

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

NEWSLETTER No - 155 - SPRING 2018

CHAIR'S COMMENTARY

Local Plan Update

The advent of spring and our first newsletter for 2018 brings a resurgence to the Society's planning focus. We continue to follow the progress of the Council's local plan review, and understand that late April / early May is the anticipated date of **publication of the Pre-Submission Draft Plan**. Once the draft plan is available, the Society intends to hold an open meeting to identify and discuss key issues. There will be a further round of consultation on the plan's draft policies, proposals and designations before submission of the plan to the Secretary of State. The Society will be responding on behalf of members, and we encourage as many of you as possible to make your views known to the Council directly. Independent examination of the plan by the Planning Inspectorate will then follow. The Inspector's role is to assess whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements and whether it is 'sound' overall. Public hearing sessions will be part of this process and will be publicised at least six weeks before they are due to take place. Details will be available on the Council's website, and we will provide updates to our members via our website, Facebook page and Twitter account.

Housing: members will be aware that housing, in particular the building of new homes, is high on the national political agenda. The timing of recent interventions by the Secretary of State could scarcely have been worse for the Council's local plan process, with central government launching its own consultation on a new method for assessing local housing need ('Planning for the right homes in the right places') immediately before the Council's launch of the Issues and Options consultation last September. Under central government's proposals, the Council's former local assessment of 418 new homes a year has increased to 579 a year over the life of the new local plan (15 years). The new approach to housing need assessment will apply to all local plans submitted for examination on or after 31 March 2018, so it is likely that the Council will have to work to this new figure, at least for now. As reported in our last newsletter, the Society considers this figure to be unrealistic. The Council's Strategic Housing Land Allocation Assessment (June 2017) indicated a 62% shortfall in deliverable sites for housing, working on their original assessment of 418 new homes a year, concluding that 'tough policy choices' may lie ahead. Unsurprisingly the Council's response (October 2017) to the government's consultation has been robust, and the Society fully supports it.

Epsom and Ewell is not alone among Surrey Councils in facing a challenging housing environment. It is interesting to note the united stance from the County's 11 council leaders, who have criticised the government's housing numbers as 'unrealistic and unacceptable' (reported in Get Surrey 13 Dec 2017). Also noteworthy are the Mayor of London's plans for more homes in the capital, which might help to address in part any unmet housing need locally. The Mayor of London also plans to protect the **Green Belt** (Get Surrey 2 Jan 2018). Local plan policies must take account of constraints, such as land area covered by Green Belt. Currently 46% of Epsom and Ewell is subject to Green Belt and other constraints so it will be a challenge to find suitable sites for new homes over the life of the new local plan. The

Society's committee members attended the Council's Green Belt workshop on 19 January, as part of the second phase of the Green Belt Study, currently in progress.

There is no doubt that locally we are facing a challenging planning environment. Do we build higher, increase housing densities, build on the Green Belt? How do we embrace change and yet retain Epsom's local distinctiveness and the qualities of our Conservation Areas? Epsom and Ewell has 21 Conservation Areas to cherish. Good design is vitally important. We agree with the Secretary of State when he said, "...people say they would support the building of more homes in their area if they were well-designed and in keeping with the local style." (Speech to the Federation of Master Builders 12 Dec 2017). This reflects local feedback the Society has received over the past year from members and non-members alike.

Planning has been described as 'the orderly management of change'. Change is coming to Epsom with the new local plan. With your continuing support, the Society has a voice in shaping that change.

Margaret Hollins

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

For this edition I am going to concentrate on three important cases in a little more detail than usual.

Aldi at the Dairy Site, Alexandra Road: Aldi's application to build a supermarket on the Dairy Site was refused and their Appeal was heard over five days in October. My last episode left you waiting for the Inspector's decision. As those of you who haven't already heard have been held in great suspense, I will tell you at once that the Appeal was dismissed. The question now is whether Aldi will follow their usual practice of making some amendments and trying again.

Following national guidelines and local policy, the Inspector considered four issues. (They get a bit technical so stop here if you want only the simple answer.) Firstly, he considered that the development would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the surrounding area but cause less than substantial harm to the Pikes Hill Conservation Area; this harm should therefore be weighed against any public benefits. Secondly, on highway matters, he thought the car park would be adequate, the access safe and suitable, and there would not be an impact on traffic flow.

The third issue is the critical one. Known as the sequential test it means, in very simplified terms, that if there is an available site which is more suitable for retail use, the application should be refused. As you can imagine this has been subject to much legal interpretation. An important decision in the Supreme Court enabled the Inspector to decide that the more suitable Upper High Street was available for retail use, and Lidl's occupation did not prevent him deciding that Aldi failed the sequential test.

The fourth issue was a summing up and he found there was insufficient public benefit from the development to out-balance the harm and he therefore dismissed the appeal. This very brief report is a precis of 12 pages of solid argument and shows that detailed technical and legal issues are thoroughly examined in reaching such decisions. As the sequential test is central, followed a Supreme Court decision, and seems difficult to challenge let's hope that this will be the end of the story.

The former Police Station, Church Street: This current application proposes the building of two brick-built blocks, containing 29 flats, on the site of the former police station. It is only the second scheme to come forward in the Upper High Street, Depot Road and Church Street Development Brief of 2012. An overall plan for all the emergency services sites would have been preferable but the others are not available yet and we have welcomed this proposal as a first stage. In terms of layout and size it seems acceptable and it avoids undue intrusion along the frontage to The Parade.

Our reservations sought confirmation that the flint boundary wall in The Parade will be kept and extended; found that the proposed 25 parking spaces are insufficient and that the somewhat square and unfriendly appearance of the buildings, not helped by flat roofs, would be improved by some modest softening features. We also found that a statement that no financial surplus will be generated by the scheme to support affordable housing is unacceptable. Viability studies producing such results are always suspect and need strict checking.

South Hatch Stables, Burgh Heath Road: In 2005, we opposed an application to demolish these rather outmoded stables, build new state of the art stables in the open land at the rear and flats or houses on the Burgh Heath Road frontage to pay for the cost. The whole of the land is in the Green Belt and we said the proposal was totally unacceptable. The application was refused and appealed. I gave evidence at the Public Inquiry and said I might have been satisfied with stables being built in the Green Belt to support the racing industry, but only if the existing buildings were demolished and the land devoted to an open green area providing a better view from the road. The Inspector's report was referred to John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister at the time, for decision and he dismissed the Appeal.

That the whole sorry story is about to be repeated was shown at a Community Consultation Open Day recently held at the stables to illustrate a very similar proposal for state of the art stables financed by an enabling development of 47 apartments fronting Burgh Heath Road.

First reactions have been varied but points we shall have to consider, if a planning application is made, will include: building in the Green Belt, the future of the racing community, the appearance of Burgh Heath Road, the principle of enabling development and the increased pressure to find sites for more housing. There's trouble ahead.

Alan Baker

HERITAGE

Things have been very quiet over the past few weeks and I have written no letters since the last Newsletter. Overall this year I have looked at 78 applications affecting listed buildings or buildings in Conservation Areas. The great majority were for house extensions, usually quite modest but each would clearly make a great difference to quality of life for the householders. The objective most usually is to increase the size of the kitchen. This has been a noticeable trend over the past few years as kitchens increasingly become the focus for more family activities.

Sadly - from my point of view at least - I have decided that I must leave the committee. My involvement in other things has become much more time consuming and I would not like this to impact adversely on what I have been doing for the ECS. So this will be my last contribution to the Newsletter. I joined the committee, I think, in 2002 or 2003, and took on the heritage and conservation role in 2006 - at least, it was that year that I wrote my first, somewhat tentative, letter.

I will not refer to those over-used valedictory twins 'honour' and 'privilege' but I would like to say that I have greatly enjoyed working with a small group of dedicated people who give a lot of time and effort, and who have been able to work together very happily and professionally, and to great effect. Epsom is not only very fortunate in having the ECS to help the town retain its appeal and character, but also in having a council with a majority of independent councillors. I did a little research about this: in fact, Epsom is the only district council in England with a majority of independent councillors. There are others: four in Scotland and six in Wales, among far fewer councils. Independents also form part of eleven coalition-led councils in England but there are no such administrations in the rest of the UK. We are thus uniquely fortunate in having a majority non-partisan council which must help to get the best outcomes for all those living in the Borough.

We are also fortunate in having an unusually large membership for a civic organisation – nearly 2000; usually, the membership of such organisations is numbered in tens. This gives the ECS a real voice and we are often involved by the Council in consultations into planning matters and our views clearly matter. Long may it continue to be so.

I feel I cannot sign off without some reference to design, which I have banged on about from time to time. This is an issue which is likely to become more acute over the next few years as attempts are made to solve the housing crisis. Architects must find themselves under huge pressure from developers to squeeze as many dwellings as possible into a given plot. Some improvements have taken place; for instance, there are now recognised space standards for different sizes and types of dwellings. These are minima, but all too often such standards become a sort of seal of approval – a gold standard. There are occasions when I have wondered how a family can possibly manage within the constrictions of some supposedly adequate houses. But the layout of a development might be thought to be of equal, or even greater, importance to give a sense of place, of pride, and of security.

In the last Newsletter, I mentioned an application to build a block of flats in The Grove in the Church Street Conservation Area to which I had written a letter of objection. It seems I wasn't alone. There has been a storm of objection, with probably over 200 (I lost count) objections on the website, including one from an MP (presumably ours – but I couldn't open it). There was also an excellent report from the Council's Conservation Officer. It is clinically dispassionate and well-argued, and finishes: *The proposal is thus contrary to Para. 132 of the NPPF, which requires great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets and notes that significance can be harmed or lost through unsympathetic development. In order to avoid harm to the significance of the Church Street conservation area, a form of development compatible with key local qualities is essential and refusal of the present proposal is strongly recommended in terms of Policies DM8 and DM9.*

There can be no guarantee that this application, or others like it, will be refused or that an appeal might not be successful, but with strong will and clear sightedness I am sure that Epsom, with the help of the ECS, will continue to resist the worst efforts of developers.

Rob Austen

MILLENNIUM POND

We have been informed by the treasurer of the Millennium Green trust, Mr Jeremy Horken, that the sum donated for the restoration of the Millennium Pond has reached £10,000. This triggers our agreed contribution of £5,000 and this sum has now been sent to the Trust. I show below illustrations of how the pond urgently needs restoration. It has become much more obvious since the recent clearing of saplings around the perimeter.

Malcolm Boyd.



THE LAST COACH via EPSOM

I understand that at one time as many as fifty horsedrawn coaches a day would stop at Epsom and then move on to Brighton or Portsmouth and other destinations. These coaches continued long after the railways provided, presumably, a much faster service. The History Centre at Bourne Hall has now retrieved evidence which points to a service which continued until the First World War in 1914 and I am using much of their information.

The writer believes that the service which continued until 1914 may not have been commercial but more related to the activities of some wealthy enthusiasts who began forming clubs in order to show off their horses and coaches. Their 'service' became known as the London Coaching Season and in 1907 a multi-millionaire Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt brought his 26 coaching horses from the United States for the coaching service and entered in the first International Horse Show. The English owners thought the U.S. horses were a bit coarse but they won many events.



Clock Tower, Epsom

The Vanderbilts made their money with the railways in the U.S. and at one time William Henry Vanderbilt and family were among the wealthiest in the world. The family at one time operated at least seven large estates around the world.

Alfred started to entertain his friends by driving them in his horse drawn coaches, from London to Brighton using a relay of horses. He enjoyed this and in 1907 he started a regular, but seasonal, London to Brighton service using a coach named 'Venture'.

From 1908 the runs to Brighton and occasionally to Portsmouth were routed via Reigate. The route to Brighton via Epsom, Ashted and Dorking continued from 1910 until the outbreak of war in 1914.

Vanderbilt returned to America but on May 7th 1915 he was travelling first class to England on the RMS Lusitania when a German submarine, U20, torpedoed it. He helped others to the lifeboats and then gave up his lifejacket to save a female passenger who was holding a baby in her arms. Vanderbilt, his valet Ronald Denyer and 1196 died as a result of the sinking.

On the A24 London to Worthing Road in Holmwood, just south of Dorking, a memorial was raised by his friends. The inscription reads, 'In memory of Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt a gallant gentleman and a fine sportsman, who perished in the Lusitania May 7th 1915. This stone is erected on his favourite road by a few of his British coaching friends and admirers'.

I am grateful to Peter Reed and Brian Bouchard who supplied most of the information in this article.

Harry Corben (by Invitation)

THE TREE FUND

We have received an extensive communication from the Tree Advisory Board (TAB), but unfortunately too long to include here. It is reported that 35 new trees are due to be planted before the end of March, funded in part by donations and in part by funds from TAB. Grateful thanks are expressed towards the donations from members of the Society. In total, the sum transferred from our tree fund and including £1,000 from Society funds was £2,140. There is now £90 remaining in the tree fund. The 35 new trees planted at a cost of £250 each, represent just one third the number considered necessary to maintain the street tree stock in the borough. If members would like to contribute to the tree fund, please send your cheque to our treasurer, Nick Lock, Lower Bridle, 30 Downs Avenue, Epsom, KT18 5HG.

Malcolm Boyd

SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you haven't paid your 2018 Subscription [Individual £2 / Household £3] please complete the slip at the bottom of the green AGM notice and take it to your rep. This would be much appreciated. The list of Reps is on the 2nd page of the green AGM notice and your Rep. should have marked their name. If, for any reason, you are unsure who your Rep. is, please phone or email me. Maybe you receive your Newsletter by email, in which case the Rep list cannot be marked – you may recognise your Rep's name but if not, do contact me.

Ishbel Kenward - Membership Secretary (01372 728570)

email info@epsomcivicsociety.org.uk

PROGRESS in ROSEBERY POND

On the left, the path is well advanced, but, on the right, use has to be made of gabion baskets to raise the height.

Malcolm Boyd

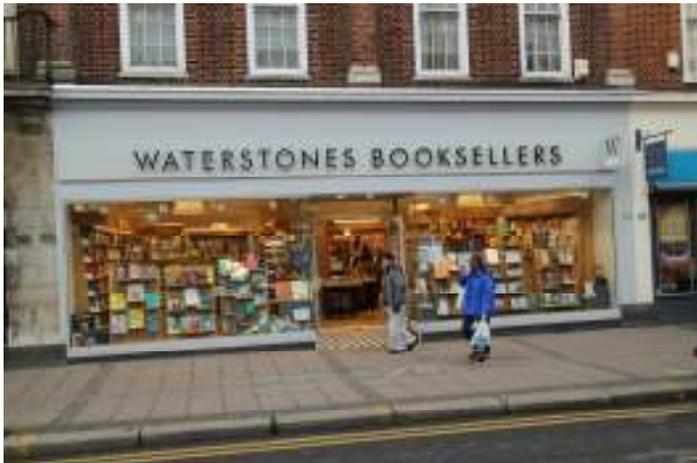


PHOTOGRAPHS

As members will have noticed, your editor likes to include photographs in the newsletter when space permits. Not only does this add colour to the pages, but it also adds to the topicality of the edition. The editor does not profess to be an expert photographer, but hopes that his efforts are appreciated. If members are disappointed at not seeing the photos in colour, they may like to join the increasing number who receive the newsletter by email (email request to Ishbel Kenward). The editor would also like to encourage members either to make suggestions to improve the newsletter or to write with a view to possible inclusion in the next copy. Unfortunately there can be no guarantees of inclusion and no prizes. Address on back page.

Editor

Photographs of current happenings in Epsom including the new Post Office, Pret a Manger , Waterstones in the High Street and the Premier Inn making progress in the Parade



EVENTS

Annual Buffet Supper, a Date for your Diary

This will take place on Friday 19th October in the Unity hall. Details will be in the next newsletter.

Visit to Lambeth Palace and the Museum of Garden History

The date of the next visit is Friday, 22nd June and the cost will be £50. I realise that this is an expensive outing and regret that only 40 people can visit Lambeth Palace, but we need a large coach. As we have to arrive there by 10.30 a.m., there are only two picking-up places, The Street, Ashtead at 8.40 a.m., and the Epsom Downs carpark behind the tea hut near Tattenham Corner at 9 a.m. As time is tight, there will be no time for coffee before we begin the Palace tour so I suggest that members bring a water drink with them. The guided tour of the Palace and its garden is in two groups. Then we have reduced entry to the Museum of Garden History next door, where first there will be a lasagne and salad lunch with tea or coffee, then members can explore the newly-modernised and re-opened museum themselves.

For general information, Lambeth Palace has been the London residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury for almost 800 years and its garden is the oldest in London (1197), whilst the Museum of Garden History covers all aspects of plants and horticulture through the centuries and has the John Tradescant tomb in the churchyard. The anticipated departure time to return home is 4 p.m.

I think this will prove an informative visit with quite a lot of walking. Bookings from non-members can be taken after 1st May. If anyone has any problems or enquiries please contact me on 01372 273517

Sheila Wadsworth

Application for the Lambeth Palace Visit and to the Museum of Garden History, Friday 22nd June

Members/s Name/s.....

Address.....

Tel. No.....

No. of tickets @£50 pp.....Total cost.....

Do you have any dietary requirements or allergies? Yes/No . Please describe them

.....

Coach collection. Please indicate

(A) 8.40 a.m. The Street, Ashtead

(B) 9.00 a.m. Epsom Downs, the carpark behind the Tattenham Corner tea hut.

Please return this application form with your cheque made out to “Epsom Civic Society” and a stamped addressed envelope to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashtead, KT21 1LJ (01372 273517)

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