The Buckingham Society

Issue 2005/1 April | Spring Issue | Price 60p

Highlights:

Buckingham Health Campaign
Transport Priorities in Buckingham
Mary Pix, Buckingham's Greatest Author ?

the civic trust

ANTAS
Association of North Thames Amenity Societies

Ashtav

The Buckingham Society is a Registered Charity Number 268503

The Buckingham Society is Your Local Civic Society

A voluntary group of people who care passionately about our surroundings and campaigning to enhance and improve our Town.

Members of The Buckingham Society share common aims:

- Promote the distinctive character of our town
- Set high standards of design and sustainability
- Celebrate and safeguard Buckingham's heritage
- Find solutions to environmental problems
- Improve the quality of life in our community
- Inspire sensitive changes within the places we cherish
- Create and consolidate effective partnerships between community, business and local government.

The Society is registered with the Civic Trust, one of 850 Civic Societies in England, and is a member of the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS) and the Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages (ASHTAV).

The Executive Committee Who's Who

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Stanley Meadows 01280 813133

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Campaigning For A Better Buckingham

David Peevers

Our Society's stated objective is to help make Buckingham a better place in which to live and work. We therefore take a keen interest in matters that can affect the town and have several special interest groups (SIGS) to ensure we keep in touch with matters that affect our town. These SIGS enable us to keep up to date with planning, transport and environmental issues.

From my own discussions with members I know that litter is one of the major concerns. Discarded fast food trays, tins and bottles litter our walkways and abandoned supermarket trolleys and other rubbish really spoil the attraction of our town. Our beautiful river is not spared either. The stretch behind the town car park regularly sports a discarded supermarket trolley or two and lately these have been joined by empty beer barrels.

The Buckingham Society is a member of two national civic society organisations, Ashtav and The Civic Trust, and we shall be working with these organisations to learn what experience they can provide to help us combat this menace. We are also in touch with Keep Britain Tidy for their input. I would also welcome thoughts and suggestions from members, as I know that many of you feel strongly about such anti-social behaviour.

Please feel free to contact me at:
The Buckingham Society, 6 Fleece Yard, Buckingham MK18 1JX, or on 01280 817666. Email: david.peevers@tesco.net.

Editorial

Warren Whyte

Welcome to my first edition of the Society's magazine, and the first for 2005. Following on from John Credland's great work last year, I am pleased to take up the reins and trust that you will find this issue as interesting and informative a read as usual.

Working with the editorial team of David Peevers and Charlie Macdonald, I hope that the magazine becomes even better with a wider scope of interesting news, provocative debate and discussion about issues that affect our great and historic town that we are lucky to live in.

Cover Picture

This issue's cover photograph is of the Buckingham Hospital taken by Warren Whyte.

Buckingham Health Campaign's Petition

Ed Grimsdale

Buckingham Society members will realise that there is widespread discontent over plans that Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust are effecting to remove some areas of hospital care (eg strokes and cardiac treatment) from Stoke Mandeville Hospital (Aylesbury) to High Wycombe Hospital. The proposed connective large ambulance (or "jumbulance") from the Stoke Mandeville site to High Wycombe will make the journey to treatment less fraught for those patients living in or around Aylesbury, but will offer little amelioration to those in North Bucks because they must undertake a trip to Aylesbury before joining any hospital bus.

People are asking why the Strategic Health Authority is not rescheduling North Bucks to come under the aegis of Milton Keynes Hospital or The John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, since those good facilities are closer for car travel and relatively well provided with direct public transport from North Bucks (the X5 Stagecoach bus – Oxford, Buckingham, Milton Keynes, Cambridge – operates from early to late on seven days a week, mostly with half-hourly frequency).

Whilst patients may understand the economic case for creating fewer, but larger, consultant teams (that may mean better treatment), they cannot accept the translation of some of the teams to a remote rim of the hospital region that neither patients nor their visitors may access without stress. The people of North Bucks feel that the public consultation exercise was flawed and that a solution is being imposed that will degrade support for some seriously ill patients in North Bucks. The testimony of patients who have faced early morning, inaccessible appointments in High Wycombe Hospital and who chose to travel the day before, and then stayed overnight in Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Wycombe has sounded alarm bells in many homes, particularly those containing elderly or infirm people.

Some people argue that the issue is a temporary one that will cease to be a problem once the proposed system of patient choice – with money following the patient to the location that they select is fully functional. The counter argument has also been rehearsed (eg in a recent issue of "The Doctor" magazine – that in areas where patient choice is being tested, it is failing in a miasma of delaying extra layers of costly bureaucracy). National studies show that patients are reluctant to travel even to access better class of care. The Health Service's goal of patient choice with money following the patient risks expensive failure if few customers exercise choice. Dr C. Brown has suggested that we should invest in the Hospital Car service – volunteers who provide "lifts" to patients. We have spoken to some of these drivers and they lack enthusiasm for the long two hour round trip to Wycombe (and the prospect of a second trip if their person is undergoing "day surgery").

The Buckingham Health Campaign Group found the people of Buckingham and the villages of North Bucks to be supportive when they held a rally in front of The Old Gaol during a Saturday's market in February. The group of collectors led by Cllr Robin Stuchbury included Cllr Hugh Carey from Turweston who serves on Bucks County Council, the Campaign's Guru: Dr Paul Thomas (a mastermind behind the successful Tingewick By-Pass Campaign) and three members of the *Buckingham and Winslow Access for All Group*. They were delighted to be joined by Ken Cockerton whose criticism of a system that provided him with an ambulance to get to and from High Wycombe hospital was highlighted in *The Buckingham Advertiser*. Getting signatures for the petition was facile, many people volunteered themselves, and did not wait to be approached. Young and old, workers, business people and intellectuals (including at least two Professors) rallied to the cause and within three hours the total number of signatories had leapt from 300 to 865. With other collectors spread across the villages of North Bucks, the 1000 mark – the chosen point for further action was soon reached.

After receiving excellent advice from our MP, John Bercow, the Steering Group sent that Petition to Parliament. Here is a copy of the official record in Hansard: 22 Mar 2005 : Column 856 Hospital Provision (North Buckinghamshire)

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): *I wish to present a petition on behalf of 1,088 residents of north Buckinghamshire and others. The petitioners are led by Mr. Edward Grimsdale, the secretary of the Buckingham health campaign steering group, and by Councillor Robin Stuchbury, the chairman of the group, by Councillor John Barnett of Buckingham, Dr. Paul Thomas of Gawcott, Buckingham, Councillor Hugh Carey of Turweston, North Buckinghamshire and Petula Boddy of Buckingham. The petition states: To the House of Commons. The Petition of residents of North Buckinghamshire and others.*

Declares that the Petitioners have serious reservations about the plans for the reorganisation of hospital and other health provisions in North Buckinghamshire, and that the consultation process was inadequate. The Petitioners further declare that the proposed plans are unacceptable. The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to review the proposed plans and make changes to address public concerns.

And the Petitioners remain her Majesty's loyal and humble servants.

What next? The Campaign anticipates that the power of the Petition will help it, and John Bercow, to insist on detailed answers to questions asked of the appropriate authorities: the Buckinghamshire NHS Hospitals Trust, the Regional Strategic Health Authority in Oxford, and, ultimately, Rt Hon John Reid MP, Secretary of State for Health.

Mary Pix, Buckingham's Greatest Author?

Ed Grimsdale

Mary Pix was one of the first female dramatists in the modern world. She was the author of over a dozen plays, half of them comedies, half serious histories, that were all staged by leading companies of actors in London. Mary also wrote one or two novels and some poetry.

Mary Pix was born in Nettlebed, Oxon, in 1666, the daughter of the newly-appointed Headmaster of The Latin School, Roger Griffiths and his wife, Lucy who also taught in our Grammar School. The family moved into The Latin House, not the present home of Mr and Mrs Henry Scrase and family, but in an earlier dwelling on that site next to Buckingham's ancient Chantry Chapel and Grammar School. Clearly, Mary picked up a little learning and a considerable knowledge of sex whilst growing up amongst the boys of The Latin School. Her learning was demonstrated through her writing that is full of little tags in French and other languages – typically, a veneer on the wooden prose of the half-educated. It is not unfair to claim that Mary Pix may have been the ONLY girl educated at RLS before The Education Reform Bill of 1907.

Mary Griffiths first claim to fame was through an ill-judged sexual act. Her father perished early sometime in 1682, possibly through one of the epidemics of smallpox that were endemic in Buckingham. Presumably Mary's mother carried on as teacher, and she and her daughter continued to stay in the Headmaster's residence. Possibly, the new young Head, Thomas Dalby, thought he possessed "Droit du Seigneur" over his predecessor's daughter. Whatever, it is recorded that the Headmaster's house was burned to the ground during a night of passion between the Head and Mary Griffiths on 23 February 1683.

O let us hear thee speaking in accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion;
of candles on the sill;
O speak to reawaken and
hasten our control;
O speak, and make us listen,
thou Guardian of our school.

That was virtually the end of Mary's connection with her hometown of Buckingham. In July 1684 she married George Pix, a London merchant tailor. For a time, despite the loss of a daughter in infancy, Mary Pix enjoyed a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption, that inflated her figure so that she became known as a corpulent voluptuary. However, that Buckingham Grammar School education was not wasted and Mary became an avid reader of history and romances, particularly when she accompanied her husband to country houses of gentlefolk wealthy enough to have collected a library. Based on her memory of one dusty tome, Mary wrote a play "Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks" that took London by storm at its first production in 1696 despite the play having received a panning from the critics – it was pointed out, for instance, that Ibrahim had actually been the Turk's Twelfth Emperor! "Ibrahim" was dedicated to Richard Minshull of Bourton House near Buckingham in these words:

Sir, That sweetness of temper I have had the happiness to discover in the honour of your Company in the first place and your favourable opinion of my Play in the next gives me encouragement to claim your protection.....

Over the next ten years historical plays, farces and comedies flew from Mary Pix's pen – straight into print and performance. No doubt, George Pix had to foot the bill for the productions. He died young leaving Mary pretty well penniless. Worse still being a woman in the man's world of theatre meant that she was subject to scorn and underhanded dealing. She had satirised her own teenage fondness for wine in her play "The Innocent Mistress" of 1697, but that didn't stop male detractors issuing a withering pamphlet entitled "The Female Wits": pure character assassination of England's three earliest female playwrights. Mary Pix was satirised as "Mrs Wellfed". One actor plagiarised the whole of Mary's play "The Deceiver Deceived". Mary Pix was no rampant "women's libber": her plays paint women's imperfections as brightly as they celebrate Dandys with their outrageously well-filled breeches, quiffs, superior moles and predilection to shout "Gadzooks". Some enlightened men, such as the dramatist William Congreve, defended the new school of female writing, but most were happy to join the bully boys in their crude attempts to put women back where they belonged. Sadly, Mary Pix took to writing plays under a pseudonym or anonymously. Her fortunes continued to fall so that by 1709 a revival of a play that Mary had co-written with another of the "female wits" Susanna Centlivre was performed for Mary's benefit. It is still uncertain when and where (Kent?) Mary Pix died. Various dates between 1709 and 1720 have been the subject of conjecture.

In death, Mary Pix has become more famous than in life. The rise and rise of Women's Studies, particularly in university campuses across the USA has created an industry dedicated to studying the pre-history of women's literature. The "female wits" have an honoured position in such studies, and whilst you read this article there will be literally hundreds of earnest students reading modern editions of Mary Pix's works whilst readying themselves to answer questions on the birth of female drama. Even in her home country of the United Kingdom, interest in Mary Pix's convoluted pieces, the "Whitehall Farces" of their time is growing and, one by one, her plays are being staged. The writer saw RADA's fine production of "The Beau Defeated" in 2002, for instance.

It is time for Buckingham to reclaim its own. Mary Pix was jointly responsible for giving Alexander Denton the chance to build what we now know as "The Latin House" and her plays delighted royalty and commoners, alike. Buckingham must celebrate its role in the creation of the women's movement and decide, perhaps, whether Mary Pix is Buckingham's greatest female figure.

Transport Priorities In Buckingham

Geoff Shaw

To make progress we must try to prioritise the transport issues presently being discussed by the Transport Sub-Group of the Buckingham Community Forum and the Transport SIG of The Buckingham Society. I believe that priorities on what should be done must be determined by whether they are important or easily possible or a combination of both. The issues break into three main areas:

Road system linking/outside Buckingham

We are obviously facing massive pressures on our road system through housing and industrial development. In our case the main ones are the expansion of Milton Keynes and the growth of housing north of Aylesbury.

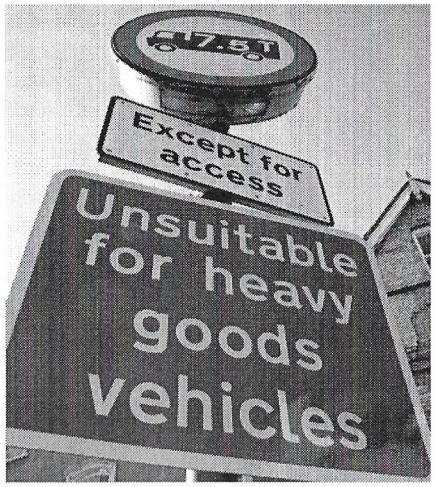
1) The main issue is the use of the A421 as a major east-west link and for local traffic. The roundabout between this and the A413 north-east of Tesco is the major pinch-point. County Council plans to dual this road are going to take a long time and will be phenomenally expensive, especially as they are unlikely to help the situation until the pinch-point of this roundabout is removed. The only way to solve this is to move the whole road south of Tesco and to allow no link onto it at this point. I believe that this will only happen if the A421 becomes a "strategic highway" and therefore the responsibility of the Highways Agency not the County Council.

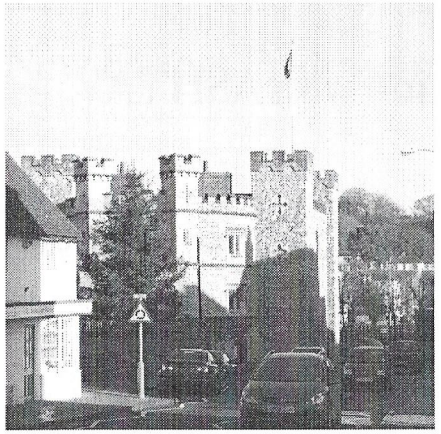
2) The pedestrian traffic-lights at this roundabout should be rephrased to a time interval similar to the ones in the middle of Buckingham, which work well. Cars should be allowed to move through a flashing yellow light, if there is no-one attempting to use the crossing.

Management of the road system within Buckingham

The main issues within the town are congestion, safety and quality of life for pedestrians.

1) There could be a HGV weight limit on Brackley Road - West Street coming in and going out of Buckingham. There is a perfectly usable alternative for traffic to use the A43 and A421 to avoid the A422 between Brackley and Buckingham.





2) To cut down congestion Addington Road should be made one-way north-south. A one-way system should be incorporated for Castle Street, School Lane, West Street in a clockwise direction.

3) A mini roundabout should be inserted into the junction of the Castle Meadow car park and the High Street by the Grand Junction Public House.

4) The speed limit on the Bourton Road should be more rigorously enforced. A 20 mph speed limit should be considered for Western Avenue and in the Tudor Meadows estate.

5) The councils should take responsibility for proper road markings and roads signage in the Tudor Meadows estate by not fobbing us off by saying that David Wilson Homes are at fault.

6) Traffic flows should be carefully measured on Friday and Saturday this coming autumn during the Charter Fair to gain evidence for a possible case for the pedestrianisation of the centre of Buckingham.

Public Transport

We now have strong evidence that a decent bus service properly advertised will produce demand, because Stagecoach have recently decided to make the X5 service half-hourly operating longer during the day.

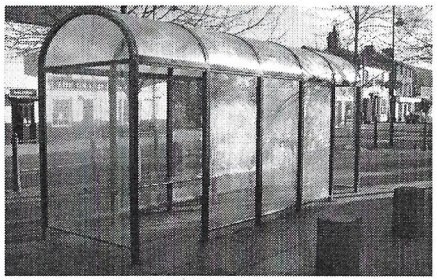
The well-advertised problems in reaching hospitals could be solved by some simple rescheduling of existing services.

1) The 40 bus should be rescheduled to produce a more frequent service between the centre of town and Tesco.

2) The 32 bus should be extended to Milton Keynes Hospital. The 66 bus presently only goes to Stoke Mandeville Hospital at weekends: this should be extended to weekdays. We should support the proposal for a fast link between Stoke Mandeville Hospital and High Wycombe hospital.

3) As a first step all the bus shelters should carry up to date timetable information. This should then be rapidly extended to all bus stops within Buckingham.

A more detailed paper is available from the Buckingham Society's office.



Society benefits by association with ASHTAV

Ed Grimsdale (Acting Chairman of ASHTAV)

The Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages (ASHTAV) was formed about fifteen years ago to voice the concerns of those living in hamlets, villages and small towns. ASHTAV's membership unites Amenity Societies and Groups, Parish and Town Councils in small historic towns and villages in their common efforts to preserve, protect and, where appropriate, adapt, features of historic importance or public delight.

ASHTAV espouses high standards of architecture and planning and it is delighted that its membership contains individuals from within the planning and architectural professions who are ready to share their expertise. Winston Churchill is said to have stated: "First we shape our buildings and from then on they shape us." The Association accepts this maxim and its implicit message that bad design blights lives. Good design is vital to the health of our smaller communities.

The Association stimulates interest in and care for the beauty, character and fabric of small historic towns and villages. Its magazine usually celebrates an individual village or town ensuring that its identity and heritage is broadcast across the country. Unless eyes are opened, the charm of a village may be forever overlooked. Britain is so full of unique villages and small towns that if a particular village is not on the tourist trail it may be unsung. Sometimes, only those that live in such a place can reveal its true beauty, for instance that from its river bridge the silhouette of the village against the dawning sky is as magical as the Taj Mahal. Such fugitive memories are life enhancing and if lost, through neglect or poor development, life becomes poorer and less memorable.

ASHTAV recognises the many social and economic changes challenging town and village life - the growth of industry and tourism, the migration of people and homes from conurbations to the countryside, the decline of traditional agriculture and demographic change. These changes alter the pattern of life in rural Britain. They cannot be resisted but ASHTAV works hard so that their introduction respects existing settlements and values.

By telling of planning successes and spreading the word through cautionary tales the Association helps other places to learn. New developments should take place with sensitive consultation and respect for the existing scene and community life. ASHTAV receives grants from English Heritage and other bodies, but is otherwise self-supporting and relies on the commitment and voluntary effort of its members and friends.

To learn more above ASHTAV visit its website: www.ashtav.org.uk

New Events Programme Starts Well

David Peevers

This year we have run two very successful open meetings at our new University of Buckingham venue.

"Bernwood in Buckingham" was the subject for the first when Vicky Wetherall and Becky Willcox from the Bucks County Council Bernwood Forest Project presented a fascinating insight into the ancient Bernwood hunting forest which included Buckingham at its northern edge. They also explained how parishes within the ancient forest boundaries can participate in helping to promote and focus attention on an area which has hitherto been overlooked and undervalued. The Buckingham Society will be working with the project organisers to coordinate activities.

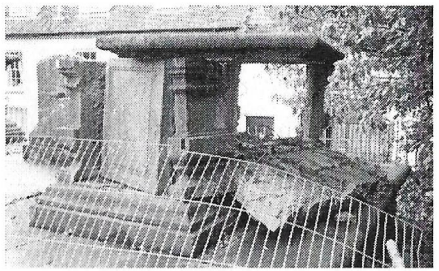
The restoration of Stowe was the subject for the society's open evening on 9th March. Stowe's Peter Wescombe gave an entertaining and informative slide presentation showing just how much work had been done in the garden since the National Trust took it over in 1989. Peter's presentation was peppered with lively and amusing anecdotes illustrating the hard work of the many volunteers and specialists who have turned what was a wilderness into a World Heritage site. Peter successfully passed on his love of the gardens to an appreciative audience.

We are planning to run an event each month up to July and then again in the autumn.

SIG Report: The Old Church Yard

Gill Jones

Although we were very disappointed to be turned down by the Buckingham and Gawcott Trust, the neighbourhood group were determined to effect the repair of the visibly deteriorating Bartlett tombs. To this end we had two days of clearance, the last being on Halloween 2004 when we had an end of year supper, which raised £205. Everyone not only worked hard but generously contributed towards the sum needed for a qualified stonemason to make good the stonework. The work was to have been started February, but weather prevented this. The Stonemason has now scheduled the second week in March so hopefully the work will be completed by the end of spring. We are still looking for funding to meet the required amount on the last estimate. Suggestions welcome.



SIG Report: Planning

Hélène Hill

An important and sensitive site in central Buckingham is the subject of a planning application; the former Magistrates Court in Verney Close. The proposal is to demolish it and build on to the existing library. The flat roofed building is contrary to the policies in AVDC's planning guidelines for Conservation Areas and those in the Vision & Design Statement.

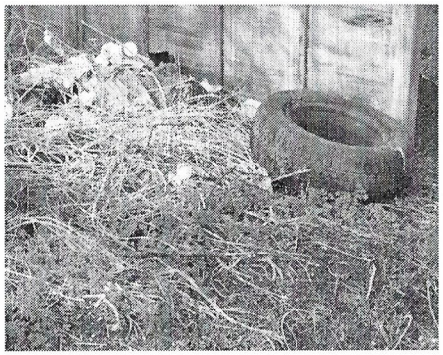
I understand that a planning brief for the Moreton Road housing will be ready in a few months. The plans for a DIY store on the Swan Business Park have been refused as being contrary to the land use and highways aspect policies in the local plan.

Amended plans have been submitted for the flood storage system at Water Stratford and the controversial flood walls in Ford Street have been withdrawn. These walls would only have protected five properties. There is a trend for applications for the conversion of office space above shops to living accommodation. We support this as long as such conversions do not have a detrimental effect to either listed buildings or the conservation area. We were pleased to see plans to replace the windows above the Darling and Wood's old shop with sash windows.

Personally I have written to Bucks County Council Highways about the two lime trees that have been hastily felled in Stowe Avenue, supposedly because they were dangerous. These trees are important historically as well as aesthetically, and are mentioned, and pictured, in the new Conservation Area Review document.

Spring Litter Pick

David Peevers

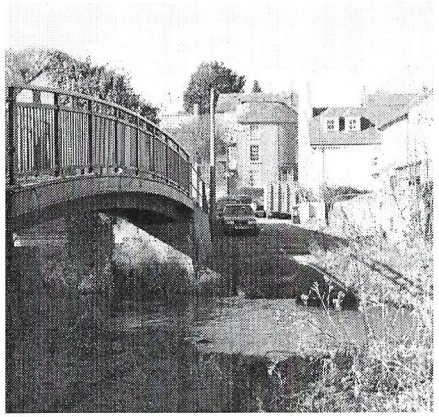


A car wheel and two discarded car batteries were among the litter collected at our annual spring litter pick on 16 March when Society members cleared several sites in the town centre.

The event was organised by Ed Grimsdale, and we thank AVDC for the loan of equipment and materials.

SIG Report: River

David Peevers



One of our major projects this year is to revitalise the River SIG to carry on the excellent work of John Townsend and Tony Parker with their highly successful Year of the River project.

One of our aims is to improve access to the river so that more of us can enjoy a clean, well flowing river and the Riverside Walk.

If you would like to be involved with the River SIG please contact David Peevers (details on page 3).

SIG Report: Green Spaces

Ted Farmer

Agreement concerning a sewer pipe has delayed Heartlands adoption by AVDC but is anticipated soon. A full inspection will be made and a schedule of remedial works compiled before transfer.

The pedestrian bridge from Cornwall's Meadow is a separate matter for the County Council and the continued shabby condition is very frustrating.

The Hilltop area adjacent to Holloway Spinney has now been transferred to AVDC. A management plan for these two areas, together with Maids Moreton Avenue, is being drafted by AVDC and we understand will be available for public consultation.

A large double-trunk sycamore on the perimeter of Maids Moreton Avenue woodland was recently felled as part of AVDC policy to eliminate the species; it is to be left where it fell.

There has been no change in the matter of reclamation of the pit but it is still intended to replace the derelict fence on the Page Hill perimeter, possibly this summer.

Help Needed

Minutes Secretary

Following Gill Smith's move to become the Membership Secretary, we are looking for a new Minutes Secretary to help the executive prepare agendas and minutes for five executive meetings and the Society AGM.

Contact David Peevers on 01280 817666 for more information.

Planning Applications Now Online

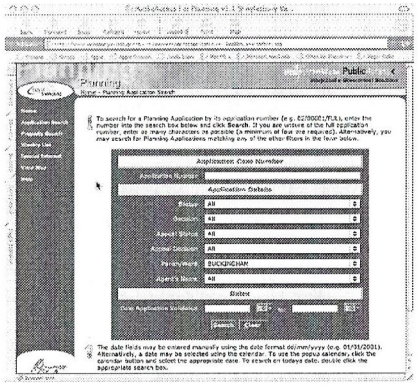
Warren Whyte

AVDC planning department has improved its online presence and was recently marked 16/21 for its services by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This welcome move finally allows local residents to inspect the latest planning applications without having to travel to Aylesbury or catch the Town Council office within their limited opening hours.

However, the planning website is running on out-dated server software which means that users of non-Microsoft browsers cannot access the site correctly (such as Firefox, Netscape or Safari). The planning department has advised: "It is certainly not out policy to limit web access to [Microsoft] Internet Explorer users and we plan to upgrade to the new version as soon as possible".

To try out the new service, you could review the planning application for the new Library extension as noted in Hélène Hill's report by using the application reference number 05/00670/ACC.

The website can be found at: www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk and follow the "Our Environment" link to planning applications, though only broadband users should consider downloading drawings!



Notes & Queries

Editorial Information

Articles are commissioned by the editorial team: David Peevers, Charlie Macdonald and Warren Whyte. Suggestions and ideas for articles are always welcome. Contact: editor@warrenwhyte.co.uk or david.peevers@tesco.net

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Charity Details

The Buckingham Society is a registered charity (number 268503). The Society address is 6 Fleece Yard, Market Hill, Buckingham MK18 1JX.

Next Issue

Submissions and article ideas for the summer issue should reach the editorial team by mid June.

Dukes of Buckingham

Following on from last issue's article by Rodney Shirley, readers may be interested in a new website about the Dukes of Buckingham by Andy Boddington of Finmere. The site can be found at: www.dukesofbuckingham.org

Heritage Open Days Weekend

HODs is scheduled for the 8-11 September. Events are being planned by the Society for this year's proposed theme Upstairs Buckingham – an opportunity to see parts of Buckingham not normally open to the public. For building owners who wish to take part, please contact Carolyn Cumming on 01280 816226.

Buckingham Parish Fête

The Parish Fête is on Saturday 21 May in the grounds of St Peter and St Paul. The fête will be opened by Rt Hon John Bercow MP at 12 noon. Attractions include music by the Buckingham Acoustic Club, barbeque, magic show, various fund raising stalls and activities for the children.

Further Information

Civic Trust: www.civictrust.org.uk

ANTAS: www.antas.org.uk

ASHTAV: www.ashtav.org.uk

Keep Britain Tidy: www.encams.org/

Bernwood Ancient Hunting Forest Project: www.buckscc.gov.uk/countryside/bernwood

Corporate Members

We are pleased to receive support from these corporate members:

Aerodex-Floyd *www.aerodexfloyd.co.uk*

Buckingham Nurseries and Garden Centre *www.buckingham-nurseries.co.uk*

Castle Court Properties Ltd

If your business is interested in becoming a corporate member of The Buckingham Society please contact the membership secretary listed on the inside cover.

Next Event

Wednesday 11 May 2.30pm at the Buckingham Community Centre

Jason West:

The new Buckingham Wildlife Project

Address Label