



The Buckingham Society

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BETTER BUCKINGHAM

Newsletter – April 2026

Chairman's Notes – Ian Orton

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

Buckingham always looks its best during springtime. Even more so after a long, grey, wet winter. I can't remember a winter where the light levels have been so low. It could have been worse, however. Between 21 January and 12 February Aberdeen experienced 21 consecutive days of no sun with average daytime temperatures of just 2 degrees celsius. Ugh!!



It is amazing the difference just two cloudless days, warm sun and wind has made especially on the motivational front. Let's hope we get more of them.

Trees and hedgerows

In Buckingham we are very fortunate in not only having an abundance of green spaces and linear parks but a very diverse treescape that encapsulates a wide range of species. This certainly adds to the quality of life, especially in springtime.

Thanks to the efforts made by the town's wealthy citizens during the nineteenth century we have a number of tree collections that contain a number of outstanding trees.

The old churchyard, for example, contains a fine silver or weeping lime along with a weeping ash, sequoias, yews and a rare pine grown from a seed found on Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

The Royal Latin School's grounds also contain a number of fine trees, not least the cedar of Lebanon found adjacent to its Chandos Road carpark. There are also a number of wellingtonia, or giant redwoods in the vicinity.

These have been augmented by plantings made by a variety of institutions during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The former Aylesbury Vale District Council planted a wide variety of species in the green heartlands, not least a number of flowering cherry trees. Buckinghamshire Council, its successor, has continued this work and appears to have been particularly active during the winter with at least one large-scale planting.

Buckingham Town Council has also been very active on the tree planting front in the open spaces it looks after, i.e. Chandos Park, Bourton Park, where it has also created a wild flower meadow, and the area around the Lace Hill Community Centre.

Other institutions that have helped expand the range and variety of trees in the town include the Buckingham Canal Society, the University and the Buckingham Society. We were responsible for planting the elm at the top of Elm Street to replace the one that stood there for many years.

Beautiful as our treescape is, however, I think it is trumped by our hedge-rows, especially during springtime when they are in blossom. The hedgerows on Tingewick Road are particular favourites in this respect.

Notwithstanding all the development that has taken place in recent years we still have a lot of hedgerows within the town. Useful as trees are in terms of acting as carbon sinks, hedgerows may provide additional ecological benefits.

They act as biodiversity hotspots, carbon sinks, and wildlife corridors that connect fragmented habitats. Hedgerows also boost diversity by providing food and shelter for mammals, birds and insects, while improving soil health, reducing water runoff and cleaning the air.

These assets have to be managed, however.

On the whole the various councils do a good job in this respect, especially given all the other demands on their budgets. Perhaps they could appreciate help from civic-minded organisations like the Buckingham Society, a point I'll return to later in the newsletter.

Society activities

Over the past few months, I've spent a considerable amount of time brooding over the future of the Society.

As many of you will know the Society owed its genesis to the campaign to get Buckingham a by-pass or ring road during the 1970s, something which eventually materialised in December 1982.

Since then, however, the Society has reined back its campaigning activities and adopted a much lower profile. Indeed, some people claim that we have become virtually invisible.

This would be an exaggeration. The Society continues to make an impact on life in Buckingham, albeit in a more subtle way.

I think we can claim a number of achievements during the time I've been a member of the Society, especially when it comes to persuading various developers such as the university, Sainsbury and other developers to modify their plans to provide a more efficacious outcome.

We have also submitted comments on innumerable occasions on more general planning matters, such as local and neighbourhood plans and extensions to the Buckingham Conservation Area.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that we have probably ignored or done next to nothing on a swath of items over the years.

The fact is that over the past 40-years Buckingham has changed out of all recognition. On the whole these changes have generally been for the better.

The situation is still far from perfect, however. Notwithstanding the arrival of the ring-road in 1982 there are still two major roads that go-through the town centre: the A421 and A413.

These cause considerable congestion as well as having an adverse environmental impact.

Then there are other problems associated with the town centre, not least the decline of the retail sector. This is a common problem shared by many former market towns.

Is there anything that could improve the situation?

Possibly not given its complexity. The advent of online shopping; customer preferences for out-of-town shopping with free parking along with the impact of rents and council taxes has almost certainly affected the dynamic.

Perhaps more pertinently is there anything that we could campaign for that might lead to an improvement as part of our broad Manifesto aim of making Buckingham a better place in which to live?

Any offers? Or should we even bother with campaigning?

One of the problems with campaigns is that they take a lot of organising. This places a lot of demands on campaign organisers. In the case of the Buckingham Society the load will almost certainly fall on the executive committee. And we are already short-staffed.

The reality is that we need more active members if we are to expand our campaigning activities. This is a far from straightforward task.

As I've pointed out at successive AGMs we have to run very first to stand still. We currently lose between 10-15 percent of our membership each year for a variety of reasons. Given our current membership this means we have to recruit between 20 to 25 new members each year.

There are a number of ways we could do this.

The fact that we have committed to campaigning could raise our profile and convince prospective members that we are an organisation worth joining.

We could also raise our profile in other ways by timely articles and comments across the media and making sure that our marketing literature is available in locations like the public library, council offices, hotels, coffee houses etc., etc.

I have spoken to Brian Russell of Russell & Butler, one of the local estate agents, who is willing to include our literature in the welcome/information packs his firm provides for new house purchasers, many of whom may be new arrivals in Buckingham.

Another way we could generate interest in the Society is to make it a much more member focused body by organising and promoting events for members.

We already do this to some extent with our talks and visits. We could do more, although this is likely to involve much more work for those involved.

One virtue of this approach is that we can do this irrespective of whether or not we put the onus on campaigning.

But this begs the question about what members actually want. Tell us! We need to know.

The Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan Referendum

As members know the Society led the campaign, along with the Buckingham Canal Society, for a “yes” vote in the referendum that took place on 22 January.

The good news is that there was an overwhelming vote in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan. Ninety four percent of the votes cast were in favour.

The bad news is that the turnout was very low. Only 12 percent of those that could vote did vote. This is a very poor turnout and is perhaps symptomatic of just how low planning-related matters resonate with our fellow citizens.

Nonetheless, I would like to thank those members who did vote in the referendum. I would also like to thank David Child, Belinda Morley-Fletcher, Anthony Ralfe and Mary Simons for their efforts in helping to promote and support the campaign.

Let’s hope that now it has successfully negotiated the referendum the Neighbourhood Plan will be vested, implemented and enforced.

The Buckinghamshire Local Plan

The Buckinghamshire Local Plan (BLP) is the next planning-related event hanging over us. It would be nice to think that this will build on the latest Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan. But don't count on it. The reality is that circumstances have a habit of changing.

One potential fear about the BLP is that it must grapple with the UK government's demand that Buckinghamshire must make provision for 95,000 new houses within the county within the period covered by the plan.

Given the land use constraints faced by the rest of the county, and especially in the south, the suspicion is that much of this will have to be accommodated within the north, i.e. the area covered by the former Vale of Aylesbury District Council.

Buckinghamshire Council (BC), which is responsible for drafting the BLP has yet to determine detailed housing allocations.

But there must be a risk that Buckingham may be expected to accommodate additional housing, along with all that implies as far as additional physical and social infrastructure is concerned, over and above the numbers contained in the Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan.

One pertinent point to make in this respect is that it is developers that actually build houses, not planning authorities (i.e. BC).

So even if Buckingham, or any other area covered in the BLP, receives a higher housing allocation, there is no certainty that the houses will be built.

Unfortunately, however, there are very good reasons for expecting that prospective developers will target Buckingham, irrespective of any numbers contained within the BLP.

This stems from the fact that Buckingham falls within the Oxford-Cambridge "growth corridor", formerly known as the Oxford-Cambridge Ark. This has grown substantially over the past two decades based on a range of new industries covering advanced IT and bioscience and is expected to grow further over the next 20 years.

As a consequence demand for new housing will almost certainly increase. And, in this instance, developers will be more than happy to supply it, always assuming, of course, that they can recruit the necessary construction workers.

I pointed out in a previous newsletter that Buckingham's population growth between the 2011 and 2021 censuses grew substantially faster in percentage terms than the rest of Buckinghamshire (as well as Milton Keynes).

Nuclear armageddon or pandemics, notwithstanding, there seems little reason to suggest that this feat cannot be repeated irrespective of any strictures imposed by the BLP.

The East West Rail Line: Rip Van Winkle strikes again

The East West Rail Line, which will, if completed, run between Oxford and Cambridge is meant to play an important role in sustaining growth within the Oxford-Cambridge corridor. Unfortunately, all is not going smoothly, especially as far as the stretch between Bicester and Bletchley/Milton Keynes is concerned.

Work on this section was completed by the end of 2024. Although the line opened for freight services in June 2025 there has been no progress as far as passenger services are concerned.

The Department of Transport finally appointed Chiltern Railways as the operator of the line in March 2025. Chiltern has acquired the rolling stock necessary to run the service and recruited and trained the drivers necessary to operate the service which was meant to commence in December 2025.

Owing to an ongoing dispute over whether or not the trains should be manned with a guard as well as a driver no passenger services have commenced, however. Nor does there seem to be any indication that they will start in the immediate future.

A smokescreen of sorts has been released to divert attention from this ridiculous state of affairs. The platforms at the new Winslow station are apparently too short to accommodate the lengthier trains that will be used on the line once the Universal Destinations and Experiences theme park opens at Kempston Hardwick, which will have a station adjacent to the East West Line.

Given that the theme park is not expected to open until 2031, however, this seems to be a red herring. It is extremely unlikely that Winslow is likely to be a major embarkation point for the Kempston Hardwick-based theme park.

Even if it is, will it take five years to extend the platforms? Very possibly, given the speed at which rail-related construction projects take to complete in the UK. But that assumes that the ongoing dispute between Chiltern Railways and the rail unions is resolved and that trains actually run by then!

Guided Walk in Evenley Wood Gardens



Letter to the Editor

I applaud the resolution and hard work of those involved to get the Neighbourhood Plan to this stage. My wish is that it turns out to be a blessing. However, I'm full of fear and trepidation that it will turn out to be an expensive fig-leaf.

I respond as one who would have voted against it in the referendum had my chosen 'carrier pigeon' not fallen ill and failed to deliver my postal vote in a timely fashion.

My belief is that neighbourhood plans are unnecessary and useless. Were they to be of any utility they would marginalise and undermine the decisions of the local planning authority and upper echelons of the planning system from the planning inspectorate up to the government minister in charge.

We know that the government has commanded Buckinghamshire Council (BC), our local authority, to plan for over 95,000 extra homes to be allocated across the county to be built over the next 15 to 20 years. This is a heck of a lot of housing.

BC is now creating its local plan. I, and I suggest many members of the Buckingham Society, fear that this will dictate that North Buckinghamshire will receive more than a fair aliquot of these extra homes because South Buckinghamshire is protected by bouquets of barbed wire decorated with strident notices saying "KEEP OUT -SOUTH BUCKS IS AN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY CONTAINING LARGE ENCLAVES OF GREENBELT LAND.

Against this backdrop my prediction is that our "made" Neighbourhood Plan will fail us at the first and every successive hurdle. Its cost of over £100,000 plus unappreciated hours of volunteer labour will be seen to have been wasted on a useless fig-leaf.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Grimsdale - Life Member and Historian

Planning Report – Carolyn Cumming

Development at Manor Farm, Bourton

The Inspectorate has found in favour of the developer and allowed their appeal. In effect, the decision to allow this development was based on the lack of a five year housing supply

within the Local Plan Area. The Inspector appears to base this on both lack of delivery within VALP and the, as yet, undesignated sites **within** Buckinghamshire in the emerging Bucks Local Plan to accommodate the new Government target of approx. 95,000 dwellings.

She agrees that the application is in conflict with the policies set out in VALP and the NEW Buckingham Neighbourhood Plan.- “Consequently the proposal conflicts with the spatial strategy, including Policy HP1 of the NP which supports housing development within the settlement boundary area.” she says

“However, the Council is unable to demonstrate a five year housing land supply..... Even taking the Council’s figure of 3.9 years, this is a substantial shortfall which renders the policies of the Local Plan and NP out of date.”.

She does support and re-iterate the long list of conditions that pertain to the application, including an 18 month time limit to the submission of a Reserved Matters application and a subsequent two year time limit following the approval of the RM to commence Phase One.

Importantly, given the parlous state of waste water capacity in the Buckingham area, written confirmation from Anglian Water confirming that there is sufficient capacity must be received by the Council before occupation of any dwelling.

Let us hope that the Council sticks to the letter of this Condition and does not allow it to be watered down by any subsequent ‘Variation of Condition’, such as seems to be common practice by developers seeking to make life easier for themselves.

NESS (New and Expanded Settlement Study Sites) Buckinghamshire Council Local Plan HELAA

As Ian has already written something about the emerging Local Plan for Buckinghamshire (LP4B), I will not dwell on the above.

His analysis is correct in that, if BCC is to provide 90,000 dwellings, the bulk of this will be located to the north of Aylesbury. Among those study sites in NESS, are Winslow, Steeple Claydon, Calvert, Turweston, Beachampton and Buckingham.

Evidence is now being gathered for the HELAA (Housing, & Economic Land Availability Assessment), which will look at all proposed sites; small, large and/or undeveloped with a view to housing, employment, infrastructure, etc. The Town Council has completed a lengthy review on those within Buckingham as part of the evidence gathering. As far as Buckingham is concerned, the ‘expanded settlement area’ concentrates on land to the south of Osier Way between Gawcott Road and Lenborough.

Does Buckingham really need an extended Conservation area? – Ian Orton

Buckinghamshire Council (BC) has consulted the public about its proposals to extend Buckingham's existing Conservation Area. Like most people that have responded I broadly accepted its proposals. I had severe reservations about doing so, however.

The aim of a Conservation Area designation is to provide the buildings, artefacts and trees that fall within it with an additional level of protection. The focus is primarily on maintaining the overall ambience of an area such as the "street-scene" rather than focusing on individual buildings.

On designation these are, to all intents and purposes, treated as if they are listed buildings (in the case of buildings or artefacts) or had tree protection orders (TPOs) in the case of trees.

As such, any owner or developer that wishes to make any changes to a building, artefact or tree, that falls within a Conservation area must also apply for listed building consent (LBC) as well as the usual planning permissions.

At first sight, especially to anyone interested or concerned about conserving our physical heritage this all looks very reasonable. The reality often turns out to be very different, however. And I speak from the standpoint of someone that lives in a listed building located within the existing Buckingham Conservation Area).

The major problem, as with the case with a lot of well-intended legislation, is that it is rarely implemented, let alone enforced. And if it is enforced it is rarely done so on a consistent basis. This can result in any number of unintended consequences.

Sometimes applications for LBC, if they are actually made at all, can be virtually waved through on the nod. At other times, a houseowner or developer seeking LBC to make essential repairs to a building to maintain its physical integrity can face a minefield of rules and regulations, which all come with additional costs and delays.

Woe betide anyone whose application for LBC comes before a planning authority's historic buildings officer.

In my experience these always seem to be the pedants of the planning system, who seem to take great delight in "gold-plating" the Conservation Area regulations well beyond what the original legislators intended.

Maintaining a sense of proportion is the first thing that goes out of the window (both figuratively and literally).

Essential repairs must be made using the materials originally used in the building's construction, irrespective of whether or not they are actually visible or would contradict other government policies such as making a building more energy efficient.

At issue here is the difference between "conservation" and "preservation". It sometimes seems that planning and listed building officers perceive "conservation" and "preservation" as being one and the same.

This is not the case. Worse, by gold-plating the rules "preservation" minded offices can undermine "conservation" by making it too expensive for house owners and developers to undertake the necessary measures to maintain a building in good order.

This can often dissuade people from applying for the necessary permissions. This is especially the case if it is widely known, as was the case with the former Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVD, that the Conservation Area regulations are unlikely to be enforced by a planning authority even if a transgression is actually noted. The results of all this can be seen in the current Buckingham Conservation Area.

Another problem associated with both the destination of Conservation Areas and the implementation and enforcement of the relevant regulations is that no account is taken of traffic and parking. This seems ironic to say the least, especially when the "street-scene" is meant to be taken into account.

The reality is that much of the "street-scene" of parts in the Buckingham Conservation Area is effectively destroyed by parked cars, many of which, as in the case of Well Street, encroach onto the pavement.

Spare a thought for residents of Well Street that can not even get out of their front doors because of cars parked right up to their front walls.

And don't even get me started about the damage caused by heavy goods vehicles and delivery vans!

The point is that BC being optimistic, to say the least, with its plans to extend Conservation Area coverage when it seems unable or incapable of looking after the existing Buckingham Conservation Area.

Still, we can but hope!

One final gripe: BC's proposals left out one or two areas that are possibly more deserving for inclusion into an enlarged Conservation than the areas that it identified.

Given that i) it is a uniform planned development and ii) consists of the first local authority-built housing to be constructed in Buckingham, Bourtonville should have been considered for designation.

But what do I know?

Local Wildlife – Mary Melliush

At the turn of the year 2 bluetits flew into their box. Probably it was for shelter but since then they have been working with nesting material , one of them carefully discarding any unsuitable pieces.

This January there were some interesting sightings. A flock of 20 sparrows worked in the garden and 3 robins chased each other along the back of the garden bench.

In the second week of January I took my observing walk for this article. The aconites were opening, a mass of little gold cups. The snowdrops looked good. I turned along the river and a kingfisher flew upstream. Apart from the pleasure of a first sighting this year there must be food in the river for them. Other birds seen included several mallards, two moorhens , a red kite, gulls , blackbirds, pigeons, and 3 bouncing squirrels. A wren was heard.

February was rainy, even sleet soaked us. But on fine days birds were displaying courting behaviour and nest building.

Species included blackcap, goldfinch and shiny spotted starlings on the fatballs. A greenfinch was heard at Gawcott.

In the first days of March around 6 a m the dawn chorus was building. The early March walk was rewarding. There are some trees with beautiful pink blossoms in Buckingham, along with pussy buds and catkins. Even the willow is colouring. First primroses and celandines were showing. There was a promise of bluebells. Sadly the little egret sheltering across from the splashes was seen off by a dog. Perhaps there is a case for a lead for bouncy dogs near wildlife.

Now warmth is bringing out butterflies, commas and brimstones etc. I am enjoying the activities of bluetits in their box and a blackbird who has built and is busy in my front hedge.

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We would like to hear from you

We currently require a newsletter editor. If this is something that would interest you, then please let Ian know.

Please provide us with feedback. Tell us what activities you would like The Buckingham Society to prioritise. Comments to kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk Tel: 07834484762

If you would like to be involved in any of our activities or attend a meeting of the Executive Committee, then contact us or just come along. www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk