

NEWSLETTER – No.110 – WINTER 2006

THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

In the last *Newsletter* I commented on the definition of "brownfield land" in relation to the planning of new housing in urban areas. I did not know that I was joining the nationwide chorus in protest. Under Planning Guidance PPS3 issued then by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister gardens are classified as "previously developed land", that is they can be regarded as brownfied sites for planning purposes.

This issue is sufficiently important for me to quote the guidance which states that: "Previously developed land is that which is or was occupied by a permanent structure and associated fixed surface infrastructure. The definition covers the curtilage of the development..... The curtilage is defined as the area of land attached to a building. All of the land within the curtilage of the site will also be defined as previously developed land". The change in status was designed to help the Government achieve its target of 60% of new housing being built on such land. It means that front and back gardens are vulnerable to development.

Local authorities are told to avoid developments which "make inefficient use of land for sale" while encouraging those of between 30 and 50 dwellings per hectare. They are therefore encouraged to give permission to developments of high density on brownfield land.

In the House of Commons an early day motion was tabled by Greg Clark MP for Tunbridge Wells to raise awareness amongst other MPs. Mr. Clark also introduced a Bill on Protection of Private Gardens (Housing Development) designed to exclude front and back gardens from the brownfield definition. Sadly it was not selected. However, we wrote to Mr. Clark in support of his initiative, copying our letter to Chris Grayling. We received a very prompt reply from Mr.Grayling saying that he hoped that a Conservative government would be able to restore some common sense to the planning system to avoid the inappropriate development which has blighted our towns and villages in recent years. Let's hope he is right.

The Royal Horticultural Society has taken the issue up and this month held a Forum with the theme "What future for Urban Gardens: Eden or Extinction". The Civic Trust has highlighted the danger and concern is building; meanwhile local authorities have been given rules and are driven by targets to meet perceived housing demand.

This brings me to a local issue of real concern details of which are emerging. A developer is consulting on a proposal to build a group of houses on the old chalk pit which forms the garden of Dame Annis Barn together with the adjacent house in Burgh Heath Road. This is an area of great character and in 1987 was designated a Conservation Area. Would such a development enhance its appearance and character and would the infrastructure, for example the narrow road, be capable of supporting more houses? This is a good example of the clash between the pressure for housing in the south east and protecting the environment where people live. I have to say that a planning application seems certain; we will keep you informed.

Christmas is now in view so the members of your committee send greetings and hope that you will enjoy the break and prosper in the year ahead. Thank you all for such splendid support you continue to give.

GEOFFREY STONE

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Telecommunications Mast, The Paddock, Langley Vale Road: Following the deferment at the June Planning Committee this was again debated in September. Alternatives to the 30m lattice tower were submitted, both as to siting and to design. The conclusion was reached that they were all worse than the original, which was therefore approved. Our only criticism was that the possibility of a solid tower, which we previously suggested, was unconvincingly dismissed by the applicant's consultant.

Carpetright, 102 High Street, Epsom: Our objections to the garish signs were supported by the Planning Department and the application was refused on the basis that they would represent a strident and unacceptable element in the setting of nearby listed buildings in the town centre. As the fascia is the company's normal logo, further action is likely to be required.

8-12 Dorking Road & 6 Elm Grove: This application to build 41 sheltered apartments with road access from the rear in Elm Grove has been refused on grounds including siting, size and bulk, loss of trees, harm to the adjoining listed building, and adverse effect in Elm Grove. An appeal has been lodged which will surprisingly be heard at a formal planning inquiry and we have written to confirm our objections.

Upper High Street and Depot Road: There is still no news of any appeal on the superstore application and time is running out. In the meantime the Planning Department is working on the site appraisal for this area and is consulting a number of interested bodies. We have ourselves spent a morning discussing the matter with officers. The agreed notes of these meetings will be posted on the Council's website and recommendations reported to Committee in due course.

Briavels Court, Downs Hill Road: The refusal of permission, reported in an earlier *Newsletter*, for an extra floor on these flats has been appealed and we have written to the Inspectorate repeating our objections.

11 Alexandra Road: This large Victorian house is on the triangular site at the corner of Alexandra Road and Bridge Road opposite the Cottage Hospital. Several applications have recently been made for redevelopment. The first three - one for a nine unit care home and four flats, the second for ten flats and the third for a terrace of four houses and

a pair of semi-detached houses - were withdrawn after fierce opposition from local people and ourselves. The latest for four semi-detached houses is still opposed locally. We have written to say that it is an improvement on the others but we see a number of objections and we cannot support it in its present form. Some form of development is likely to take place but more work is needed on the layout and design.

6 Alexandra Road: Almost opposite the last item, No 6 is next to the Cottage Hospital. The application is from the owner of the Day Care Nursery likely to be moved from Heron Court if it is redeveloped. She wishes to transfer the nursery to this house and whilst we are very sympathetic we are unconvinced that this is a suitable location and could not support the application.

ALAN BAKER

51-55 Church Street: The Society has written twice to the Borough Council concerning the proposal to demolish and redevelop 51-55 Church Street. We expressed particular concern regarding the density of the proposed apartments which appeared to be excessive even measured by the Government's current onerous demands. We were also concerned about access and circulation and that there was insufficient parking on the site. The design was also felt to be inappropriate and paid scant regard to the nature and scale of the surrounding development. Fortunately these views were strongly echoed by the Council's officers and the proposal was refused permission when it came before the Planning Committee.

ROBERT AUSTEN

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

We have been informed by the Borough Council that the Public Hearings on the responses to the Core Strategy proposals, the overarching document of the Local Development Framework (LDF), will take place on the 23rd and 24th January 2007 in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall. The main topics that will be covered orally by the Inspector will be Housing Provision, Affordable Housing, Monitoring Targets and Local Distinctiveness. There are additional main topics that will be covered by the Inspector but they will not form part of the oral examination on the above dates. The Society's only response to the Core Strategy concerned the problem of traffic congestion in the town centre and this topic was not one chosen by the Inspector for examination.

Your committee has also responded to the Site Allocations Options Paper as a further part of the LDF. We were invited to provide suggestions as to where new housing might be sited or where further development would not be appropriate. It would have been easier to respond to these questions had we been land owners or developers. Our comments comprised several general points together with others that were more specific.

In respect of new housing we suggested that there may be certain previously developed sites that could be considered for future development provided that development is not detrimental to the character of the area and that 'over-intensification' is not permitted. We observed the current trend for conversion of office space for residential use and we supported this where there is clearly no demand for office buildings and they remain unoccupied over long periods.

We recognised that it is anticipated that the housing needs of the Borough can be met over the next ten years without recourse to using Green Belt. We reiterated that the Society is solidly in favour of protecting the Green Belt but, without prejudice to this position and without creating precedent, we made the following point: if pressure on the Green Belt becomes intolerable to meet housing targets at some time well in the future, there are areas within the Epsom hospitals cluster where further development could be entertained providing it is done sensitively with high quality design and conforms to the appropriate suburban housing density of 35-55 dwellings per hectare. Additionally, we supported releasing a small corner of Priest Hill designated Green Belt, but of low quality, for housing development to support the creation of a Nature Reserve on the adjoining 41 hectares as was proposed in a recent planning application.

EPSOM WALKING HERITAGE TRAIL

At the recent Members' buffet party, I showed a copy of the Heritage Trail and reported that I hoped to have a copy distributed with this *Newsletter*. We are now in partnership with the Borough Council and there has been some editorial polishing of the text to make it flow more readily. As I write this the Heritage Trail is ready to be sent for printing by the Council and I hope that there will be a copy for each member. For those interested in the heritage of Epsom this is a beautifully illustrated guide that will lead you from the Clock Tower to St Martin's Church and back highlighting the historically important buildings along the way.

MALCOLM BOYD

ON HORSE CHESTNUTS AND OTHER TREES: A REPORT BY MR. TREES

The horse chestnut (*aesculus hippocastanum*) is one of the most beautiful of our large flowering trees, especially in late spring when it is covered with candle like flowers. Its seeds provide the conkers that European children have played with for centuries. Now rare in the wild in Greece and Albania, it was introduced into this country in 1576.

Sadly the horse chestnut may become rare in this country too due to a three pronged attack which could be as devastating as the Dutch elm disease that wiped out millions of elms during the 1970s. There are three things that are conquering the chestnuts: leaf miner moth, leaf blotch and, the most serious, bleeding canker.

Leaf miner moth is a pest that arrived here in 1992. The moth larvae eat their way through the internal structure of the leaves causing the brown appearance. This seriously affects the tree's ability to photosynthesise; continuous attack year after year will weaken trees and perhaps lead to their death. Clearing fallen leaves as soon as possible is perhaps the key to eradication as this removes the adult moth which will emerge in the spring to lay more eggs and repeat the cycle.

Leaf blotch is caused by a fungus. It is not fatal but gives the tree an unattractive appearance.

Bleeding canker is potentially the most serious attacker of the horse chestnut. It is an infection of the bark which "bleeds" a dark liquid. This can quickly spread to large patches all the way around the branch or trunk until limbs fall off. There is no cure at present but some trees have been known to pull back to health. So I would give the tree

the benefit of the doubt and wait until spring to see if it flushes new leaves before giving up hope. But obviously, if there is no sign of life or it is brittle, a large tree can be very dangerous and advice should be sought.

All in all the future does not look too positive for the horse chestnut but we can only hope that some will survive as indeed some elms have, especially in Brighton. One answer could be to develop and plant a hybrid tree that is immune from these attacks as again this happened with elms. The whole problem has been exasperated by the hot dry conditions of the last few summers and generally expert opinion is leaning to the idea of planting tree species that are more suited to drought conditions.

There is no doubt that all of us have a responsibility to plant trees for the future good of the health of the planet. Limes have been shown to cope well in drier summers rather than the birch and beech which are shallow rooted and so struggle to obtain water.

Talking of tree planting brings me to a Cedar of Lebanon that I will be planting in Shadbolt Park on Saturday 25th November 2006. It is a seedling that came from the cedars that stood outside The Cedars in Church Street until 16th October 1987. Shadbolt Park is well worth a visit at any time as it is Epsom's mini arboretum. It is named after its owner Mr.E.I.Shadbolt who acquired the estate in 1911. He was the chairman of the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association and began planting his land with many rare trees and shrubs some of which are still in existence. On his death his estate passed to his niece but in 1936 Epsom and Ewell Borough Council bought the gardens for £3,500 and commissioned a survey of all the trees and shrubs by W.J.Bean of Kew Gardens. The catalogue was deposited with Epsom and Ewell Library Service in 1948 and is still available today.

MIKE FORD

Chairman, Epsom & Ewell Tree Advisory Board

NONSUCH REVISITED.

The Chairman welcomed a "full house" to the first of our series of talks this season. Norman Dempster then introduced the team of speakers from Atkins (formerly W S Atkins), Ian Milford, Hugh Fraser and Mike Tapper, ably supported by Sue Dartnell.

Ian gave us an insight into the background of this fascinating project – the creation of a virtual reality model of the Palace. The project started in the 1990s, was shelved, then reinstated when funding was found. Much information was taken from the records of Professor Martin Biddle's archaeological exploration of the site in 1959/60. Although there is little contemporary material available apart from a few paintings by Hoefnagel and others and written records by authors such as John Evelyn and Anthony Watson, all the snippets of information combined enabled the appearance to be pieced together. Some parts were harder to assess so examples of similar work, such as the gardens at Hampton Court and the stables at Kenilworth, were used to enable some of the images to be composed by 'educated guesswork'. The result, on the screen before us, was a three-dimensional reproduction of the Palace.

Hugh then explained the historical background to the French and Italian influences which gave rise to the construction of this extraordinary building by Henry VIII between 1538 and 1545. In 1586 it was described fulsomely by William Camden. The Palace was

famous for the stucco panels in the courtyard - they were based on classical motifs and sculpted from gesso duro (ground marble and plaster) on a gilded wooden frame. Stucco was much used in France and Italy but was not really suitable for outdoor use here. The Palace only survived for about 150 years, but the marvels of virtual reality enable us to take an imaginary tour round it.

Mike explained how the virtual reality models are constructed on screen - to show us, he built a five tower medieval-style fort in brick with wooden conical towers and tiled roofs in less than 15 minutes!

Some of the queries raised by the audience were about the seeming lack of chimneys - the paintings all show different numbers, so probably many more than on the VR model; interior decoration - largely conjectural from other known examples; is it on line - no, files too big but Atkins may make it available on CD.

All in all an extremely interesting and informative start to this series of talks. Do make sure you come to the next one in January.

ANGELA CLIFFORD

EVENTS

ANNUAL BUFFET SUPPPER PARTY

The Buffet Supper was held on Friday 27th October and over 100 people attended. Our guests of honour were the Mayor of Epsom and Ewell Councillor David Wood and the Mayoress his sister Barbara. The catering was expertly done by one of our members Barbara Culpin. There was plenty of excellent food served at the tables by her waitresses, in fact there was a surplus which was not wasted because it was boxed up and taken that night by Roy and Nancy Richmond to the Night Shelter in Leatherhead where it was much appreciated. The new catering arrangement worked very well and saved guests the time and effort of queuing up for the buffet. Everyone enjoyed the entertainment provided by the talented Hedley Kay with his mixture of songs, stories and guitar playing, so much so that we have been asked to invite him back again next year.

OUTINGS

Visit to Rochester for the Dickens Christmas Festival on Saturday 2nd December 2006. This outing is fully booked with a small waiting list. Tickets have been sent to everyone with a seat on the coach and those on the waiting list have been informed.

FUTURE TALKS

THURSDAY 25TH JANUARY 2007 AT 8PM IN MYERS STUDIO.

This talk will be given by Dr Nigel Barker Historic Areas Advisor, English Heritage. He will give an illustrated talk entitled "New futures for historic buildings - conservation work in the South East Region of English Heritage".

Tickets are £3 each. Please apply on the application form at the back of this *Newsletter* with a cheque made payable to Epsom Protection Society and an SAE and send it to Joy Furness at the address on the form.

THURSDAY 29TH MARCH 2007 AT 8PM IN MYERS STUDIO

Illustrated talk by Derek Mossman on Design of Buildings; more details to be given in the next *Newsletter*.

Tickets are £3 each. Please apply on the application form at the back of this *Newsletter* with a cheque made payable to Epsom Protection Society and an SAE and send it to Joy Furness at the address on the form.

If booking for both talks one cheque will be acceptable.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY: AGM 26th April 2007

JOY FURNESS

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APPLICATION FORM

SECOND TALK

THURSDAY 25th JANUARY 2007, 8PM AT MYERS STUDIO, EPSOM

I would like tickets for this event (£3 each) and enclose a cheque (made payable to Epsom Protection Society) for £..... and SAE

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NUMBER

Please return to Joy Furness, 37 Woodcote Hurst, Epsom KT18 7DS (Tel 01372 722186)

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APPLICATION FORM

THIRD TALK

THURSDAY 29th MARCH 2007, 8PM AT MYERS STUDIO, EPSOM

I would like tickets for this event (£3 each) and enclose a cheque (made payable to Epsom Protection Society) for £..... and SAE

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NUMBER

Please return to Joy Furness, 37 Woodcote Hurst, Epsom KT18 7DS (Tel 01372 722186)

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