should be adopted for the local residents of both Maidenhead and Taplow, together with the travelling public.

In essence, the Maidenhead Bridge route to the M4 for the toxic waste is most definitely 'A Bridge too Far.'

A Commuter's Tale

Jeremy Vanstone

Taplow Railway Station must be unique amongst those that enjoy a service from Thames Trains. In terms of size it has one of the largest station areas but one of the worst of services.

The Station now is a sad reflection of its heyday when with the building of the Great Western Railway and before completion of Brunel's bridge over the Thames it was briefly the western terminus of the railway network. This was at a location now occupied by Altwood BMW. At that time (1838) it was known as 'Maidenhead' Station but in 1854 in deference to Taplow this was changed to 'Maidenhead and Taplow'. Following completion of Maidenhead's own Station in 1871 the name was changed to 'Taplow' and in 1872 the present Station was built some 26 chains to east and the original Station closed.

The size of the Station belies the small community that it had to serve. This it probably owed to the influence of the great houses of Taplow and not insignificantly to the fact that a number

of their proprietors were at various times directors of the Great Western Railway. The requirement then for services and amenities appropriate to the needs of the community was consequently high. There were even extensive sidings.

The Station now is very different. Not only are half the platforms out of commission (apparently because the stepping down levels are too high from most trains) but many of the public facilities have been removed and those that remain (the waiting rooms and lavatories) are at most times locked - even during the brief period from approximately 6am to 1pm when the station is manned! Therefore anyone having to endure the vagaries of the train service is usually faced with an uncomfortable wait on an exposed platform. The wait is frequently made worse by there being a complete lack of information due to the public information screens not working or displaying incorrect information. Even the help point which is meant to provide assistance in an emergency goes unanswered!



Whilst an attempt was made in the BR days to brighten the Station with flower beds on the central platform, the lack of care in now maintaining them merely adds to the atmosphere of neglect. The extensive car parks are pot holed and littered and frequently homes for abandoned and stolen vehicles. The Station areas themselves are also littered and untidy and the fabric of the Station is in need of attention.

Then there is the service! Thames Trains appear to regard Taplow as a backwater and are intent in keeping it that way by providing it with a grossly inadequate service. There is of course no Sunday service but Taplow is the only station on the Thames Trains network between Reading and London that outside peak hours has only one stopping train per hour in each direction.

Many Taplow residents will have witnessed the decline in the service and recall the times in the BR days when Taplow used to enjoy regular and fast trains to London with only one stop at Slough in the morning rush hour and equally as good services in

the evening. Now the fastest service available has four stops and runs on the slow line - with all the problems that that entails.

During the day the build up of problems result in the consistent late running of the evening services. Delays of 10 minutes are quite normal but when the Taplow train may be a few minutes late in turning round at Paddington, the slower suburban service (which is timed to depart 3 minutes after the Taplow train) is often allowed to proceed ahead of the semi-fast Taplow train (even when the suburban service may itself be running late) thereby adding to the delay by 30-40 minutes. That way Train Operators' statistics need show only one train as running late. Once the train is late, then it is consigned to that fate and nothing is done (such as holding back the slower suburban service or moving the Taplow train onto the fast main line) to help it make up lost time.

The journey is made more uncomfortable by the condition of the rolling stock. If the incoming service is late arriving at Paddington there is frequently little time for it to receive basic cleaning before it is sent on its way. As a result the journey is made amongst the filth and litter from the previous trip. The journey also is made worse by the fact that the supposed air conditioning available in some trains works so inadequately that it actually makes the trains hotter! Over the summer this makes travelling a very unpleasant experience - even more so with the overcrowding prevalent on so many peak time services. In the wintertime it is often the turn of the heating system not to work!

What Taplow needs is a faster and more frequent train service. It is 23 miles from Paddington - a distance great enough for it not to have to be grouped with the suburban stations east of Slough and so after 19:38 have to receive the same service as them, which entails a stop at every station between Paddington and Taplow and takes 44 minutes. Instead, Taplow should have a semi-fast service such as Maidenhead enjoys (or used to enjoy before Maidenhead too started suffering the same cuts as everywhere else). It is certainly the case that Taplow has the capacity for this in that its car parks are barely used. Better services would attract more passengers and even take the pressures off adjoining Maidenhead and Burnham Stations. If Taplow is to have all the expected extra housing over the coming years then Thames Trains need to start planning now to meet this need.

Privatisation of the railways has not worked well for Taplow and one reflects fondly on good old BR.



Lincoln's Corner

Ask a silly question

Taplow is extremely fortunate that Soka Gakkai International who occupy Taplow Court are so welcoming and generous. Last year, or maybe it was the year before, my wife and I were strolling along the Cedar Walk back towards the house when I was amazed to see a tree which was covered with purple blossom: "Just look," I exclaimed... "I have never before seen a tree which was covered with purple blossom, especially in June. I must ask Andy what it is." My wife, I hate to admit, was just a teeny bit scornful, "Ask a silly question..." she retorted "why don't you look it up when you get home?"

This I did, and I made an astonishing discovery. The tree is called *Siliquastrum*...

Ask a *siliquastrum*? It is more generally known in the UK as the Judas Tree, or even by the name given to its family, *Cercis*. If you don't believe me, look it up for yourself... Another rarity in this area.

Keep Clear

Several years ago somebody garnished the traffic light posts in Taplow - even the posts right by the traffic police station - with some rather distracting free advertising for Hardwood Flooring. I had planned to write a paragraph about that, but in July a vehicle hit one of the posts at the bottom of Berry Hill so that the only advertisement now on display is for Lock Reach, wherever that may be. (you should not confuse this with the plethora of signs on the Bath Road, where on the south side next to Amerden Lane there are about twenty, pointing the way to Cliveden, Barge Farm, and to various other places including an assortment of new houses).

What is more of interest to me are the instructions seen so clearly on the surface of the Bath Road itself, because as one approaches the Berry Hill junction from Maidenhead Bridge there are instructions painted in two places: "KEEP CLEAR". It is said that these two words were painted on the Bath Road several years ago when the Flood Alleviation Channel was being constructed, in order to assist people coming out of the driveways opposite, and perhaps they still serve that purpose. But do they? Deleting white paintwork on a road surface does take a great deal of ingenuity, and it would be nice to think that those astonishingly clever engineers who had the remarkable idea of freezing the railway embankment could conjure up a method of obliterating those powerful words which so many of us read and ignore.

Heathrow's third runway proposal - a brief update

Derek Walker

In my article in the Autumn issue of the HTPS Newsletter - particularly page 3 as it does appear that some of what I referred to as the options are now going to appear in a White Paper due out later this year.

Before being specific about runways, I do want to mention the outcome of the Court case in Europe which I mentioned in the Newsletter article - where HACAN - the Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise, won its first case against the Government over its wish to gain extra night flying hours at Heathrow. I reported that the Government had appealed and that appeal has now been heard and the Government won. This is important because they won on the economic case they made that any loss of flights into and out of Heathrow had a considerable economic impact on this country. You can imagine the ramification this has on the runway issue.

On runways it now seems clear that the Government's options for the South East are :-

A new short runway at Heathrow, by short they mean a 2000 metre runway parallel to the other two.

At Stanstead at least one and more likely two more runways - one is needed for emergencies anyway. That said the option is for three more.

At Gatwick two more runways, however that may be reduced to one at least for the foreseeable future.

The next issue is the time tabling for the building of these runways. It is currently a very hot topic and while this is only a guess it could be that if BAA has its way a new runway could be opened at Heathrow by 2012, another at Stanstead around 2016 and one at Gatwick by 2022.

Residential Areas of Exceptional Character are Out

There was a proposal to create additional Residential Areas of Exceptional Character (RAEC) in Taplow. There were quite strict criteria which had to be met in terms of density of housing and styles and one area was chosen. A questionnaire was circulated and there was an overwhelmingly positive response. The District Council therefore felt able to go ahead with the extensions to the existing RAEC scheme. However the Government Office of the South East (GOSE) raised vehement objections to any additional RAECs, on the grounds that the proposed RAECs were not in line with National Planning Policy Guidance that seeks to encourage higher densities in built-up areas in the interests of making more efficient use of land. GOSE also indicated that it is highly unlikely that the existing policy and any related Supplementary Planning Guidance would be able to meet the Government's criteria for inclusion in new Local development Documents (this replaces the old Local Plan)

So at the SBDC Cabinet meeting of July 7th, it was accepted that notwithstanding the widespread public support for additional RAECs, the response of GOSE had made it clear that they would be inconsistent with Government policy, and therefore the idea was reluctantly dropped.

(I imagine that we will all soon have to find room in our gardens for Mr. Prescott's affordable pre-fabs! Ed.)

Cliveden Hospital site development

Many of you will be aware of the Parish Council's action group (Cliveden Campaign) intended to try to change the intention of the National Trust to carry out an open market housing development on the Canadian Hospital site at Cliveden. At this year's AGM a group of local NT members tabled a resolution in the following terms:

“The Annual General Meeting of the National Trust deplores the decision by the National Trust to build a housing estate of 192 unrestricted open-market dwellings on inalienable land, part of the Trust's Cliveden Estate in Taplow, Buckinghamshire.”

This resolution was proposed by the Parish Action Group Chairman, Euan Felton and supported by number of local members.

The original, approved proposal by the NT was to build a number of retirement homes with a close-

care facility and, although this was not seen as an ideal use of the land it did have the major benefit of a reduced impact on our local infrastructure. This proposal was deemed by the developing company employed by the NT to be either unprofitable or not profitable enough and the present idea of a full housing estate was mooted. No formal planning application has yet been submitted to the District Council and there are many that hold that little can be done until this application is made. Clearly the Action Group (rightly) do not accept the 'wait and see' approach since once the application is in place then protesters are left with scant weeks in which to mount a reasoned set of arguments against it. The idea of tackling this issue as a national rather than a purely local one is certainly a more proactive approach, and addresses the general issue of whether the NT as a whole should be engaged in this kind of activity at all.

Naturally, the NT are not going to allow such a resolution to be aired without their own input and have issued as a 'Statement by the Council of the National Trust'

Their response asks for members to “...support the Trust's vision for the future of this derelict brown-field site”. It would appear from their list of benefits the development offers that they have certain duties to the State that their members are probably unaware of, for instance:

“helps meet identified need for affordable new housing, including some for key workers such as teachers, nurses and police... helps meet government targets for housing on brownfield sites, so avoiding the need for additional building on greenfield sites in the area.”

The NT Statement also includes a throwaway line that needs challenging, “After lengthy discussion with Local Communities...”. It is a pity that no mention is made of the fact that when the village was polled on the matter, no fewer than 93% of those responding were against the scheme.

Generally, the National Trust seems to be managed more by the profit motive than the good of the lands entrusted to them. Clearly they have to balance their books but one hears of little snippets like the following and wonder what is happening. The Swan sanctuary at Outwood in Surrey is a lifeline for sick and injured birds. Its founder, a Mrs Unwin, has been very ill and will be unable to return. The National Trust state that if she does not return they will close the sanctuary.

The NT AGM is on the 15th October at the Guildhall, Portsmouth. Hopefully Taplow will be sending a number of representatives to gauge the member's response to the Cliveden proposal.

www.clivedencampaign.org

Planning Applications

Remember, readers, whilst your Society is responding to these applications on your behalf, it helps if you also write to the District Council stating your views, for or against.

South Bucks District Council
Director of Planning Services
Council Offices
Windsor Road
Slough. SL1 2HN

02/01485/CON. River Close, Ellington Road (Mirabellum Development Ltd)

Conservation area consent for demolition of dwelling and erection of two detached dwellings with integral garages. There were massive objections from the whole area yet it seems the planning office ignored them and approved the application, ignoring affected neighbours human rights yet explicitly allowing the developer his.

02/01487/FUL. Windrush Garage, Bath Road.

New entrance structure. The Parish Council have requested a position statement from the owners of Skindles about their intentions for that site; one wonders if the real problem is the Windrush lease on part of the land they want to develop. Windrush appear to be digging in.

03/00175/OUT. Land rear of The Walnuts and Neuk House, Bath Road

Erection of detached dwelling with access onto Amerden Lane. The present structures, looking a bit like a wedge of cheese, suggests more to come.

03/00433/OUT. SGT, Station Road.

Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment of site to provide 44 flats within two blocks with associated car parking. Construction of vehicular access onto Institute Road.

Looks as if the garage is not making enough profit compared with the potential windfall from 44 flats. A problem here, for the developers, is that the Local Plan does not like development which reduces employment in the area. The jury is still out on this one.

03/00164/RC. Boundary Road Farm and Riding Stables, Boundary Road

Removal of condition 04 of planning permission S/95/0749/FF to allow formation of residential curtilage. Refused

03/00649/FUL. The Nutshell, River Road.

The demolition of existing house and replacement with terraces of four two and a half storey dwellings with integral garages. These are simply townhouses which in style and context are totally at odds with the line of Edwardian cottages alongside them. An Antler's Homes initiative, not being content with the Sunnyside site. Still pending

03/08534/SDJ. Badnell's Pit and Jenkinson's Yard, Blackamoor Lane, Maidenhead.

Decontamination works involving removal of landfill waste and replacement with clean fill. See article 'A Bridge too far', this issue. Pending.

03/00899/FUL, 03/00900/LBC, 03/00901/FUL, 03/00902/LBC, 03/00903/FUL, 03/00904/LBC, 03/00905/FUL, 03/00906/LBC, 03/00907/LBC. Dropmore Estate.

Demolition of structures and buildings within Dropmore Estate, restoration, extension and conversion of main house, estate manager's house and ancillary buildings into 54 self contained flats, and conversion of Cabrooke Cottage, Oak Lodge and the Water tower into separate dwellings. There are mixed feelings about this one since some would regard this proposal as the best possible compromise we can expect on a site that is now the focus of developers and something has to happen to it. Others believe that the proposal does not take on board the government requirements for affordable housing and that maybe the grounds should be open to the public. There is also the possibility that The National Trust are watching this site with interest since they may regard a go-ahead as a precedent for Cliveden. Pending.

03/00607/ADV. Altwood, Bath Road.

Externally illuminated Mini advertising box. What next? The appalling proliferation of jazzy signs and advertising gimmicks on this section of the Bath Road continues apace. I'm expecting a giant Jurassic Park Dinosaur to appear soon! That'll stop the traffic...

Talpidae - Friend or Foe?

Barrie Peroni

Although we have been around for centuries and expect to exist over the years ahead, not everyone loves us, despite being described at times as “so sweet”, “how cuddly”. “how cute”.

I or my relatives, be they close or distant are found throughout the world from North America to Africa, Japan, Australia, Russia, Europe and even on the southern slopes of the Himalayas. Interestingly we have never managed to penetrate Ireland or the Western Isles of Scotland. However, as in all things there has to be an exception and we have made it to Mull.

I and my family have long been resident in Taplow and for years our particular local habitat remained untouched. Nothing lasts for ever as when certain humans decided to clear what they deemed untidy undergrowth. Whilst this effort brought to light banks of daffodils and fritillary it meant that we were again in the eye of humans.

I know they do not really mean us harm, but in their ignorance of our needs they cause us severe problems. A wonderful habitat for us was where the tunnel from the old dairy to the lower pasture collapsed. In former times the tunnel was used to take the cows to and fro from milking so avoiding any visiting cards being left after milking had they returned to the pasture via the park..

Having lost our favoured habitat we were of course forced to move elsewhere to find food and a home. It must not be forgotten that we are a most voracious mammal constantly in need of flesh; any meat, even our own kind if things get desperate. Deprived of food for 10 - 12 hours we can succumb, or if we do not succumb we can become so maddened by the need for food that we will attack anything, even animals almost as large as ourselves.

Ample supply of vegetables are of no help whatsoever. In hard times only the strongest and fittest survive. In our search for new habitats we eventually arrived in someone's garden causing great irritation. Being designed for digging hillocks and burrows we soon follow our urgent search for food, best of all, worms.

To some humans we are considered beautiful and much loved. Rather than try to exterminate us they talk to us and we move on. This is precisely what happened to my family, we were asked to leave so we did. The neighbour into whose garden we moved was not so pleased, but following advice he spoke to us and we departed to what we thought would be an acceptable home.

Oh that was a mistake!

Thinking we were safe we dug and burrowed with enthusiasm. Our landowner was not amused and set about us with a modern day guillotine - the dreaded rotary mower. Every mound was flattened, often causing some of my family what can only be described as severe headaches. Once our landowner realised the devastating results of his mound flattening technique, it was clear that we had to talk not fight.

He proposed our habitat be limited to a defined area away from his house. Provided we kept our heads down as the rotary mower passed overhead no additional action against us would be taken. Both parties have stuck to their side of the bargain and even the tennis court, a fabulous source of worms remains off limits to us. The fact that it is protected by this hateful garlic shrub does also deter. Whilst it is well known that some people talk to flowers I can confirm that there are others who do talk to small mammals and harmony is achieved. You should try it when next you encounter one of my family. It is far better than gas, traps, jam jars or poison.



Your loveable friend underground in Taplow.

The Green Belt Destruction Scam

Jenny Habib (Chiltern Society)

During the last year a new danger to our heritage has begun to destroy some of the most beautiful areas of our precious Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The danger is from dishonest 'developers' who buy up land when it is put on the market by farmers, and then sell it on in 'building' plots, despite the fact that Green Belt Planning Regulations forbid building on the Green Belt. The whole purpose of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl. The purpose of the land crooks is to make huge profits, making it unusable for agriculture, they would then, if successful, blight the countryside with a huge amount of urban sprawl. It seems that there are several companies doing this, buying the land, selling it as small plots, erecting fences to divide the plot over Saturday night/Sunday morning when Planning Officers are on leave and then allowing the land to run to wild, weedy rubbish dumps. As the 'plots' are sold, the owners expect, at some time in the future, to be able to build on them, so have no interest in maintaining the land itself. The fences, once erected, cannot be removed legally, due to a sadly overlooked loophole in the existing law.

There is only one way to prevent the erection of these fences. The Local Authority can impose an Article 4 Directive to prevent any erection whatsoever on the land. This must be imposed before the fences are built. The land pirates therefore try to erect their fences before the public becomes aware of their plans. The plots are sold on the Internet, mostly to people who do not understand that they cannot be built upon, or to people hoping to degenerate their plots so badly that they become ugly, and so may persuade the Government in future to change their designation. They hope to succeed in blackmail by neglect.

PLEASE ALERT YOUR LOCAL PLANNING
AUTHORITY IF YOU SEE ANY
AGRICULTURAL LAND PUT UP FOR SALE.

Already large areas of the Chilterns have been destroyed in this way. We have lost to PARKER FIELDS LTD who have ruined a huge area of green belt land at Bellingdon near Chesham, and to WARRENGATE who have ruined a large area near Tewin. There are 6 other areas gone in Sussex, Kent, Hampshire, Buckinghamshire and Suffolk. And, of course, many of these areas are also in or near Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particularly here in the Chilterns.

The enormously inflated figures for needed housing issued by John Prescott has encouraged this wicked piracy. **In fact there are enough brownfield sites**

within the M25 circle to accommodate all the new housing required for London if they are developed properly.

The only reason developers prefer using prime Green Belt land is the value of its beauty (and the fact that it is easy to clear for building, unlike many brownfield sites). They are destroying this beauty as fast as they can. Soon too much of our treasured countryside will be overbuilt and the value and beauty of the rural environment will be lost forever.

Even now it is almost impossible to find a landscape view that does not contain any buildings.

There is only one glimmer of hope for the already sold plots. This is to prove that an illegal Change of Use has been made. Here again there is no legal definition of an agricultural plot size. It is obvious to anyone that very small plots of less than an acre cannot be used for farming, but so far no successful case has been won on this ground.

In San Diego County, California, and in most of the USA, there is a strict rule that **no land scheduled as being within an agricultural area can be sold in less than 8 acre plots, and that only one dwelling is allowed on each plot.** If we had such a sensible rule here our Green Belt areas and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty would be far better protected. I ask all your readers to **write to their MPs** requesting such a rule to be made law.

The Minister of State in the Deputy Prime minister's office, Lord Rooker, has written to Oliver Weald, MP for NE Herts, saying that where the land has been divided into small plots **an unauthorised change of use has occurred** from the established business of Agriculture. In this case a retrospective Planning Application from the developer must be made, and, if refused, the fences will become illegal. Councils do have some power to demolish illegal structures.

However the legality of this view has not yet been established in court. Please make your local councillors aware of this letter from Lord Rooker.

(Some of the other companies involved in this business are Gladwish Land Sales, Hartwell Bond and Property Spy. The profit incentive mostly comes from the difference in price between the price of agricultural land and land available for development. The options open to the District Council are to issue an Article 4 Directive (a show stopper) or issue a Compulsory Purchase Order. The latter is obviously a difficult option because of the expense. Ed.)

Whither The Society?

John Hanford

The aims of the society, according to its rules are:

“...securing the protection from disfigurement or injury of the countryside and rural surroundings of... Hitcham and Taplow”.

The title of the Society includes the word 'Preservation', and indeed in most of its actions it is essentially negative, that is to say it is against any development or change in our area. This is certainly how the Society is viewed by the Planning Officers of the District Council, and probably most of the Councillors.

As most people know, Taplow itself (or some of it) was designated a Conservation Area by the District Council in 1975. What is the difference between conservation and preservation? This is not a question easily answered since the (Oxford) dictionary very unhelpfully defines conservation as preservation. However in the introduction to the Consultative Document on the Conservation area it states

“Conservation should not be thought of as a purely negative process or as an impediment to progress”.

Thus as far as the Council and the Conservation Area is concerned, developments will be allowed if they enhance or do not detract from the character or appearance of the Area.

Indeed recent developments have been allowed. One example is the demolition of the much extended original house at Wickenden and its replacement by the current house, (which I am sure everyone would agree was a great improvement). There was also the demolition of the old Plessey buildings at Taplow Court and the erection of a hall in a modern architectural style, with little in common with Taplow Court, or the Village, although again most people would agree it was an improvement on the Nissen type huts there before.

Neither of these developments were in the Conservation area. However four modern houses were allowed to be built on the old Springfield house site off Mill Lane, and a modern house (New House) in the grounds of Bapsey House on Berry Hill. It is not apparent how these enhanced the area. However outline consent had already been given before the Conservation Area was designated, so no doubt the cost of compensation weighed more with the planners than their suitability.

The Village is therefore changing, and indeed has done for centuries. Why should the Society attempt to preserve the current status quo in aspic? Attitudes change, certainly to architectural styles. In the 50s and 60s Victorian architecture was considered

terrible, ornate and ugly. Now new houses are being built in the Victorian style, and contemporary 60s and 70s architecture is the *bête noir*, if property values are taken as a guide. Should we be the arbiters of taste for future generations?

Perhaps more importantly, how representative of the inhabitants of Taplow is the Society? What is the average age of its members? How many young people do we have and what is their attitude to the Society and its aims? Can it continue without an influx of new blood and ideas? The Burnham Society has had a significant decline in numbers and is wondering about its future. Will ours go the same way?

The structure name and aims of our Society do not at present attract young village members. Why? Will they perhaps gravitate to it as they get older? Or do they feel they are not interested in its aims? One of the events that the youth of the village do participate in, support and enjoy is the Village Green Party. Indeed it is the major financial undertaking of the Society, but what is the Society doing running it? It certainly bears no relationship to the name and aims of the Society as set out in its rules and objects.

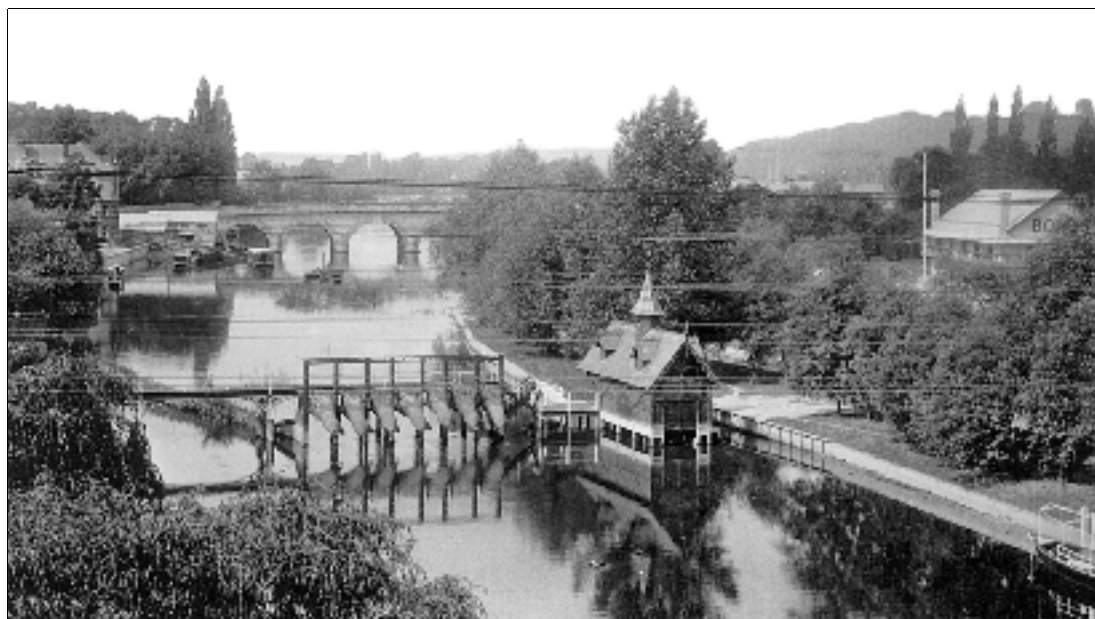
My own view is that the aims of the Society are too restricted. It should be called the Taplow and Hitcham Society, and only part of its object should be the conservation of the village. Promotion of events for village life such as the Village Green Party could be extended to include art exhibitions, talks, walks and perhaps musical events. Note the word promote - it doesn't necessarily have to organise them, indeed as with most Societies there aren't enough active members prepared to or able to do this. It should also take a much more positive view to change and actively encourage the demolition of unattractive or nondescript buildings (of which the village has quite a few), and their replacement with modern buildings in a style complementary to (but not aping) that of the rest of the village.

The Society might then not only attract the younger members of the village, but promote village life, so that people met each other instead of just using their houses as dormitories which most people do. How often do you see and talk to your neighbours?

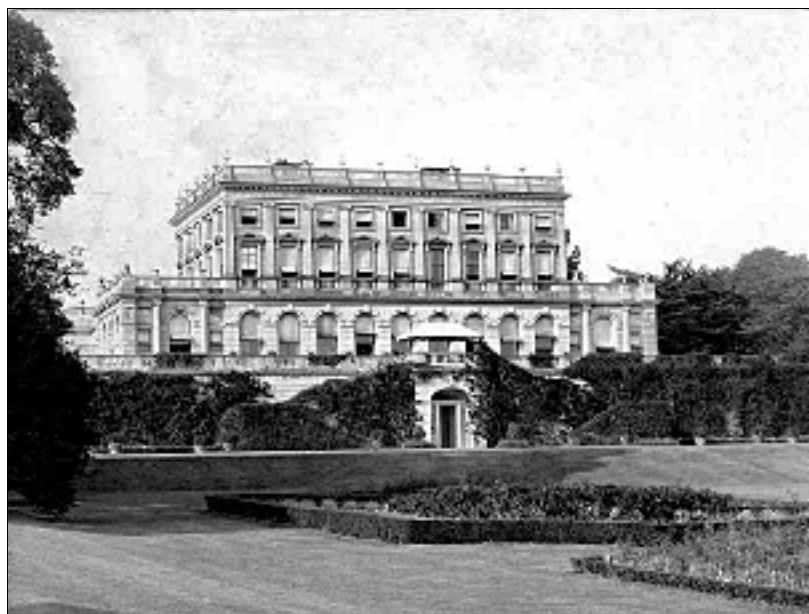
When I was in Hamburg after visiting Vienna, one of the locals asked me “What is the difference between the Viennese and yoghurt?” The answer - “The Yoghurt has a live culture”.

Do we want people to say the same about Taplow?

Pictures from the past



The River Thames at Maidenhead, photographed in 1883 by Henry Taunt. A set of eel bucks (fish traps) can be seen next to the boathouse in the foreground, with Maidenhead Bridge in the background and a glimpse of the old Bond boatyard building on the right; now the site of the flats in Ellington and River Road. Photo courtesy Bob Hanbury / English Heritage.



Cliveden House, also photographed by Henry Taunt in 1883

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