



The Buckingham Society

Campaigning for a better Buckingham

Newsletter October 2024

View From the Chair – Ian Orton



Hello and welcome to the Buckingham Society's Autumn newsletter.

A lot has happened since the publication of our last newsletter at both a national and local level. The Society has also been very busy on a number of fronts as well as discovering, rather belatedly, that 2024 effectively marks the 50th anniversary of its foundation. And there has been yet another series of flooding incidents.

On 4 July the British electorate elected a new government headed by Sir Keir Starmer. In Buckingham, now part of the new Buckingham and Bletchley constituency, we elected Callum Anderson as our MP in the new parliament.

Callum succeeds Greg Smith, who won the new constituency of Mid-Buckinghamshire. In what may possibly have been a first in UK electoral history, Greg defeated his namesake Greg Smith, the Green Party's candidate.

Prior to his election Callum had already contacted the Society so some of you may already know him. We hope to work constructively with him, as we did with Greg, to try and help make Buckingham and its hinterland a better place in which to live and work.

To this end I have already invited him to meet with the Society so that we can explore points of common interest.

It is already clear that we will face many challenges in the future, especially given the plethora of announcements the new government has made since its election, especially as far as housing and land-use planning is concerned.

As well as reforming the land-use planning system, primarily by introducing a new national planning policy framework (NPPF), the new government is committed to building more housing.

Irrespective of the amount of housing that has been built in Buckingham and the surrounding area in recent years it is almost certain that we shall have to absorb more in the years ahead.

Indeed, given its position as part of the Cambridge to Oxford growth “arc” or corridor, it is very likely that developers would have targeted Buckingham and its hinterland as a suitable site for more housing irrespective of any government’s plans.

The Society has always made it clear that we are not opposed to new development provided that it is well planned and designed and underpinned by the relevant social and physical infrastructure to make it sustainable. Growth can make life better given the right circumstances.

But therein lies the problem.

The reality is that Buckingham faces an infrastructure deficit. Given the current constraints faced as far as sewage treatment and drainage is concerned it is very unlikely that the town and its hinterland can accommodate any more development without substantial new investment along with increased maintenance expenditure.

Similar constraints almost certainly affect education and medical services. The centre of Buckingham’s mediaeval street pattern, which still accommodates two “A” class roads provides another, more obvious, bottleneck.

Moreover, far from providing benefits for the community, more growth can impose greater costs, notwithstanding the use of section 106 payments and other measures designed to mitigate these. More growth may exacerbate Buckingham’s existing flood problems, for example.

These concerns partially prompted the decision of the Society’s Planning SIG to arrange a meeting in June with Peter Strachan, Buckinghamshire Council’s cabinet member for planning and regeneration and Eric Owens, Buckinghamshire’s Council’s director planning services, to discuss these and other issues.

Our meeting was positive and seemed to offer some hope for the future. We were told that Buckinghamshire Council’s intention is to extend the new home levy to the former Aylesbury Vale District Council area in 2025 to bring us in line with the rest of the county.

This is a much better alternative to the section 106 regime when it comes to funding new development-related infrastructure expenditure on almost every count, not least because 25 percent of any money raised goes to parish councils with neighbourhood plans in force to use at their discretion.

We await future developments in this respect with great interest (although there are already rumours circulating that the government is not keen on the new home levy at all). I will try to get an update.

Speaking of neighbourhood plans the Society has continued to play an active role in the formulation of the latest iteration of the Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan, which is nearing completion.

Roger Newall has represented the Society in this respect.

Although, on a personal basis, I remain as sceptical as ever about the virtues of land use planning, especially in the UK where implementation and enforcement often appear to be afterthoughts, I would like to commend Roger's work on the updated design code that will accompany the new plan. It is exemplary.

We have also responded to an ongoing review of conservation areas being conducted by Buckinghamshire Council.

Buckingham has had a conservation area for many years now. I suspect, however, that many members may not be aware of this, not least because the additional protections that come with the designation have rarely been used by either the former Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) or Buckinghamshire Council. As a consequence, our conservation area has been badly affected by cynical, opportunistic developers, who routinely ignore not just the conservation area provisions, but the planning system completely.

Needless to say, the Society's response to the consultation, which I drafted, was not complimentary.

Indeed, I would argue that the conservation area legislation epitomises all the failings of the current UK land-use planning system. But that is the subject of another article.

Moving on to other matters the Society has been out and about this summer. We had stands at both the "Celebrate Buckingham" day in June and at the Buckingham Rugby Club's Beer Festival in July.



Left: Carolyn Cumming, Ian Orton and Russell Poppe at our Stand at Celebrate Buckingham Day

These events are important because they provide a platform for the Society to engage directly with the general public and existing members as well as an opportunity to recruit new members.



I would like to thank Carolyn Cumming, Russell Poppe, Mary Simons and Lionel Weston for their help and assistance on Celebrate Buckingham Day and Russell Herbert for arranging and manning our display at a gale hit Rugby Club Beer Festival.

We also held our annual summer lecture in July, followed by drinks and canapes. This year we were treated to a fantastic illustrated talk by Thea Young, left, about Sulgrave Manor, the ancestral home of the Washington family.

Many thanks, once again, to Kathy Robins, who organised the event, and the University of Buckingham, who once again made available the Vinson Centre for the event.

Looking forward we have a number of putative events planned for the remainder of the year. These may include something to commemorate our 50th anniversary as well as the annual winter lecture. The latter will take place in late November and will focus on rural crime.

Belinda Morley-Fletcher, the organiser of this event, has secured the services of Thames Valley Police's top man in this area so we should set for a very interesting night.



Flood Bourton Park – Picture by Anthony Ralph

Planning – Carolyn Cumming

While the planning limelight has been on the new Government's much publicised reforms for the nation, the local highlights have focussed on the upcoming revised Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for Buckingham. We hope that members will have taken full advantage of the extended consultation period and noted what the aspirations are for the town.

If adopted, it foresees some 1100 additional dwellings coming to Buckingham and site Q from the current Neighbourhood Plan (south of Wipac) retaining its position for promoting employment uses. The largest residential development would be on land south of the A421 bypass, opposite St. Rumbolds Fields and would establish a new primary school alongside

community facilities to help redress the lack of such things in the neighbouring Osier Way and St. Rumbolds Fields developments.

But that is looking ahead over the next decade or so. Currently, sewage capacity, flooding and HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) have been the “hot topics”.

There has been a growing trend to convert larger residential properties into HMOs, accommodating up to seven or eight self-contained units. While they are ostensibly to house students who might be expected to be part time residents, the reality is that these smaller units are in permanent use and are needed to offset the lack of affordable housing. The fact remains however that these properties were not designed for such intensive use, putting a real strain on the fabric of the house, as well as the utilities. It is imperative that developers take seriously the need for smaller properties. The forthcoming NP makes it clear that new developments must have a larger proportion of one, two and three bed dwellings.

Sewage capacity and wastewater capacity have long been an issue in Buckingham and are exacerbated by both the increasing heavy rainfalls and new developments. Buckingham residents are only too aware of the consequences. Water companies have a legally bound duty to connect new properties to the existing sewerage system, regardless of its efficacy to accommodate the extra flows, which means that illegal spills into our waterways have become the norm. A recent court case concluded that *“the planning authority has the power, which the sewerage undertaker lacks, of preventing a developer from overloading a sewerage system **before** the undertaker has taken steps to upgrade the system...”*. A recent application relating to the development of 170 houses in Maids Moreton has thrown this point into sharp focus. David Wilson Homes has applied to vary the condition imposed at determination, which was intended to prevent building the development before Anglian Water have an agreed upgrade programme of works. If granted, Anglian Water would have no option but to connect the built property to the system, despite having no firm undertaking to upgrade the system. The case has far-reaching implications beyond Buckingham and, indeed, has attracted criticism from several outside bodies. Watch this space!



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Land between 38 Moreton Road and Old Police Station. A third “amended” attempt to develop this piece of land still evades the Enforcement Notice issued by the Forestry Commission to restock the site with 286 trees! The aerial view left, taken before the treescape was removed (unlawfully) shows just how much green cover there was!



Buckingham Society Award:

The Buckingham Society was awarded the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Organisation of the Year Award at the Mayor Making on June 7th 2024. David Child is pictured holding the award 2nd from the right.

50 years Not Out – Ian Orton

Thanks to the diligence of Mary Simons, who brought it to my attention, I recently found out that the Buckingham Society should be celebrating its 50th anniversary. The use of “should” is deliberate. The reality is that with or two exceptions I suspect that none of the current membership was aware of the fact!

One factor that may have obscured our golden anniversary is that we don’t appear to have original founder members still active (if alive). Helene Hill, whose father Stanley Meadows was a founder, has uncovered a pile of documents and newsletters from the early years so we at least know the names behind the establishment of the Society as well as the issues that concerned them.

The Society can trace its roots back to an organisation called the Buckingham Action Group in the early 1970s. This was established to prevent the old Town Hall, now part of Villiers Hotel, being demolished to help ease the town’s traffic congestion problems.

The narrowing of Castle Street, then part of the A221 between the Town Hall and the Swan & Castle (now also part of Villiers Hotel) was a major cause of traffic congestion 1970s. This was exacerbated by its junction with the A422 and the A413.

Quite how the demolition of the Town Hall would have eased the problem, other than facilitating the widening of Castle Street or the construction of a giant - and probably ineffectual roundabout - must remain an open question. Thanks to the efforts of the nascent Buckingham Action Group its demolition was averted.

Chronic traffic congestion in the town centre remained, however and this resulted in strident demands for a ring-road or by-pass to ease the problem. A campaign to secure this provided the focus for the Society’s activities from the date of its inception in 1974. The ring-road eventually arrived in phases.

When I arrived in Buckingham in November 1981 the part between the Page Hill roundabout and London Road was open. But the final section, from London Road to the Tingewick Road would not be completed until December 1982. This meant that from between 9.00 and 17.00 gridlock reigned in the town centre. Tailbacks on the A421 sometimes extended all the way to Buckingham Golf course in one direction and the Stratford Road in the other.

Following the decision to construct a ring road the Society still continued to make its influence felt, especially as far as planning matters are concerned, as well as increasing its presence in a more nuanced manner. It has launched a series of awards covering design and conservation, sponsored interpretation boards at the former railway station and old churchyard and organised a regular series of well attended talks.

To help celebrate our 50th anniversary we are contemplating replanting and maintaining the large flower bed outside the Council Chambers as well as helping to organise the forthcoming "Buckingham Ablaze" commemoration (see Lionel Weston's article below).

Our 51st year looks as if it will be very busy.



Hart at the White Hart – 13th October 2024

After the renovation of the White Hart Hotel, it is a joy to see the White Hart symbol back in its place, cleaned and repaired.

Buckingham Ablaze – Lionel Weston

As a commemoration of the fire of Buckingham which occurred on March 15th, 1725, we will be marking the incident with a week-long series of events during the week beginning Monday 10th March until Sunday 16th March 2025. The devastating fire had a very significant impact on the Town's history

The launch of this Commemoration period will take place on Saturday 22nd February when exhibitions will be opened in various locations in the Town. The Rotary Club have joined



forces with Men in Sheds and the four local Primary schools, to build a scale model of the town as it was in 1725. Local children will also be contributing to other exhibitions and events with a range of activities including artwork, clay collage and creative writing.

Left - Lionel Talking About Buckingham Ablaze on 3B's Radio

There will be tours for local people, and school groups, to witness the fire-affected areas, to understand more about how the fire spread and how its impact has been felt ever since.

The Buckingham Society will be sponsoring a talk on Thursday March 6th by historian Julian Hunt about these momentous events.

We hope the legacy of the project will involve a commemorative plaque being unveiled as a fitting memorial, a drama-documentary film available to see at all times and the various model and artistic exhibits. A natural link with the Firefighters' Charity has been established and many volunteers have given time and expertise to produce the activities being planned. The Town Centre will be transformed during the evening of the 15th into how it may have been in 1725.

With the help of people in "costume" period music, dancing, children's games, local crafts and refreshments suited to the age, local families will experience life as it was then! The finale of the week will be a ticketed concert where the West Midlands Fire Service Band will perform. During this a "Story of the Fire" will be narrated by Charlie Ross with animations and images created by pupils from the Royal Latin School and accompanied by appropriate

musical items. So do put these important 2025 dates in your diaries now!



Left: An artist's impression of what the row of Inns may have looked like in 1725.

The line of buildings which are now the White Hart down to Browns' hairdressers. The artist is John Whitehead a member of BAFA , and the Inn behind which the fire started is "The Unicorn"

Ed Grimsdale has been the instigator and driving force behind the concept and Carolyn Cumming and I (with support and direction from the Society) will be working to create the timeline of activities.

Buckingham Society Golden Anniversary 2024 Tree Tour at Evenley Wood 16th October 2024 – Michael Hunt



Members were met by guide Michael Hunt on a slightly damp morning, but this did not detract from witnessing the fine trees on offer at this amazing arboretum.

We started off with a collection of Aesculus (horse chestnut) trees with many hybrids from the USA, the buckeyes, as they call them there. This shows the great lengths that the late Tim Whiteley went to in developing the Wood from 1980 onwards.

We did a circuit of the 60 acre site seeing the autumn splendors of firstly the Gymnocladus (Kentucky coffee tree), then Acers like Japanese Acer Palmatum Purpurea, left, as well as Acer Japonicum and Acer Palmatum “Eddisbury”.



We then saw Two Dinosaur trees the Metasequoia Glyptostroboides (dawn redwood) only discovered in China in 1944 and Ginkgo Biloba, as well as the collection of Euonymus (spindle trees).

Finally, we reached the more unusual Zanthoxylum, American, The Toothache Tree, left, so named as north American natives chewed the twigs and fruits to alleviate toothache.

The tour included some glorious flowering Colchicum “Water Lily” and Sternbergia Lutea.

A great time was had by all.

Population size, facilities and services – Ian Orton

Is there a correlation between settlement size and the range of facilities and services available to residents? Logic suggests that there should be. However, this isn't necessarily the case in practice as I found out during a recent visit to the rural wilds of Shropshire. Take Bishop's Castle, a small “market town” 20 miles southwest of Shrewsbury and 20 northwest of Ludlow.

Although it has a population of just under 1,900 Bishop's Castle seems to have just as many facilities as Buckingham, despite being a fraction of the size. It has a bank complete with ATM; a post-office; five pubs (including an hotel); a good range of shops including a butcher and speciality shops; a community hospital, a secondary school; and a cattle market.

There are downsides. The town is not well served by public transport. There are buses to and from Shrewsbury. But the last one to Shrewsbury leaves at 15.40. The nearest railway station is at Craven Arms, 11 miles away with no collecting bus services. On balance, however, Bishops Castle compares quite well to Buckingham.

This may reflect its relative remoteness along with the fact that the town seems to function as a local centre with a hinterland that extends into Wales. The Welsh border is just two miles away. This may explain the presence of a bank and the ATM.

I am sure that Bishops Castle attracts tourists. It is the site of the Three Tuns brewery which claims to be the oldest licensed brewery in England. Until relatively recently it also had another brewery in the form of the Six Belles at the other end of the town.

Nonetheless, I have never been conscious of many tourists on the occasions I have visited.

Another factor that may explain the town's relatively buoyant retail trade is the absence of any of the supermarket chains.

Like them or loathe them the big supermarket chains can have a significant impact on a settlement's retail trade.

Ludlow provides a good example in this respect.

Twenty-five years ago Ludlow could claim to be one of the UK's leading gastronomy centres. Not only did it have three Michelin starred restaurants, but it also had a wide range of specialist food shops.

The town is still a vibrant place and a significant tourist magnet complete with a castle, an attractive townscape and many historic buildings. But the arrival of a big Tesco around 20 years ago does appear to have had an impact, certainly as far as butchers are concerned.

Of course, correlation does not imply causation so there may be other factors at work to explain Ludlow's changing retail mix. And it is still worth a visit.

Tilting at Windmills - a personal critique of the government's housing and planning policies – Ian Orton

You have to applaud the new government's ambitions of building 300,000 new houses a year during the current parliament as well as reforming the land use planning system to help make this happen.

The reality is that the last time this target was met was back in the 1960s.

According to data from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the UK managed to build more than 300,000 houses each year between 1964 and 1968. “Peak supply” occurred in 1968 when 352,540 new houses materialised.

Since then the UK residential construction sector hasn’t managed to get anywhere near these levels. Indeed, the sector has struggled to get anywhere near 200,000 new houses a year.

Between 2010 and 2023 it managed to build 2.2 million new houses. But this works out at an average of only 157,000 a year.

The pace of new builds has increased in recent years. In 2021 and 2022 the sector delivered 174,940 and 178,010 new houses respectively.

But this is still far short of the 300,000 target (which was, coincidentally, the last Conservative government’s target).

There are almost certainly a plethora of reasons for this state of affairs.

Politicians being politicians, however, there is always a preference for simplifying both the problem and the range of possible solutions.

In this instance successive governments have identified the land use planning system, along with a shortage of suitable land, as significant constraints on the supply of new housing.

The current government intends to tweak the system to enable the supply of land for new housing to be expanded by incorporating more of the “green” or, as it would prefer to call it, “grey” belt; reintroducing mandatory housing targets for each planning authority; and introducing a new more development friendly national planning policy framework (NPPF).

It is very unlikely that any of the changes envisaged will have anything more than a marginal effect on outcomes, especially during the current parliament.

Granted the current land use planning system is not fit for purpose, and has probably never been so ever since the passing of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act which introduced comprehensive land use planning to the UK.

But the proposed “reforms” will not have a tangible impact for they fail to recognise, let alone remedy, a fundamental flaw of the planning system.

It is relatively easy to make a plan. The difficulty is executing and enforcing it.

Therein rests another problem. The government, or more pertinently, its local agents may create plans. But implementation, especially when it comes to building houses, is effectively in the hands of the private sector.

And the private sector operates to a different set of rules.

Housebuilders will not even consider building any new houses unless they can make a profit or, at the very least, cover their cost of capital.

Moreover, the private sector tends to have its own ideas about where to build. These often conflict with the planners' desires.

One of the interesting facets of the UK planning system is that it always seems to be operating in reactive mode, with plans modified to reflect unplanned but subsequently permitted development.

Buckingham and its hinterland provides lots of examples in this respect. The site currently being developed to the south of Ousier Way certainly didn't appear in the current Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan as a preferred development site.

Nor did "Site Q", adjacent to London Road, or two other new putative development proposals which have emerged in recent months.

Irrespective of all the work spent to glean and analyse the data that underpins all those plans that have been produced at great expense, developers have a knack of identifying suitable sites of their own volition.

A similar situation holds when it comes to supplying the physical and social infrastructure necessary to sustain any new developments.

New drainage, sewage or water treatment systems cannot be "magicked up" to facilitate a "planned" new housing development, for example, just because it appears in a statutory plan..

It has to be built, often by private sector firms. And this requires capital investment. With the government increasingly unwilling to foot the bill the onus is placed on private firms and the regulated utilities.

Of course, one of the functions of the planning system is to ensure, as far as possible, that development and infrastructure provision marches in step. It rarely does, however.

But let's suppose that all these constraints or problems can be solved. Will the construction sector be able to build 300,000 houses a year? The answer is almost certainly no.

The reality is that the construction sector is facing severe capacity problems, especially as far as the supply of skilled labour is concerned. Most skilled craftsmen and tradesmen employed in the residential sector are nearing retirement age.

Looking forward, because of decades of underinvestment in manpower and vocational training, there is nowhere near the supply of replacements to enable the sector to function at its current level, let alone at the state necessary to deliver the government's 300,000 target.

Greater use of prefabrication may help to ease the problem. The likelihood is, however, that the government will almost certainly have to permit greater inward migration to square this circle. And this could pose another set of problems. So good luck Secretary of State Rayner and Prime Minister Starner.

You will certainly need it to get anywhere near your very ambitious targets.

Future Events – more details to follow

Thursday 7th November 2024 Italian Wine Tasting with For the Love of Wines. Venue The Old Gaol. **Members and guests only** as spaces limited. More details to follow.

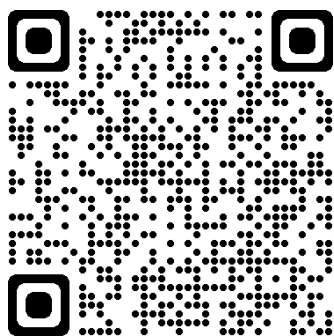
Tuesday 26th November 2024 Inspector Stuart Hutchings Talk on Rural Crime. Venue The Vinson Centre at 7.30pm. Open to all. More detail to follow

Thursday 6th March 2025 talk by historian Julian Hunt about the fire of Buckingham

Executive Committee:

Ian Orton	Chair, Green and Open Spaces, planning
David Child	Treasurer, transport, website, and planning
Karen Cockerill	
Carolyn Cumming	Planning
Ed Grimsdale	Planning and Society Historian
Sarah Goodrum	
Russell Herbert	
Gill Jones	
Belinda Morley-Fletcher	Secretary
Roger Newall	Planning
Russell Poppe	Membership
Anthony Ralph	Planning
Kathy Robins	Newsletter Editor, Planning
Franz Rothe	
Mary Simons	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 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