

BUCKINGHAM SOCIETY NEWS LETTER

SEPTEMBER 2009

Update from our chairman

One of the biggest issues facing us at the moment is the proposed development of 700+ houses on a green field site on the other side of bypass at Bent Hill described in more detail below.

One welcome development is the planned improvements at Stowe where a new visitor centre has been approved using the original buildings used by the very first Stowe visitors in the early 1700s. The New Inn, which is a grade I listed building is being sympathetically restored and will once again be the first port of call for Stowe's 100,000+ visitors per year. Along with the New Inn restoration will be a new car park, restaurant and shop. The plan also includes a revision to the road layout at the Chackmore end of Stowe Avenue.

Our annual summer party was a great hit again this year at the end of July, kindly hosted by Bill and Kathy Robins in their beautiful riverside garden. The event began with a lecture by Cyril Aydon, entitled Charles Darwin: Botanist and Gardener followed by drinks and canapé at Walnut Yard.

The Civic Trust went into administration in May, and had long championed the work of civic and amenity societies such as ours and had been a voice for us on a national scale. There have been moves to recreate an organisation to take on the role. There is further information below with an opportunity to put forward your own views. The Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages also has a role to play.

We are very keen to attract more members to join the executive committee. The task is not at all onerous. We meet just four times a year for about an hour and a half. At these meetings we review matters of interest to our members including planning, transport and environmental issues. It is a very rewarding and interesting task. We will also be electing a new chairman at this year's AGM as my four year term has come to an end. If you are interested to know more please just call or email me. I'll be pleased to help. David Peevers 01280 817666 or David.peevers@tesco.n

The Civic Society Initiative (CSI) An Important Debate for ALL members of Civic Societies

This debate was launched in June following the demise of the Civic Trust. Led by Tony Burton, with support from Campaign for Rural England (CPRE), Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the National Trust, the objectives are to explore the options and build consensus around the provision of a national voice which can truly support and represent the Civic Society movement.

This debate needs YOUR input. There are a number of ways in which you can contribute:

Direct Email: civicdebate@civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk

Conferences: GUILDFORD, Saturday 26th September
BLACKPOOL, Thurs – Fri, 15th/6th October
More details on the website

Questionnaire: An on-line questionnaire is now available. Responses by 30th September. www.civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk If you do not have access to email then Gil Jones 01280 815153 would be happy to forward the questionnaire to you if you ring her.

Please take part in at least one of these ways.

The questions being addressed are:

- What is the role of the Civic Society movement?
- What does it do best?
- What are the shortcomings?
- What is the single most important action needed to raise its profile?

I attended the Open Forum in London on 28th July. The excellent Tony Burton chaired the session, encouraging all of us to address the questions listed above. If there was a general consensus, **my** interpretation would be that, as essentially locally-based organizations, individual societies are best served when they seek to forge partnerships with local, single-issue groups and link into a wider local network of campaign organizations (such as ANTAS) with whom they can share best practice. To do this successfully requires strong, national leadership; leadership that is focused on clear, principled objectives and that can act as an effective lobbyist at Government level as well as providing training and interpretation of the mass of confusing legislation.

This was my personal interpretation. Your judgements might differ. But do please join this critical debate, the outcomes of which will shape the future of local civic societies. Views and comments should be received by the end of September 2009.

Of course these questions do not address the underlying problems of funding. Funding for this debate has come largely through generous grants from the National Trust and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. But a strategy for future funding can only be achieved when a consensus for how a national body might operate has been reached.

Carolyn Cumming

Planning Special Interest Group Report – Helene Hill

Aylesbury Vale's core strategy proved to be an indigestible document, and the forms on which comments had to be made were even more of a headache. However the task was undertaken and our response was submitted in the time allowed.

The other big local issue has been the proposal for 700 dwellings off the London Rd behind Benthill. As AVDC did not determine the application within the set time limit, the developers have gone to appeal. This means that AVDC are unable to make a decision, although the officers' recommendation would have been for refusal. At the same time the developers submitted a second application for the same site for the same number of dwellings. There are a few minor alterations, but our objections remain the same. Carolyn Cumming's update follows this report.

Buckingham should be better served with dentists soon. The new owners of Ward's hardware shop obtained change of use as a dentist surgery and they advertise opening soon. Then an application for dentist and doctors surgeries came in for the old cinema. We could see no planning reasons to object, much as we would prefer to see the building returned to its proper use.

We are concerned about the growing number of retail outlets moving from the town centre to the industrial estates. This increases traffic just as government is trying to curb the use of private cars, limits choice and access for those who rely on public transport. It dilutes the range of shops and services available in the town and so weakens the viability of Buckingham as a shopping venue.

Whatever one thinks of M&Co as a shop, it is good to see such a large unit as the former Woolworths back in use. We are also looking forward to studying the newly announced plans for the area behind this block.

While at the BS Garden party last week, I noticed that the Twisted Chimney house had had the ivy removed from it and the chimneys appeared to have been re-pointed. It is good to see that Aylesbury Vale District Council have persuaded the owners to care for this listed building.

Latest News on the Proposal for A Development off the London Road Against unanimous local opposition, the application for a Mixed Development of 700 houses on land south of the bypass road gains approval – Carolyn Cumming

We have just borne witness to the most scandalous and devious interpretation of our planning laws that has resulted in the approval, under delegated powers, of an application that will irrevocably alter the historic configuration of Buckingham and its community.

At the Development Control meeting in Aylesbury last Thursday, 3rd September, District Councillors were told of the impending financial doom should they choose to refuse the Officers' recommendation. It appears that Hallam Land Management has played the system by taking their first application for this site to Appeal and promptly

submitting a second application, which through carefully contrived negotiations, meets the Council's "requirements". Should the meeting have voted in favour of refusing the application, then Hallam Land would have pursued their Appeal, confident of the Inspector finding in their favour and therefore penalizing the District Council with prohibitive costs. In these circumstances, all other valid planning objections – over 300 from members of the Buckingham Community, as well as The Buckingham Society - were cast aside. We shall no longer have a say in where development should be located in Buckingham.

Carolyn and Ed spoke on behalf of the Society and ASHTAV at the meeting and have written at length on what they perceive as a calamitous abuse of the system by speculative developers.

Himalayan Balsam – Ted Farmer

A Buckingham Society member recently expressed concern about the spread of Himalayan Balsam, a very invasive rogue plant, which has appeared on the Heartlands and Bourton Park river banks. This was taken up with AVDC and the BTC. The Town Council Environment Committee has now approved an estimate for the removal of all of these plants as soon as possible.

The Death of Chris Phillips

Members will be saddened to hear of the death of Chris Phillips, one of our members. Chris had been due to speak at a committee meeting of the AVDC about objections to the buildings of a 700 home estate south of the A421 ring road in Buckingham. Chris was a quiet, reflective man of great integrity and principle. Chris supported many local organisations and Buckingham will miss him. Our sympathy goes to his wife and family.

Dates for your Diary

River Rinse – This event will take place on 13th September at 10.30, meeting at Buckingham Athletic Football Club (off Stratford Road). There will be a second river rinse on 11th October.

Heritage Open Day event - The Buckingham Society, in partnership with the Canal Society and Buckingham Heritage Trust, are holding a talk "The Canal and It's Influence On Buckingham" on Sunday 13th September starting at The Old Goal at 2.30 pm. The talk will be followed by a walk to Maids Moreton Mill for cream teas to be served in the garden or the kitchen. Stout shoes are advised.

Executive committee meeting: 1st October at 7.30, at the Villiers Hotel. All members are welcome to attend

The Buckingham Society AGM is to be held on the 26th November 2009. The speaker will be Ela Palmer, director of ASTAV, addressing the question "Can anyone replace the Civic Trust?" The meeting starts at 7.15 pm, and members are invited to arrive early for drinks at 6.45.