



The Buckingham Society

Campaigning for a better Buckingham

Newsletter February 2021

A word from our Chair – Roger Edwards

By the time you read this it will be almost a full year since we first went into lockdown, a year in which we have all had to get used to so many new things. But I don't plan to go into all that. Most of us, I am sure, have seen so much coverage of the pandemic on the news and in the papers and I do not want to add to that.

After all, most (all?) of us will have had at least one Covid jab by now and the light at the end of the tunnel is probably not an oncoming train. Spring is on its way and we have reason to be positive. Who knows, by summer we might be able to do the things we all want to do. And, if that is the case, I am sure that we will all appreciate not just the big events but the small things in life more than ever.

I had not heard of Sharon Draper until recently, and for those who don't know of her, she is an American teacher and author of children's books who has been honoured as American National Teacher of the Year, is a five-time winner of the Coretta Scott King Literary Awards and has been invited no less than six times to the White House. Sharon Draper says this, *"It's the little things that make happy moments, not the grand events. Joy comes in sips, not gulps"*.



And we are very fortunate that, living in Buckingham, it is possible to stumble across all sorts of small things, sips, that can cheer us up. When walking through our parks you can hear the birds getting ready for spring, snowdrops and crocuses are blooming. Even the occasional daffodil is on view and the days are getting longer (although that is not so easy to spot through the persistent murky wet weather).

Also, we are fortunate to have so many organisations around us who do so much to help provide those small moments of pleasure. There are too many to name and it would be unfair to try, as I am certain to miss some. However, it does not take a lot of thought to come up with a lengthy list of groups and societies, all of which help to make Buckingham

the fine community it is and bring us all those small moments that make our lives better – the sips rather than the gulps.

And just to make the point even more strongly that the small things matter, here is a poem by the wonderful Wendy Cope OBE, it is called “The Orange”. The poem was written almost 30 years ago but it seems to me to be so appropriate for today:

*At lunchtime I bought a huge orange —
The size of it made us all laugh.
I peeled it and shared it with Robert and Dave —
They got quarters and I had a half.*

*And that orange, it made me so happy,
As ordinary things often do
Just lately. The shopping. A walk in the park.
This is peace and contentment. It's new.*

*The rest of the day was quite easy.
I did all the jobs on my list
And enjoyed them and had some time over.
I love you. I'm glad I exist.*

I am not going to try to top that - enjoy the Spring.

Planning – Carolyn Cumming

Various Planning Consultations

The Society's planning group has spent a lot of time responding to consultations within the past 6 months! In addition to the Government's *Planning for the Future*, another consultation on revising Permitted Development Rights was issued before Christmas. This contained damaging proposals to permit all commercial premises on the high street to undertake a change of use to residential WITHOUT planning permission. Hitherto, there had been restrictions to changes of use within Conservation Areas. Civic Voice also viewed this as a particularly retrograde step. The Buckingham Society's response argued that, without the need for prior planning permission, there would be a long-lasting detrimental impact on the historic fabric of our market towns.

Another consultation for the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) was also issued before Christmas. The “further main modifications” were, in essence, adding emphasis to existing policies and allocations. The latter, in our view, remain contradictory to the Buckingham Neighbourhood Development Plan and, regrettably, do very little to tackle the lack of infrastructure to support new developments. Of particular import in this respect is the failure of the VALP to acknowledge the need for an extension to the bypass to link the A421 and the A422. The proposed developments of Moreton Road, (Phase 3), and the 170 dwellings in Maids Moreton will severely impact congestion in the town centre and lead to the evils of rat running on unsuitable roads around the town.

Meanwhile the Buckinghamshire Council is embarking on a new plan for the county as a whole, which given the current progress of VALP, could supersede it. It is worth recalling that, throughout the process, the main thrust of VALP has been to establish Aylesbury as a re-invigorated 'Garden Town', an ambition likely to succeed.

Planning Applications

There is a backlog of applications awaiting decisions, including those mentioned in previous newsletters; including flats above M&Co, an extension at 5 The Villas, flats behind Pightle Crescent to name a few.

The application for 13 houses opposite the old Police Station has been reduced to 12. Next to the old police station, there has been a much-criticised scheme for 9 houses next to 38 Moreton Road. This former 'green' space was denuded of its trees and vegetation, exposing a steep, narrow slope on which the applicant seeks to squeeze nine three-bedroom houses. There are multiple issues to consider, not least over-crowding and drainage, given its elevated position above Mary McManus Drive and the Wharf Yard complex below.

Manor Farm, Bourton is seeking permission to install a solar energy scheme on land bordering the Bletchley Road (A421). The scheme is supported by the Society and the Town Council as an important contribution to green energy by the town. The site will be relatively concealed from housing, hedgerows will be retained and enlarged at some points, and it will also include an expanded area of wildflowers bordering the footpath that runs through it. Archaeological excavations will be carried out in advance of the panels being installed. It is expected to have a lifespan of approximately 35 years.

Transport Report – David Child

Path Moreton Road play area

The community pathway sub-group meeting of 27 January 2021 was cancelled. I therefore have nothing new to report on this proposal, which is backed by the Society. Details can be found on this link to the Society website.

<https://buckingshamsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PathwayMoretonRd202006.pdf>

Buckingham HGV (Buckingham Town Centre Freight Intervention)

The proposal by the Transport Strategy Officer to Buckinghamshire Council was planned to be submitted about March 2021. Whatever the final design it will go to consultation and I suspect with May local elections planned to go ahead on the 6 May it will have to wait until later in the year.



This HGV got lost on Summerhouse Hill causing serious damage to a multi-occupancy building. It at least makes a change from Well Street.

It is possible that the Moreton Road closure for gas main replacement may have had a hand in this but of course equally the satnav probably did not show that the road was closed.

HS2 and East-West Rail Working Group

The Society continues to attend the monthly meetings. Most of the meetings are taken up with problems raised by parish councils where the railways, transport routes and works sites are located. Fortunately, Buckingham has not experienced the sort of disruption experienced by other parishes.

Update from the University – Dean Jones

Sadly, the university has not been immune from the impact of lockdowns and over the last few months, changes have been made to refocus and strengthen the university's position. These changes will provide the necessary resilience to get the institution through the inevitable challenges which lie ahead. Recent pressures have meant that plans for development of the Centre for Computing and AI on the Tingewick Road site have changed significantly and are currently on hold pending further review. It may be some time before the site takes shape in the way everyone had hoped and planned for.

Even though the university is supplying distance learning we still have 110 students living in our accommodation who either are unable to return home or are eligible to be on site in line with government guidelines issued to higher education establishments.

University buildings, along with many others in the town, suffered significant flooding damage in December. We became aware that some families were in very severe difficulties and so during this time the university housed 4 families with free accommodation. This has been a difficult time for everyone coping with flooding and Covid and the University remains committed to help and support our students and neighbours wherever we can.



Tanlaw Mill 24th December 2020

The Vice Chancellor, Professor James Tooley says ‘Fortunately student numbers in January were significantly up on the previous year, which was welcome news amongst the gloom of further tiers and lockdowns. It is encouraging that the roadmap out of lockdowns has now been published, and we now have some hope for a return to normality this year. I am incredibly proud to be leading the University of Buckingham and to work with such a supportive team and of course our wonderful students past, present, and future from around the world. I am looking forward immensely to working with the Buckingham Society and our friends and partners from across the community as I become established in the University.’

Railway Board – Roger Edwards

Many of you probably remember when Buckingham had its own railway station with a regular, if not hugely frequent, train service. Even if you didn’t see the trains in action, you will almost certainly have made use of the Railway Walk for exercise and recreation. Well, you will no doubt be pleased to know that the Buckingham Society is planning to commemorate the town’s railway heritage by installing an information board next to the remains of the station platform at the end of Chandos Road.



Train for Bletchley

The University Vice-Chancellor has kindly agreed that a board similar to those to be found in Bourton Park and on Berties’ Walk can be installed. It will describe in words and pictures the history of the railway from its opening in 1850 up to the final visit by Her Majesty the Queen in 1966 and the removal of the track in 1967.

To fund the project, the Society has put in a bid to Buckinghamshire Council’s Buckingham and Villages Community Board. At the time of writing, we are waiting to hear if the bid has been successful – so watch this space.



Buckingham Station in the 1950s

Ultimately it would be good to have a series of such boards throughout Buckingham to celebrate the most important historic places around the town. Maybe one on Church Hill for example, and another by the Cutterne Elm tree at Bristle Hill – lots of history around there and what about something about the canal?

It would be very interesting to hear whether members have any ideas where other such boards could go? Please let us have your suggestions.

Flood Alleviation and Mitigation: the natural way – Ian Orton

The jury is still probably out as far as determining the truth of the assertion made by the Environment Agency back in the summer of 1998 that the floods that hit Buckingham on Maundy Thursday of that year were a “one-in-a-hundred-year” occurrence.



Since then, Buckingham has been hit by serious floods on at least two occasions, notably in July 2007 and most recently, on 23 and 24 December 2020 as well as a number of “near misses”. The 1998 floods certainly lasted longer, with parts of Buckingham still under water days after the initial deluge. In both 2007 and 2020 the waters receded almost as rapidly as they had risen, mostly disappearing within 24 hours. But the river level was almost certainly highest in 2020 with the measuring gauge at the Tingewick Road bridge recording a new record in the early evening of 23 December.

Quite what the new record is remains unknown as the gauge ended-up being totally immersed by the rising waters. What is beyond dispute is that many properties in Buckingham, including Oddfellows Hall and the new care home currently being constructed behind the Grand Junction, were flooded.

Given the time of year this almost certainly caused much distress, disturbance, and financial loss. The December 2020 floods may have been exacerbated for many householders by problems associated with storm drains and fallen trees and branches in the river. All this will invariably raise questions about flood alleviation and mitigation schemes.

In the aftermath of the 1998 floods there was talk of the construction of a holding pond upstream of Buckingham along with the construction of physical flood barriers within the town. These came to nothing, however, possibly because of a perceived lack of social or economic return on the investment required and the belief that bad floods were a one-in-a-hundred-year event.

More recently attention has started to focus on natural flood prevention and alleviation measures with both the government and the Environment Agency funding a variety of schemes and evaluation exercises. Working with natural processes to reduce flood risk involves implementing measures that help to protect, restore and emulate the natural functions of catchments, floodplains and rivers using a variety of measures.

These can involve:

1. River and floodplain management involving river and floodplain restoration; the erection of “leaking” barriers; and the creation of “offline” storage areas.

2. Run-off management focusing on soil and land management; headwater drainage; and run-off pathways.
3. Woodland management involves woodlands within catchments and on floodplains and riverbanks together with cross-slope woodlands.

Some elements of these approaches are controversial and appear counter-intuitive. River restoration, for example, can involve the reintroduction of bends in previously straightened water courses, along with the removal of weirs. Given the role of fallen trees and branches in causing and exacerbating water-build up in the recent floods the introduction of “leaky barriers” may also seem counterintuitive. Furthermore, some of these measures could effectively amount to little more than closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Planning authorities and the government still tolerate development on floodplains. Meanwhile the conversion of front gardens into hard standing to facilitate domestic car parking has undoubtedly exacerbated the problems associated with run-off as has the ongoing development of former greenfield sites in general.



However, it should also be pointed out that natural flood management can provide other benefits in addition to possible reductions in flood risk. It may generate environmental benefits. By increasing infiltration, soils and plants absorb pollutants when water passes through them. Slower water flows help to reduce erosion and soil and sediment losses. These can help improve water quality in streams and rivers. And natural flood management measures can also create new

wetland habitats which help to support wildlife and biodiversity. But do these approaches work? Once again, the jury is out.

Back in 2017 the Environment Agency published data, case studies and evidence about the role of natural management measures in reducing flood risk. But this was hardly conclusive and tended to focus on the successes rather than the failures. Moreover, some of the schemes were desk-based modelling exercises rather than real-world cases.

A project in Debenham, Suffolk, for example, showed that installing a range of natural flood management features along the River Deben would provide more than 30,000 cubic metres of water storage and reduce annual average damages to properties and farmland by 31 percent. Is this approach of any relevance to Buckingham? We could soon find out. The River Thames Flood Conservation Trust has secured funding to deliver natural flood management schemes for the upper Great Ouse catchment area and is looking for possible partners.

Any offers?

The Restoration of the Lady Chapel in Buckingham Parish Church – Kathy Robins



Visitors to Buckingham Parish Church will see that the side chapel, known as the Lady Chapel, has been renovated and restored. The work was completed two weeks ago and is pictured left.

The Lady Chapel was created in 1916 'for intimate and private worship' and was the gift of Mrs Mary Elizabeth Harrison in memory of her husband J. T. Harrison. The architect was Sir Charles Nicholson of Messrs. Nicholson and Corlette Architects, London. He was well known for his church work and held the post of architect to Lincoln Cathedral.

The bottom two stained glass windows commemorate the two patron saints of Buckingham Parish Church, St Peter and St Paul. They are inscribed at the

bottom with the words "To the glory of God and in memory of George Jones and six children this window is dedicated by his widow 1868.

The two bottom windows were removed in 1925 to install a high-backed altar and were placed in what is now the kitchen area at the back of the church. The two windows have now been cleaned and restored to their original position and are fully visible once again.

This set of alterations have resulted in a lovely restoration of this corner of the church and reinstated the previous Gilbert Scott grandeur.

Dates for your Diary

Executive Committee Meetings:

24th March 2021 AT 5.00pm via Zoom

26th May 2021 at 5.00pm

Please contact any committee member for further details if you would like to attend the above meetings.

The Summer Lecture and Garden Party is planned for 22nd July: lecture at 6.30pm and the garden party at 7.30pm. Details will follow later.

Executive Committee:

Roger Edwards	Chair
David Child	Treasurer, transport, web site and planning
Carolyn Cumming	Planning
Ed Grimsdale	Planning and society historian
Gill Jones	Membership secretary
Belinda Morley-Fletcher	Secretary
Nigel Morrison	Ent Fest representative
Roger Newall	Planning
Ian Orton	Green and Open Spaces, planning
Anthony Ralph	Planning
Kathy Robins	Newsletter Editor, Planning

We should like to hear from You

Please give us some feedback - tell us what activities you would like The Buckingham Society to prioritise, any ideas for social events (once they are again allowed) or simply write to us on any Buckingham related matter. If you have any ideas, questions or comments please address them to: kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk Tel: 07834 484762. If you would like to become involved in any of our activities or attend a meeting of the executive committee, just contact us and come along. www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk