



# The Buckingham Society

*Campaigning for a better Buckingham*

## Newsletter February 2024

### View From the Chair – Ian Orton

Welcome to the winter edition of the Buckingham Society's newsletter.

The first snowdrops and crocuses are beginning to blossom which means that Spring is on its way.

Winter is not quite finished yet, however. In meteorological terms February is still a winter month. It is not inconceivable that we could get more harsh weather over the coming weeks. March and even April can be very cold as last year demonstrated. One virtue of February is that the amount of daylight we receive increases by around two hours from the beginning of the month to the end. And this can make an appreciable difference to life. So far, however, the winter has not been particularly harsh.



A few trees have been uprooted, the most spectacular of which is the one that fell into the pond on the railway walk. (see photograph left).

Nonetheless, the accumulated effect of decades of rain, ice, sun and snow inevitably takes its toll, especially on the built environment. As we outline further in the newsletter the frieze on the Duke's Bridge is in a sad state and in need of repair (see photograph page 11).

However, it is unlikely that the ongoing degradations inflicted on the natural and physical environment by the climate and weather will be the focus of the Buckingham Society's activities over the coming year.

The challenges posed by ongoing growth and the ways in which these can be handled, mitigated, or offset are likely to occupy a significant portion of the Buckingham Society's time. Last year I pointed out that Buckingham had grown much faster than the rest of Buckinghamshire, England and even Milton Keynes between the 2011 and 2021 Census.

Irrespective of what the planners, or the latest iterations of both the Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan or its Buckinghamshire Council equivalent say, it is not beyond the bounds of possibly, that something similar will occur over the period to 2031. Just what could be in store for us was illustrated at an event hosted by Buckingham Town Council on 27 January, inviting prospective developers to reveal their plans to the public.

Just because a developer turns up with a plan doesn't necessarily mean that a formal planning application will be made soon. But the fact that one developer had spent a lot of time and effort on a possible scheme that could result in another 1,200 houses alone, illustrates what could be in the offing.

More development and population growth could be beneficial, especially if accompanied by the physical and social infrastructure needed to sustain it. Experience, however, suggests otherwise. The reality is that developers, and especially the big listed residential construction firms, know precisely how to game the planning system and rarely provide what they promise.



It isn't all doom and gloom, however. Buckingham, or rather its treescape, comes out very well in a new "tree equity index" produced by American Forests, the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (see article below).

Picture to left – trees in Bourton Park by Roger Newall

## **Society Matters**

The AGM and winter lecture - Our AGM and winter lecture were held at the University of Buckingham's Vinson Auditorium on 23 November. Sadly, we couldn't have held it on a worse night given the number of competing attractions, not least the switching on of Buckingham's Christmas Lights and the Friends of the University's annual dinner.

The lecture given by Stuart Pringle, the managing director of Silverstone Circuits, was excellent, however. Under Stuart's oversight the Silverstone circuit has been transformed as the premier Formula 1 venue and is now an increasingly important economic and technological hub as well as a growing tourism centre.

We have decided to move the next AGM to January 2025 and hold the winter lecture on another date, probably at the beginning of November 2024.

Your executive committee. All the current executive committee members volunteered their services for the coming year at the AGM and were elected accordingly. Plus Karen Cockerill, Sarah Goodrum, Russell Herbert, Franz Rothe and Keith Wallace have been recruited in an attempt to make the committee more representative as well as augmenting its expertise and experience.

Gill Jones has decided to retire as membership secretary after many years of outstanding service, although she remains an executive committee member. Russell Popee assumes the mantle in Gill's place.

Similarly, Kathy Robins has decided to retire as chair of the planning Special Interest Group (SIG) although she will continue as newsletter editor and as a member of the events sub-committee. Mary Simons will chair the planning SIG.

We are also very pleased to announce that Ed Grimsdale is now back at home, following a protracted and serious illness. Ed is a very important member of the executive committee as well as being Buckingham's historian. He also oversees the Society's Facebook page. His absence in hospital has been especially keenly felt, not least because he will be of critical importance to our putative local history group (especially as we near the 300th anniversary of the Great Fire of Buckingham in 2025). We also want to make further use of Facebook and other social media platforms to transform our internal and external communications. Welcome back, Ed. We missed you!

We also decided to change the executive committee's bimonthly meeting schedule. It will now meet in February, April, June, August, October and December instead of January, March, May, July and September.

2024 programme. Our activities are underpinned by the Buckingham Society's Manifesto and the aspiration, to make Buckingham a better place. Having said this, the Buckingham Society is a member-based organisation rather than a series of self-elected committees that discuss sweet nothings. It is important that we continue to provide events and other activities, otherwise we will end-up not having enough active members to continue, a fate that has hit other civic amenities groups.

I am conscious of the need to involve members more in the Society's activities if they so wish. There is, of course, no requirement or obligation for members to "get involved." Very often, however, people join an organisation to meet with others who share the same views and wish to pursue common aims.

I intend to expand the number of SIGs that operate under the Buckingham Society umbrella. A green and open spaces SIG along with a local history SIG would be obvious places to start. But there is no reason why we can't expand further: an Epicurean SIG anyone? Meanwhile the events sub-committee has met to determine a core events programme, the details of which can be found below.

## The Seats at the Front of the Old Town hall – Kathy Robins

You may have noticed that the two benches at the front of the old town hall have been removed. This has caused some concern among people who found them useful as they moved around the town, especially those with disabilities. I raised this issue with Andy Conway, the Manager of the Villiers. He told me that the benches were used at nights by drunks and drug users who caused distress to staff when asked to move. These people also left litter and other debris. He added that the state of the benches deterred prospective customers for functions at the venue, so sadly, we must accept their removal.

## Planning – Carolyn Cumming

**Neighbourhood Plan.** The various consultations have now been held and the results show that 'Scenario 1', the southern extension, was considered the number one choice, closely followed by Scenario 2, the western extension. The latter perhaps combined with Scenario 1 was thought to address the continuing problem of putting in a new road to connect A422 with A421.

An extensive paper has been produced trying to ascertain how many new dwellings and of what sort might be needed between 2033-2040. It acknowledges that Buckingham has seen very significant development since 2011 and has met the target – or even exceeded it – of housing need to 2033, as set out in the VALP.

The report comes up with a figure of 74 houses per annum, which over a 7 year period of 2033-2040 comes to 518. However, it may be desirable to pursue a higher growth option and use the figure of 74 dwellings per annum from 2024 (the assumed start of the new NP) to 2040. In this latter case, it would result in 1,184 additional dwellings.

The report makes it quite clear that any updates on housing numbers that might emerge in the new Buckinghamshire Council Local Plan will take precedent. Unfortunately, it has been the TC's experience that communication with BC has been frustratingly zero.

The report also finds that Buckingham has a higher-than-average number of 4 bedroom dwellings but that the "need" is more likely to be for 3 bedroom dwellings, as well as affordable housing and student accommodation. To my surprise, it assumes that the majority of Buckingham University's 3,500 students who are not housed in University lodgings will be looking for private rented accommodation in the town. (Around 1000). This seems wildly inaccurate to me as so many of those additional 1000 students do courses outside of Buckingham.

## Planning Updates

**Villiers Hotel signage:** the lack of detail presented for the new signs in the car park and yard was criticised but subject to tree protection and highways comments, there were no objections.

As to the Town Hall itself, It was agreed that internally lit signage was prohibited in the Conservation Area and much regret that the applicant had installed the signage without prior permission – considering this is a Grade 2\* building. Oppose any uplighters and canopies over windows. Otherwise, subject to Heritage Officer comments, no objection.

A representative of Villiers Hotel spoke about the positive contribution to the town they make, in terms of providing adapted lavatories in the public areas of the hotel and adapted access to the conference centre. When questioned about the removal of the benches outside the town hall, he said they were subject to late night drunken behaviour and would not be replaced. This is a great loss as many people like to pause for a rest. The matter is summarised by Kathy Robins at page 4 above.

**31 Highlands Road.** Oppose and object to the removal without permission of the hedge and mature planting on the roadside.

**4 London Road.** Sadly, this application for a change of use from 4 bed family home to 7 bed HMO has been approved. It was bitterly opposed by residents and the Town Council, but the officer thought fit to approve under delegated powers. No call in allowed.

**Land between 38 Moreton Road and old Police Station.** The SUDs team at BC have objected to insufficient calculations for drainage. The arboriculture report is even more damning: “Approval of this application will lead to the complete loss of a valuable woodland parcel and the defensible aspects of the landscaping will not provide adequate compensation.”

**Old Telephone Exchange.** The proposal to provide flats over two storeys was refused, largely on the basis of design not in keeping with the area and the loss of a retail unit.

## Green and leafy Buckingham – Ian Orton

Buckingham may be facing severe infrastructure problems. According to the Tree Equity Index UK, however, most areas of the town are adequately provided for by tree cover.

Launched in late 2023 the index was developed by American Forests, the Woodland Trust and Centre for Healthcare. It combines information from a variety of sources to create a single measure that shows the extent to which a neighbourhood has adequate tree cover.



A score of 100 indicates that a neighbourhood is adequately covered. Anything less indicates a potential deficit that could be rectified by new tree planting programmes.

Picture on left by Roger Newall

In essence the index uses six equally weighted climate, health and socioeconomic variables to adjust a neighbourhood’s tree canopy



coverage to provide a measure of “tree equity”. The variables encapsulate air quality, the dependency ratio as a proportion of working-class adults, employment, health deprivation, income and heat severity.

Buckingham scores extremely well. Only one of the six “lower layer super output areas” (LSOA) that delineate the town had an index score of less than 90. This appears to cover the Lace Hill area. The other five had scores of 92, 94, 96, 99 and 100. This compares with Buckingham’s composite score of 90. The score of 100 registered by the LSOA that covers northwest Buckingham is especially notable as it is the highest of the 225 LSOAs that cover Buckinghamshire.

All this means that except for the Lace Hill area, Buckingham has little need of further tree planting, at least according to the Tree Equity Index UK. Further tree planting should nevertheless, still be encouraged. Trees are beautiful in their own right and provide lots of benefits. Besides, our abundant and diverse treescape distinguishes Buckingham from its peers.

## Obituary: Pat Phillips



Pat Phillips, a long standing and life member of the Buckingham Society died on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2023 after living in Buckingham for more than 30 years. She worked as a nurse and later a midwife, before retiring and becoming a student at the University of Buckingham. Her MA thesis (subsequently published) was on her ancestor, Brackley's Victorian 'Demon Grocer', the arch radical Ben Judge. She was intelligent, humorous, irreverent, generous, and warm-hearted. She will be very much missed.

## Tree Observations - Michael Hunt

Buckinghamshire Council have carried out several new plantings for 2023 and this time have put 1.8 metre galvanised weld mesh guards around the trunks except the Serbian Spruce which is prickly and has no trunk showing. Species planted in Cornwall’s Arboretum include crab apples *Malus Baccata*, *Cornus mas* and *Picea omorika*.

The three *Prunus serrula tibetica* have been replaced by the same species. In the ridge and furrows field towards Heartlands a *Styphnolobium japonica* has been planted.



Interestingly they have planted 3 *Betula Albosinensis* "Fascination", a clone of Chinese Red Birch, with fabulous bark, see left, on the green space at Mount Pleasant, again with the galvanised guards.

And finally, to my knowledge a single *Malus Cox's Orange Pippin* can be found in Bertie's Walk near to Lords Bridge. Let's hope that all these gems are able to survive vandalism and are watered and cared for.

## **Review: Candlemas: The Last Day of Christmas, Mr Simpson's Little Consort, Friday 2 February – Ian Orton**

It may seem odd to give a Christmas concert at the beginning of February. But as Sue Snell of Mr Simpson's Little Consort explained in the illustrated talk that accompanied the well-attended concert at the University of Buckingham's Radcliffe Centre, Christmas doesn't end until Candlemas which this year occurred on 2 February.

As it was, the musical content of the concert was not just confined to Christmas music or the ubiquitous carol. Rather it provided a succinct history of song from the fourth to the twentieth century. And as Sue explained a carol is not just a song form associated with Christmas. The term can refer to any joyful song, irrespective of whether it is religious or secular in nature. Given Mr Simpson's Little Consort's early music background the focus was very much on the mediaeval and early renaissance periods.

The music was exquisitely played and sung with Kate McKee, the consort's soprano, especially prominent. The music employed a huge arsenal of instruments all of which were expertly played by Sue and Piers Snell along with multi-talented Kate who, at one stage, was singing as well as beating a drum. George Higgins provided the narrative in his impeccable Scots voice as well as adding his lusty vocals to some of the vocal parts.

For once the viol, the string instrument that is usually featured in the band's repertoire was absent, the focus instead being on woodwinds, percussion and bells. A particular favourite was the crumhorn. It looks more like a hockey or shinty stick rather than a musical instrument. But it makes a fantastic sound. The crumhorn, which made its appearance in the last song of the programme sent the audience home (or in a number of instances to the pub) in a very good humour with the hope that Mr Simpson's Little Consort will soon return for another performance.

The concert provided a fantastic start to the Buckingham Society's 2024 events programme which was enjoyed by members as well as a healthy contingent of non-members.

## Planning: More Housing Growth on the Way? – Ian Orton

Buckingham could get even bigger if the plans exhibited at an event organised by Buckingham Town Council (BTC) at the Community Centre on 27 January come to fruition.

Organised as part of the process of producing the next iteration of the Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan, BTC invited prospective developers to exhibit any plans they might have in the offing. Three exhibits stood out, at least as far as this visitor to the exhibition was concerned. The first, and potentially the most alarming, is a possible development of up to 1,200 houses to the south and east of Lace Hill. This would extend the built-up area of Buckingham almost to Padbury Brook.

The developers were at pains to stress that the development would be phased over a number of years. But there is no disguising the fact that if it goes ahead, it will have considerable implications for the town, especially as far as population growth is concerned and the demands on the physical and social infrastructure needed to sustain it.

I don't think a planning application is imminent. But given the amount of detailed work already done by the developer the suspicion must be that there is a likelihood, especially if the merest hint that Buckingham is expected to accommodate additional "planned" growth in the future.

The second putative development is a plan to build around 80 houses on the north slope of the River Great Ouse on land adjacent to the Grand Junction Canal. The developer has already produced a brochure outlining plans which the planning SIG has seen. It claims to be "working" with the Buckingham Canal Society to produce an eco-friendly development that would also expand the stock of social housing in the town as well as addressing a potential shortage of smaller accommodation.

Given all the work this developer has done something more substantive as far as a planning application is concerned may be in the offing. One possible deterrent to this proposal is that given the consultative work done so far there seems to be a preference for future growth to occur to the south and west of the town rather than the east.

The most interesting proposal was for a small development immediately to the west of the former Cox and Robinson building, now occupied by Mole Valley and NFU Mutual.

This attempts to address the affordable/social housing issue by a very innovative approach based soundly on mutual principles. We may arrange a meeting with the owner of this site, a namesake, to explore her proposals further.

Of course, the exhibition did not attract all the developers that might be interested in launching new housing schemes. One organisation conspicuous by their absence - unless I



missed something - is the Henley in Arden-based developer behind the proposal to build housing on a site designated for industrial and commercial use to the south of the Wipac factory and bounded to the east by the London Road.

## Low Life in Buckingham - Researched by Ed Grimsdale, Historian to The Buckingham Society

"BUCKINGHAM PETTY SESSIONS Before Messrs. Chandler and Parrott - WILLAM WATTS alias "Brackley Jack", was charged with using disgusting, abusive and threatening language towards Fanny Steel, and was bound over to keep the peace towards her.

After this case, John Steel, the husband of the latter, was ordered to enter into sureties for his wife, the said Fanny, to keep the peace towards the aforesaid Watts, and subsequently another Watts, named Sarah, also [ironically], of Mount Pleasant, was charged by Fanny Steel, with committing a dirty and disgusting assault upon her by emptying upon her head a commode of filth.— Fine and cost of £1, 8s. or sent to gaol for month in default."

From the Banbury Guardian 25.01.1872



William Watts claimed the status of Marine Store Dealer: a trade recognised in British Law. I suppose that 20th century folk would have recognised such people as 'Rag and Bone' men. They would travel from door to door using a horse and cart to collect the detritus of others to be sorted and sold on. I remember Bournemouth's Rag and Bone man coming to my parents' neat, suburban bungalow in the 1950s and being sent to meet him by my mother. I carried a broken Clothes Horse and a string-less zither harp. TV captured the scenario in the Sitcom "Steptoe and Son". I recall that their yard was suitably situated in Oil Drum Lane. Image left from the Victorian Web, an image prepared for The Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

Later, Brackley Jack and Sarah, his Buckingham born wife, operated from North End Square in our town, perhaps Buckingham's poorest district. Around 1885, the couple inherited several hundreds of pounds on the death of a relative. They went walkabouts on a booze cruise. Aged 55 William ended his days face down in a ditch in Yardley Gobion. Soon, the local Workhouse was asking Buckingham Union Workhouse in Stratford Road if it would kindly house Sarah and some of the couple's many children.

## The Shoebox Doll's House - Franz Rothe

*From 15 February to 10 March a 1.12 scale replica model of the Shoebox Cottage in Meadow Row, complete with interior, will be displayed at the Meadow Row Florist in Buckingham.*

*Franz Rothe, who constructed the model and has lived in The Shoebox for many decades describes his home, the locality in which it stands and the changes that have occurred over the years.*

The Shoebox was constructed sometime in the early nineteenth century along with a number of other cottages in Meadow Row. As if fixed in time it still retains its original flagstone floor, cast iron range, sink, oak beams, oak floorboards and oak front door. This has endured over two hundred years of cold winters and long hot summers as well as the rain that is such an inimitable feature of life in our part of the world.



The Shoebox, along with its neighbours provided homes, for its inhabitants for many decades. But by the time of the swinging (nineteen sixties) the other five remaining cottages along with a decaying wash-house and a row of ramshackle Victorian outhouses had long been abandoned.

Change also came to Buckingham itself when, in the early 1970s Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) became the town's overlord. AVDC moved quickly to close Buckingham's eighteenth-century hall, the very symbol of the town's cultural identity. After failing to have the grand old building demolished it sold the building for a peppercorn fee to an opportunistic developer. A poor replacement in the form of the Community Centre was constructed in 1983 and opened in 1984 on land owned by the council.

This spelt the death knell of Cornwall's Meadow, a large tract of grassland between the end of Meadow Row and the River Great Ouse. Planning permission was soon given for a supermarket, shops, and a carpark. Hundreds of years of recreation, enjoyment and fun came to an end as giant diggers ripped up the ancient grassland.

Forty years ago, in the year of George Orwell's 1984 the antiquated Meadow Row lay bare to the brave new world of progress. During that year, it became a war zone as the old cottages were transformed into shops to open a new chapter of Buckingham's history.

The Shoebox was made to commemorate the many generations of local people who were born, grew up, married, raised children, lived, worked, and died in this small backwater in the centre of the wonderful old town of Buckingham.

## A Lion Loses a Leg – Ian Orton

Wear and tear has affected the crest on the east side of the Duke's or London Bridge on Bridge Street (see picture below). The lion, which features prominently, has lost a leg. Quite when he lost the leg is unknown. But it isn't there now.

Constructed in 1805 and financed by the Duke of Buckingham as a gift to the town, the Dukes bridge has two crests both of which made from Coade stone by Lambeth-based Coade & Sealy. Coade stone is an artificial stone made from twice fired clay, crushed flint, quartz and soda lime glass. It is a very flexible building material that can be easily moulded into complex shapes. Coade stone is still made by Coade Ltd.

The two crests are very different. The crest on the west side of the bridge, which can be seen from the footbridge on Ford Street consists of a Swan.

It may be quite expensive to restore the missing lion's leg as the original mould has almost certainly been lost. Given the cash constraints that Buckinghamshire Council currently faces it is very unlikely that it will be able to fund the repairs.

Perhaps it would be a suitable project for the Buckingham Society. The Society has received a preliminary estimate for repair work and may make further enquiries depending on members' views. Any views?





## Local Bird Observations - Mary Melliush



An untidy ribbon of rooks was blown across the sky. The bare trees reveal old nests and the ones they are repairing, being some of the first nesters. This is early January and the great tit is singing regularly. Other signs of spring include the blue tit which flies into the usual nesting box to clean up and sometimes eats what it finds. Birds are feeding up before breeding again. The robin is singing and a thick hedge a few houses away is very noisy with sparrows chattering - you could not call it singing!

I have seen flocks of long tailed tits at my feeding station. A little flight of blue tits enjoy the fat filled half coconuts put out by Jackie and she saw a woodpecker in the same area. Birds often feed in groups in colder weather and a mixed tit flock is a nice sight. But come breeding time they become territorial.

This is a waxwing winter. There is an eruption of these very pretty birds. They love rowan berries so supermarket car parks are a good place to spot them. This morning I saw a blackcap in the apple tree.

With all the rain the river level rose. At least three of us spotted the cormorant which has been around for a couple of weeks. A good friend who is a birdwatcher took this photo for us all to enjoy.

## Future Events

The events sub-committee has met to determine a core events programme for the year, the details of which will be circulated nearer the time and may well be supplemented by additional events.

June: Curated walk at Evenley Wood Garden.

July: Summer lecture and garden party.

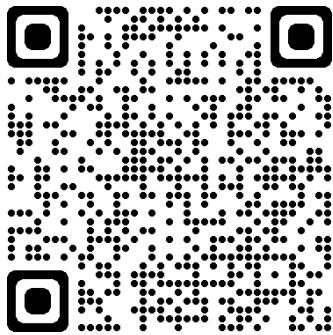
August: Wine tasting.

## Executive Committee:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Ian Orton       | Chair, Green and Open Spaces, planning      |
| David Child     | Treasurer, transport, website, and planning |
| Karen Cockerill |   |
| Carolyn Cumming | Planning                                    |
| Ed Grimdsdale   | Planning and Society Historian              |
| Sarah Goodrum   |   |
| Russell Herbert |   |

|                         |                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Gill Jones              |                                |
| Belinda Morley-Fletcher | Secretary                      |
| Roger Newall            | Planning                       |
| Russell Popee           | Membership                     |
| Anthony Ralph           | Planning                       |
| Kathy Robins            | Newsletter Editor and Planning |
| Franz Rothe             |                                |
| Mary Simons             | Planning                       |
| Keith Wallace           | 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](mailto: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](http://www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk)