

Hitcham and Taplow Society

Newsletter 89: Spring 2008
£2.50 to non-members



www.taplowsociety.org.uk

Hitcham and Taplow Society

Formed in 1959 to protect Hitcham, Taplow and the surrounding countryside from being spoilt by bad development and neglect.

President: Eva Lipman
Vice Presidents: Tony Hickman, Derek Walker, Professor Bernard Trevallion OBE
Chairman: Euan Felton
Vice Chairman: Karl Lawrence
Treasurer: Peter Mole
Secretary: Neil Blundell
Committee: Jeremy Vanstone, Heather Fenn, Andy McKenzie, Barrie Peroni, Fred Russell,
Louise Symons, Esther Willmore, Matthew Travers, Sarah Brodie, Jill Harden
Website Adviser & Newsletter Production: Andrew Findlay

Contact Address: HTS, 21 Byways, Burnham, SL1 7EB

Cover Picture: Springtime at Taplow Court (Andrew Findlay)

(Guest) Editorial

It would appear that history does repeat itself after all! Years ago Dick Nutt attempted to hand over the baton of editorship but found that he had to become 'Not-the-editor' for a significant period until, finally, a willing and able volunteer turned up to run with the baton. It looks as if the same thing has happened again, and the search for a successor rumbles on without a would-be editor in sight. There must be someone out there who harbours the ambition to run a newsletter which provides the parish with a much-needed source of information about all the varied activities going on around here. Where are they? So this is a 'not-the-editor' editorial...

This issue of the newsletter seems to have a political theme but, as I once said in an earlier editorial, we are now functioning in a rather different environment where a significant shift to centralisation is seriously diminishing the local council's ability to respond properly to our comments on planning applications. Also your committee is expected to comment on a huge raft of government papers which seem focussed on concreting over vast swathes of the South-East of England. We therefore need to

be fully aware of the nature of the changes to the planning system under development, otherwise it difficult to see how we can sensibly function as an amenity society. It is for this reason that your Society also has to look outside the parish for support and our membership of ANTAS, the Civic Trust and the Chiltern Society provides us with that much-needed support, particularly where we share common problems. Also, of course, we gain synergy from access to highly qualified people in these larger societies who have a wider knowledge and perspective than we can marshal in the 'Shire'.

We have acquired a lot of new talent on the committee over the past year which is most welcome and thankfully reduces the average age! A point made at the ANTAS meet was that the room seemed full of grey heads and why didn't younger people seem interested enough in what happens to where they live to stand up and be counted? Anyway, your committee now sprouts fewer grey heads and we can look forward with more confidence than hitherto.

Fred Russell

Brussels, a Parable for Our Time

The Lords of the Plan

*Spatial Plans for Elvish Commissars to ratify
Core Plans for the Dwarf Lords in their gravel pits
Regional Plans for mortal man doomed to comply
One Plan for the Dark Lords who cannot stand the Brits
In the land of Brussels where the Planners lie
One Plan to rule them all and in the Ee-Yu bind them
One Plan to draw them in and to the Regions chain them
In the Land of Brussels where our freedoms die*



Ln the days of Middle Bucks before the Ee-Yu stretched its greedy talons across the land there lay the tranquil parish of Taplow where its mighty trees grew old in the service of the Elven Lords and man lived in peace with them and knew his place in the order of things. Upon the hill known as Hobiton dwelt there wise and industrious humans who guided the simple folk to the wooded north and those of the river plains to the south with firm but gentle hands and who all lived their busy lives in innocence of the dread forces gathering to the south. Then the first whispers spread among them all that the great ones who lived in the place called Rivendell, known by men as Cliveden, were to embark upon the river Anduin, which came to be called Thames in the later ages of man, and were bound for the Grey Havens rumoured to be a city of dreaming spires and would leave Middle Bucks forever. The days of the Lords were over, it seemed, and man was left to ponder his fate and did face the gathering planning chaos already spreading its dark shadow across the peaceful lands with no help at hand.

To the north of the parish, the forest of Mirkwood was despoiled by wandering Orcs who destroyed the great houses nestling in its deeps and built their own foul nests in that part known as Dropmore and spread their strange angular dwelling even unto the outskirts of Rivendell

itself. It was rumoured that great furnaces were to be built on the northern outposts of the parish and folk looked silently at each other and wondered at their purpose, feared of the answer. To the south of the parish lived the river folk, where legend had it that Toad, Mole and Ratty once lived before being driven out by the new breed called commuters. These new men, refugees from the west, who were yet bound by bonds of cruel duty to return each day to toil on the underground caverns of the place which came to be called London. In these, the last days of Middle Bucks, the rise of the great powers of Ee-Yu, once called Mordor, in the Deep South claimed dominance over all the land called Albion. A Dark Lord, it was rumoured, had risen and spread his rule from the great citadel of Brussels, and moved his shabby minions across the Southern Sea to rule London through his underling Brown-the-White, whose lair lay in Blackhall, and who laboured mightily to bind all of humanity to his master's dread will through the One-Plan – watched by the



unsleeping London Eye of the Dark Lord.

Men had ordered their lives by simple plans bequeathed them by the lords of Middle Bucks and these rules were flexed as needed to meet the simple demands of the people of Taplow but, as the power of the Dark Lord waxed great, these plans were overthrown, victims to the One-Plan. The light of the west vested in Cameron-the-Grey failed to stop the evil of top-downism and the land groaned with the tread of monstrous hordes of Orc-like creatures, the Uruk-Hai, spawned from the vats and vaults of Blackhall and which form the three dread tribes of Bureaucrats, Developers and Planners, whose will and might shall not be gainsaid. One day, it is rumoured, a hero shall emerge from Albion and take the One-Plan into the very maw of Brussels and cast it to utter ruin.

But that day is not yet...

Fred Baggins

ANTAS, the Civic Trust and Us

Your Society is a member of ANTAS (Association of North Thames Amenity Societies) and nominated members of the committee attend their biannual meetings. The latest meeting was in Aylesbury. As a reminder: ANTAS is an association of local civic societies working to ensure high standards of planning and architecture in our towns and villages, and the care and preservation of our countryside. It has a current membership of 21 societies, mainly in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, and encourages all civic societies in the region to become members of ANTAS and the Civic Trust, and to be active in the work of the Civic Trust South-East or the East of England Association of Civic Trust Societies (EEACTS).

Notes from the ANTAS meeting of April 2008

There were key figures present from: Bucks County Council, Civic Trust (National Chairman and keynote speaker), Chiltern Society (Chairman), East of England Society (Chairman)

Some regret was expressed at the expected demise of SEERA (South East England Regional Assembly) but only because it is to be replaced by an even less democratic institution called SEEDA. SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) is directly accountable only to the government, with a budget 40 times that of SEERA, and more or less completes the separation of the South East planning system from local control, making local authorities largely irrelevant. 'Government is preparing to ride roughshod over residents' views with new proposals to shift housing, planning and transport powers from councillor-led regional assemblies to unelected quangos responsible for economic growth' The above is a direct quote from the SEERA website.

Reports were received from Wendover, Radlett, Oxford, Potters Bar, Marlow, High Wycombe, Hertford, Harpenden, the Chiltern Society, Chesham, Buntingford, Buckingham, Aylesbury and Taplow. In all, ANTAS represents 21 amenity societies.

The key concerns emerging from the reports from those present were remarkably consistent:

- The average age of committee members is far too high!
- Nobody in government appears to be interested in the infrastructure costs of the massive house-building programme in progress. It was estimated that every house built needed £38Ks-worth of infrastructure support (£50K if you ignore affordable homes). Given that infrastructure is not usually provided for by the developer, a very rough estimate of infrastructure for the incredible 3 million houses planned, is probably around £150billion. Is the tax payer is expected to fund this – and how?
- A propos the above, general worries were expressed about the imbalance between water supply and demand in the South East generally. It was noted that there appears to be a general trend towards exporting water from certain parts of the South East. We in Taplow have already recently experienced this. (It appears that the authorities are relying on a lesser usage per head but the trend has been the other way. Power showers might become illegal!!)
- Traffic management planning was frequently cited as totally inadequate in the face of the torrent of new traffic demands on the road system. Little really high-quality attention is paid either to support or oppose development plans. Remember the Cliveden fiasco?
- The recent announcement by the government of the creation of 'new towns' of 20,000 homes apiece is becoming reality in Aylesbury and Wendover. Wendover is already seeing a planned 20% increase in its population (Aylesbury will have a population of 100,000 by 2022). Where are all these people coming from? Where do they find jobs, schools, etc?
- Supermarket wars are breaking out all over, and systematically degrading the quality of High Street shopping.
- SEEDA is seen as a vehicle for removing power from the local people, yet they are 'going through the motions' of consulting us. The cynicism is unbelievable, particularly as they are using incomprehensible language to construct the massive outpourings of documents that Central Planning generates.
- There was general agreement that as planning power becomes more and more

centralised, the voices of individual amenity societies are getting lost. The local authorities who hand out consultation documents are only obeying government 'guidance' when making decisions about particular developments and Taplow's lone bleats can be lost. What is needed is a far greater degree of co-operation between societies to gain critical mass. Philip Kolvin, National Head of the Civic Trust, pointed out that countrywide they have a membership of over a quarter of a million people – add all the amenity societies as well, and if we could co-operate more effectively, our voices would certainly be heard. He drew a colourful analogy, pointing out that water falling as rain is spread widely and so has little effect, but when it gathers together as floodwater, its power is unstoppable.

Mr Kolvin gave an inspirational talk which left us with plenty to think about. For instance:

- Democracy is community involvement in decision-making by people who care about what is happening to their society.
- The amenity societies represent a kind of 'moral army' who have a moral authority which transcends planning authority.
- Protection of every square yard of green space (not necessarily Green Belt) is vital. Each square yard that grows things is a symbol of freedom. The loss of a single square yard to concrete or paving slabs is a symbol of the loss of control and freedom. We may not be able to plant a forest, but one precious square yard can be a home for a tree. (There is a direct parallel between this idea and the New York 'Zero Tolerance' campaign that was so successful in reducing crime levels in the capital. A broken window, if tolerated and left unmended, encourages other window breakages, and this escalates, eventually, from neglect to a cultural breakdown. A single square yard lost to cement is a broken window.)
- The Civic Trust is creating a campaign driven by volunteers designed to:
 - o Improve the quality of our High Streets. Called 'High Street UK', this is modelled on the US initiative called 'Main Street US' which, over the past 25 years, has brought back an estimated \$40billion into the Main Street economy.
 - o Identify and open new Heritage Sites. Some 3,000 have been opened and run by volunteers, and now the Civic Trust are planning to 'edge' into London.
 - o Encourage the idea of a Cultural Olympics where we can become proud of our culture and heritage and help make the term 'Made in Britain' something to respect abroad once more.
 - o Encourage better design and regeneration in our urban and rural communities. We need community buildings that are appropriate to the look and feel of the local environment; not the 'Gherkin' that graces the London skyline or the architectural abomination of the Sainsbury's building in Maidenhead!
 - o Creating an initiative with local businesses to rescue the night-time town centres from the jobs and make them once again a place for ordinary people to enjoy in safety. To encourage a night-time economy that doesn't cater only for the restless young. (This does not mean more cameras, but more things to do.)

One thing is very clear – your Society needs to cooperate more fully with its ANTAS partners to help generate the synergy to gain the leverage needed to make our voices heard by our increasingly remote masters!

Eva Lipman and Fred Russell

**Village
Green
Party**

Saturday 21st June
See insert for details

Why Buffins?

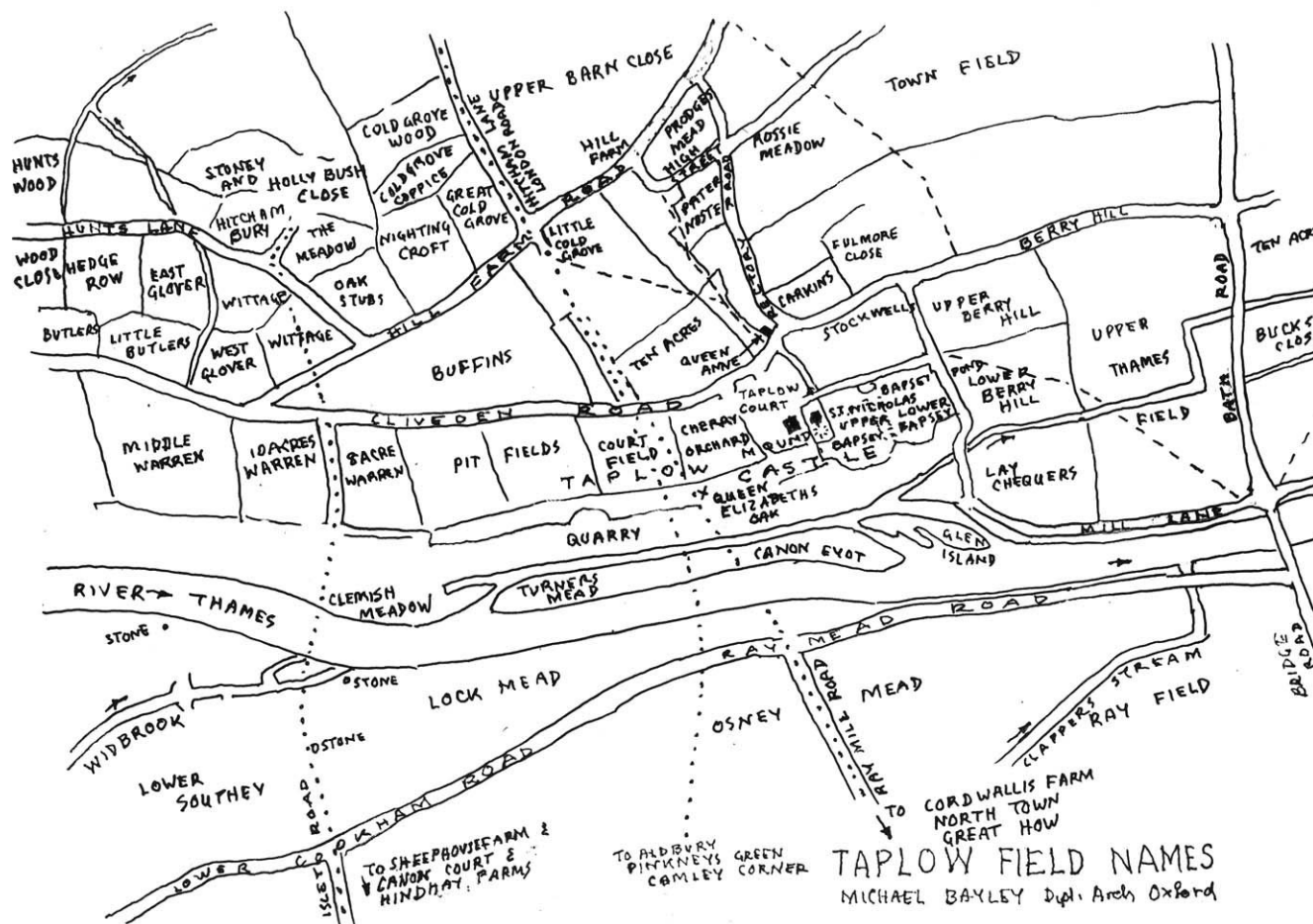
You will not find an explanation of this name in any book – you must go to the oral history of the area that preserved the local legend of St Berinus, which itself never came out of any really ancient book. If you remember the story, St Berinus baptised all the Saxons in Taplow Castle in Bapsey Pond, and the first Christian church was built beside Taplow Court within the castle defence. From this original local legend we see that the good saint didn't baptise the local British people of Taplow who adhered to the old pagan religion, so that it became accepted as the centre of local witchcraft – and today still attracts neo-witchcraft groups.

My great aunts used the services of the Taplow Wise Women who taught pillow lace-making and could cure most diseases, and perhaps that is why they found a bowl made from a human skull in Bapsey Pond when it was cleaned out in the 1960s, and the witches curse on the Desborough family for enclosing the spring that fed Bapsey Pond did come true. The British language survived as a second semi-secret language of the land and the river until it

was killed off by an alliance of the railways, Victorian education and snobbery, in the mid-nineteenth century.

So the place and field names of Taplow are corruptions of this Lowland British language, and the local history of the district – from the Neolithic to the present day – was passed on orally among the farming yeomanry. Local farmers claim to have come from good yeoman stock – their ancestor was an Ior-man, or 'petty lord', the lowest rank of the nobility or squirearchy.

Locally it was held that Hitchambury was the original settlement in the area. The name derives from *Uchel am burrow*, meaning 'The earthworks (banks and ditches) of the highest cultivated land and its cultivators'. An adjacent field south of Hitchambury is called The Meadow. It is a meadow, but to the Britons it was *Ty-med da*, that is 'The house of the field of the cattle'. West of this where the entrance to Hitchambury and Hunts Wood branches off Hill Farm Road is a small field called Oak Stubbs, which sits on the crest of the hill. It is unlikely to have been a felled oak wood from its size and position, so the name



was probably *Ugh-stum*, or 'The high bend'. Opposite this road junction lay the large field called Buffins, once called *Bugh-fan*, meaning 'The place of the cows'. On the north-east corner of Hitcham Lane is Great Colgrove, anciently *grety-kole-crow fa*, meaning 'The place of the young bull's hovel'. This makes it quite convenient for the Buffins cows!

Nearby are the wood and coppiced woodlands that produced good browsing for the young bull. One must remember that cattle are naturally browsing animals of the woodland or marsh – not naturally grazing animals. Diagonally opposite across the road and on the edge of Buffins is Little Coldgrove, or *Laity kole crow fa*, meaning 'The dairy by the place of the young bull's hovel'. The corner of Buffins adjacent to Taplow Court is called Ten Acres. In fact it is only eight and a bit acres, but don't suggest to me that primitive peasants weren't good at measuring land accurately: my market-gardening brother-in-law found that illiterate gypsies who were paid by the acre for peapicking could accurately estimate an area instantly – a task which would take a modern surveyor hours to measure! This 'Ten Acres' was known as *Tir-ner-argae*, which meant 'The enclosure of the lord of the manor', and it is easy to see how this converts to the modern version.

My great aunt first took me to Taplow in the 1920s. She and her contemporaries still referred to Hitcham Lane by its old name of London Road. It is part of the medieval road that linked most of the South Bucks villages with ancient churches in Taplow, Hitcham, Burnham, Farnham, Wexham, Iver and so on. If you continue the line of Hitcham Lane straight across Buffins you arrive at Court Field, where the archaeologists discovered the entrance to the Bronze Age Taplow Castle. In the middle of the ride on the west side of this field is the modern incarnation of Queen Elizabeth Oak. As the previous one dies, a new one has been planted – for millennia – but there is no record of the Tudor Queen Elizabeth coming here or planting any tree. It marks the course of London Road and Taplow on the escarpment from the river and was called in ancient times *Quidden un alaw ys beth*, that is 'The oak of the Holy One of the lily place beneath the tomb'.

Taplow's marshy areas were famous for the profusion of lilies (water irises) even in Victorian times, and the tomb is of course the mound that gives Taplow its name *Tir pel ior*,

that is 'The tumulus of the distant lord'. We now know from archaeology what the local Britons knew from history passed by word of mouth, that the man in the tumulus was a Saxon Lord from Kent!

Over the escarpment was Maidenhead's first bridge, over which there were two battles in the 14th century. The road continued on the Berkshire bank as Ray Mill Road to North Town and Great How; the latter was still a coaching stop on the road linking London to Bath or Oxford in the 17th and 18th centuries. This old Bath Road ran between Court Field and Cherry Orchard inside Taplow Castle. No one in their senses plants a cherry orchard alongside a busy road and the windy top of an escarpment is not horticulturally sensible. This was where the Lord of the Manor distributed largess, on Taplow Castle's parade ground or town square, between the Lord's Court or *Caer ty* (Fort House) and his and the villagers' dwellings. It was the place of the *Chwarae-or-chy-da*, or Buffins.

Michael Bayley

(For those of you unfamiliar with Michael, he is a retired architect with an encyclopædic knowledge of Taplow and its environs who lives in Maidenhead. His contributions to your newsletter over the years have been an invaluable source of material for your ex-editor. This is the first article of a two-parter on Buffins and its background. Fred Russell.)

Notice of AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Hitcham and Taplow Society will take place at 8 pm on Friday 31st October at the Village Centre, High Street, Taplow.

A detailed agenda will be included in the autumn edition of the Newsletter.

Nominations for the President, Chairman, Secretary and committee members should be sent to: The Secretary, Neil Blundell, The Dower House, Rectory Road, Taplow SL6 0ET, no later than October 9th.

Please ensure that nominees are members of HTS and are willing to stand. Nominations should be signed by the proposer and seconder.

Thames Valley Adventure Playground

How often have you driven past the Thames Valley Adventure Playground? Tucked away at the back of the lay-by by the railway arch at Taplow, most people know where it is, but have you ever wondered exactly what goes on there? If you have never visited, it is hard to imagine just what a vibrant and special place is hidden behind the secure fencing and locked gates.

areas, down to the castle. Here you will find the aerial runway (with harness bucket seat), mega-slide and the climbing structure. Beyond are the aerial runway, picnic areas and the entrance to the wilderness garden. Use the elevated walkway to view the lake before you return to the sand pit or venture on to the safety-surfaced games areas with adapted bikes and electric cars. Visit Jock's Cabin with its parents' resource area, or make use of the fully-equipped woodwork room and activity spaces. Enjoy a game of crazy golf or visit the toddlers' area.

The Playground experience is totally unique and offers something for everyone. With no formal catchment area, users travel from a wide area across the Thames Valley and beyond, as there is nowhere quite like it closer to home. They visit with their families and as individuals for respite care, and with schools, play-schemes, day centres and residential units.

An OFSTED-registered day-care facility, the Playground is run by a voluntary board of trustees, with on-site care provided by six full-time staff and ten sessional staff, supported by a loyal band of volunteers. It is open Tuesday to Saturday all year round, with Fridays reserved for adults with special needs.

2007 saw the Playground celebrate its Silver Jubilee. Over 10,500 visits are now made each year and we are constantly adapting to meet the changing needs of our users. Not only have we experienced an enormous increase in the number of visits by children with autistic spectrum disorders, who often find it difficult to cope with a crowded environment, but visits by users with physical disabilities have also risen (23% over the past ten years), with an upsurge in the number of children now using electric wheelchairs at an earlier age than ever before. Whilst we have been creative in accommodating this increase in usage through flexible use of our existing facilities, the need to provide more indoor space in which to manoeuvre, more transit points and better access in general has become a matter of urgency.

Thanks to a generous legacy, the dream of refurbishing and reorganising the Playground's original cabin (much needed after 25 energetic years in action!) is set to become a reality, whilst also addressing its limitations on space with the

Since 1982 the Adventure Playground has offered an exceptional range of adventurous, therapeutic and educational play activities, providing fun and freedom in a safe, caring and stimulating environment for children and adults with all types of disability, however mild or profound.

Indoor facilities boast a large interactive 'soft play' area with ball pool and intelligent lighting. Multi-sensory and music rooms offer the latest technology for both stimulation and relaxation. Inside the main playroom you can enjoy arts and crafts, touch-screen computers, a games room, a quiet area and lots of toys and games. Our changing areas and toilets have wheelchair and hoist access.

Outside, in the secure play areas, you will find two acres of exciting, robust equipment just waiting to be explored. The area around the building is home to our wheelchair roundabout and swings. Follow the pathways past the sand pit and splash pool, under the 'wobbly bridge' and through the gardening



construction of an annex, which will extend out over the lake. We are pleased to report that planning permission has now been secured and we hope to get the building process underway without delay.

As you can imagine, we are delighted to have this opportunity to move the Playground forward. However, the excitement of the project must not blind us to the need to meet our day-to-day running costs, currently in excess of £250,000 per annum. Project money will not be available to cover any operational expenditure and, with less than 8% of our income coming from local authority funding, the support of the

local community will continue to play an absolutely vital part in helping the Playground maintain its exceptional service – one that is of such huge benefit to so many people with special needs and to their families.

It is always our great pleasure to welcome visitors to the Playground. If anyone from Taplow would like to look around, we would be delighted to give them the 'Grand Tour'. Please call the Playground on 01628 628599 to arrange a visit.

Nicky Hutchinson
Donations Manager

A Bit of News

During the night of Friday 21st March, a very large mature chestnut tree – a major local landscape feature next to footpath 11 – blew down. This tree had lost some limbs three years ago, but still appeared to be healthy. Its further collapse was caused by a strong northerly wind. This tree is on Boundary Riding Stables land, although the field fencing was attached to the back of the tree at some point in the past. The field south of the footpath is owned by Mr John Shepherd of Poplar Farm. When it collapsed, the main part of the tree fell across footpath 11, blocking the footpath, knocking down a section of field fencing and extending into the field. The only damage caused was to the field fence.

On the Saturday morning, I found a party of cyclists at the field gate opposite the junction of Boundary Road, who had crossed the field to bypass the tree. Members of the party expressed regret (before being aware of being overheard) at not having a pair of wire cutters to deal with the fencing, and I sent them on their way. With a combination of voluntary manpower, use of a Riding Stable chain saw and Mr Shepherd's work on the fencing, the tree was cleared off the

footpath over the Easter weekend. All parties involved cooperated enthusiastically.

It is always a sad thing when a big tree comes down, and this tree has been a monumental feature of the local landscape for as long as can be remembered, a canopy of leaf for cattle and horses in the summer, a stopping point for walkers and a compass mark on a direct north-south line from its position to the junction of Station/Boundary Roads to the south. Up until the 1960s, there was an increasingly decrepit sign attached to it, saying 'Beware of the Bull'. As a child, I once glimpsed the creature in all its leisurely bulk, now the misty impression of a formidable presence; more latterly, only horses used the chestnut, for shade and for shelter. The chestnut was blown down at Easter, a time of death and re-birth, and was cleared from the path and field during the Easter weekend. Hopefully, the field owners will encourage a new sapling to take its place, so that our rural landscape continues to be marked in future by the beauty and character of great trees.

Jon Willmore



Town and Parish Councils: Democracy at the Grass Roots

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act

This Act would appear to be an honest attempt to rationalise community governance and to provide a basis for devolution and empowerment. It has been welcomed by the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils with whom government has conducted consultations. The latter see the Act as an opportunity to 'provide a number of new powers to town and parish councils'. The Chairman of the LGA has stated 'The best way to reinvigorate democracy is to start with local councils. ... Councillors know their local areas and the people who live there. ... Nor should any more quangos further undermine local democracy'. A more specific statement within the Act on the role of local councils and the structure within which they should operate would have been advantageous. However, the principles regarding devolution to parish and town councils as accountable bodies is clear as are the sentiments expressed by the Chairman of the LGA. In the event, Buckinghamshire County Council appears to have chosen to ignore both.

A 'New Deal'

In June 2007, the County Council circulated a draft paper, entitled *A New Deal for Buckinghamshire*, for consultation. The paper appeared to offer no meaningful change in the operational role of local councils despite the statement 'In their role as democratically accountable bodies, local councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities. They also offer a means of decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities'. No provision was made for a mechanism facilitating a structured dialogue between a parish and a superior local authority. Taplow Parish Council responded calling for the proper recognition of local councils as the accountable first tier of local government and the sole local statutory body representing the

views of their parishioners. It would appear that the County has abandoned the 'New Deal'.

A Dysfunctional Proposal

In February 2008, the County produced a document called *Establishing Local Area Forums in Buckinghamshire: A framework for consultation*, which it appears to be pursuing with inordinate haste and without effective prior consultation with the District or Parish Councils or the GC2C groups. The proposals therein are without logic and fly in the face of efficient public administration, good governance and democratic representation at the grass roots. The proposals are a second stage to the GC2C 'concept'. GC2C, a quango-like body, was imposed on the parishes without consultation and is a body with some members not accountable to the respective parishes. It has no statutory status. The Beeches Group originally comprised Burnham, Dorney and Taplow but was expanded, again without consultation, to include Stoke Poges and Farnham Common. It is chaired by a county councillor and has a membership including county and district councillors for the area and two parish councillors for each parish. It is joined by county officers from time to time. All appear to have voting rights. These arbitrary spaces do not conform to any statutory area relevant to public administration and have no meaningful geographical function; they do not represent 'a community' in any accepted sense of the term. An examination of the Beeches Group suggests that it is irrelevant as a body representing the aspirations and priorities of parish communities. It has failed to perform as an effective conduit to upper-tier local authorities or successfully to progress any of the priority Taplow projects over two years of discussion.

A Four-tier Structure

Simply put, the new four-tier structure proposed by the County appears to comprise the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAG) as the first tier, followed by the Local Area Forum, the

Area Forum and the County as the fourth tier. NAGs were set up under a government initiative and are controlled by the police. Their remit is to 'improve community safety, reassurance and reduce crime and disorder'. Anyone can become a member. Our local group covers Taplow, Dorney and part of Burnham, representing yet another geographical area without administrative significance. Within this Group there appears to be a lack of understanding of the role of parish councillors as knowledgeable and accountable members of their community. This non-accountable body would appear to be wholly inappropriate as part of a decision-making hierarchy processing communities' aspirations and priorities.

A Local Area Forum (LAF) will replace the South Bucks Joint Local Committee to which the District has raised strong objection on the grounds that it 'removes a key way for district, parish and county councillors to meet and discuss matters of concern'. Membership of the LAFs, based on the GC2C areas, of which there are 19, consists of all county and district councillors in the local area. Police, fire, rescue, health and parish and town councils, in that order, are listed as 'Other members'. The LAF comes between local councils and District and County and reassigns responsibilities of these bodies contrary to statutory guidance by government. There also appears to be provision for an Area Forum based on district council areas. Membership is not stated. The consultation framework states that this project 'requires a great deal of careful planning, sensitive discussion and attention to detail over many months'. Indeed this must be true and should have preceded the premature preparation of a document that is insufficiently specific for meaningful consultation.

The diagram accompanying the framework indicates parish and town plans being targeted at the Local Community Plan, prepared by a Local Strategic Partnership, to which they should make a contribution. The Local Strategic Partnership is another quango-type body. No provision appears to be made for progressing the main government-stated objective of a local council plan, which is to provide for action areas in relation to the parish communities' priorities within the policies of a Local Area Framework. Government guidance also identified a parish or town plan as a vehicle for dialogue with upper-tier authorities in order to reach

consensus, which is not reflected in County's proposals. Presumably the intention is for parish plan issues to be dealt with by the Local Area Forum. But this is inappropriate and not democratic and would be contrary to statutory guidance. The LAF has a membership with unelected members and members who are not responsible to the particular parish community; it has no statutory role. The only administratively correct and democratic way to deal with a community's aspirations as expressed in a plan or other document is by face-to-face negotiation with the statutory body responsible for the topic: that is, a department of District or County.

A Complex Bureaucracy

It is difficult to relate the proposed bureaucratic structure to the County Council's avowed intention to become close to parish and town councils. It is equally difficult to see how the proposals can provide an effective and proactive role for these local councils. The proposals fly in the face of four golden rules for institution building, which are:

1. Improve what exists rather than inventing something new
2. Stick rigidly to existing political cum administrative boundaries
3. Do not mix accountable and non-accountable members on a decision-making body
4. Differentiate locationally between a forum for the exchange of views and a body with executive functions.

The statutory three-tier set-up for decision-making within the County is simple, time-honoured and reasonably effective. The absence of a structured process to facilitate dialogue between the parishes, as accountable representatives of their parishioners and parish communities, and upper-tier authorities deprives the latter of access to the reality of local public opinion. A mechanism to ensure this prerequisite to effective public participation is essential. The present County proposals do not meet this requirement. There is no doubt that constraints are imposed by Government's propensity to produce guidance and instructions which are at best incompatible and at worse directly conflicting. This does not lead to clear and unequivocal implementation. However such situations can

be finessed. The fact remains, however, that the current proposals cannot provide for an effective role for local councils which the County states it wants to achieve.

A Simple Solution

The elegant, hierarchical structure represented by County, District and Parish offers itself as an effective basis for executive action and community involvement. An accountable, representative parish council, as the bedrock of local democracy, receives imperative decisions from County and District, which authorities should provide structures for direct negotiation between a local council and upper tiers. Each tier should have a community forum with appropriate membership for an exchange of views between councils, statutory undertakers and other leading community bodies. Taplow Parish Council made provision three years ago for a Standing Community Forum to represent amenity societies, resident associations, business, leisure facilities and bodies concerned with health and social issues. Upper-tier authorities can provide the same arrangement for forums appropriate to their level for an exchange of views. Where the number of parishes requires, consultation between County and Parish can be through the agency of a district association of local councils.

A Response

Members and parishioners are strongly and urgently requested to support the South Bucks Association of Local Councils and Taplow Parish Council in calling for the abandonment of the County strategy and its replacement with a structure in keeping with government's intentions within the act (ibid). A call should also be made for the appropriate recognition of the role of local councils as the most immediate, accountable representatives of parishioners and local communities. This recognition should manifest itself in a formal relationship between parishes and the two upper-tier authorities by provision of a mechanism facilitating direct negotiation between local councils with County and District. Negotiation should not be through a non-statutory, unaccountable third party.

Establishing Local Area Forums in Buckinghamshire is available on the County website. Go to the Bucks CC Home Page, click on 'Have Your Say' and then on 'Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy Consultation'. Note that the questionnaire is prepared in such a way that completion implies a degree of agreement. Respondents may wish, therefore, to reply by letter.

Bernard Trevallion

Our Friend Jerry Burley 1931 – 2008

On New Year's Day, 1988, the Burley family moved into Maryfield, and once again the house was a family home. Before arriving in Taplow, Jerry Burley had been involved in the world of finance, where his uncanny understanding of numbers, coupled with endless common sense, ensured a very successful career in the world of taxation and corporate finance. We were fortunate that he was content to use these same talents to act as honorary auditor to our Society for many years.

As a boy, Jerry won a scholarship to East Ham Grammar School, and while there he played for Chelsea's youth side and nearly signed professional forms for them. Instead, however, he spent his National Service in Southern Rhodesia, returning to England to qualify as a Chartered Accountant. After a short spell in Jersey in the world of banking, he again returned to England where he joined Touche Ross and spent the rest of his working life with them.

In 1983, there began for Jerry two years of severe illness during which he underwent nine operations. During that time he was supported day and night by district nurses and in 1986 Jerry married his day nurse, Jane. Happily, he made a good recovery from his illness and was subsequently able to return to work until he retired in 1992.

Throughout his life Jerry never lost his love of sport, both as a player and spectator. He was a passionate bridge player, enjoying the game whatever the standard. He was also a most generous host, who shared his great love of fine wine and food with his many friends in Taplow.

Jerry will be sorely missed, but we must remember that life is not counted by the years you live but by the love you gave and the things you did.

Barrie Peroni

The Taplow Christmas Tree

In 2006 the Parish Council organised a carol-singing event on the Village Green. It took place by the barn on the small green and was attended mostly by children and their parents as they left the school Christmas bazaar – but perhaps you didn't know about it.

In 2007 I think many more people knew about the Parish Council's carol-singing event, the difference being that a Christmas tree had appeared on the Village Green. How could you miss it? The Village Green had been dark and bare every Christmas since we came to the village 30 years ago and at long last it looked as if the village was recognising and celebrating Christmas!

The tree was funded through a legacy of £15,000, left in Jo Brooking's estate, the trustees of which were asked to use this money 'for cultural or recreational purposes in Taplow Village'.

Many residents will know that Jo Brooking lived for a number of years in Taplow, firstly with her mother Kate in an apartment in Elibank House and then in a cottage in Elm View, which is just off Rectory Road, opposite the Village Green. Jo died suddenly and tragically of bowel cancer in March 2005, just when she thought that she was in remission. She was 54 years old.

The executors of Jo's will felt that she would have loved the idea of a Christmas tree on the Village Green and she would have been pleased that so many families and their friends would come together at Christmas time to sing carols together out of doors. Every Christmas Jo had a little tree lit up and decorated outside her cottage. She especially enjoyed any singing event in the Church and was a regular supporter of the annual summer party on the Village Green.

Jo's friends and neighbours, including Alan and Gillian Dibden, and the Parish Council all approved

the plans for the Christmas tree and with lots of help from Janet Wheeler (who organises the Christmas trees for Cookham) we went ahead and ordered a 20-ft tree and 400 lights. Finding an electricity source proved to be difficult but eventually we got permission to run a cable from a street light opposite the school to the middle of the green – the prime position!

Sheila Horton designed an appropriate plaque and Josie Corio organised a fence to protect the tree which provided a prominent place to display the plaque.

And so... on Thursday 29th November, the tree was delivered and erected in a specially prepared sleeve

within a deep hole. We are grateful to the team of men from Cookham who (along with some passers-by) made the tree upright, hung the lights and erected the fence.

The Parish Council planned a magnificent carol-singing party for the early evening on 22nd December. Generous sponsors provided mulled wine and mince pies. We had a children's farm on the small green, a hot chestnut and toasted marshmallow seller and the Salvation Army carolled us towards Christmas. Around 200 neighbours and their friends and families joined in and we collected over £250 for bowel cancer research in memory of Jo.

The Parish Council are now planning the carol-singing party for Christmas 2008. We expect Jo's bequest to provide a Christmas tree for many years to come and trust that it will be the focus for any outdoor Christmas celebrations on the Village Green.

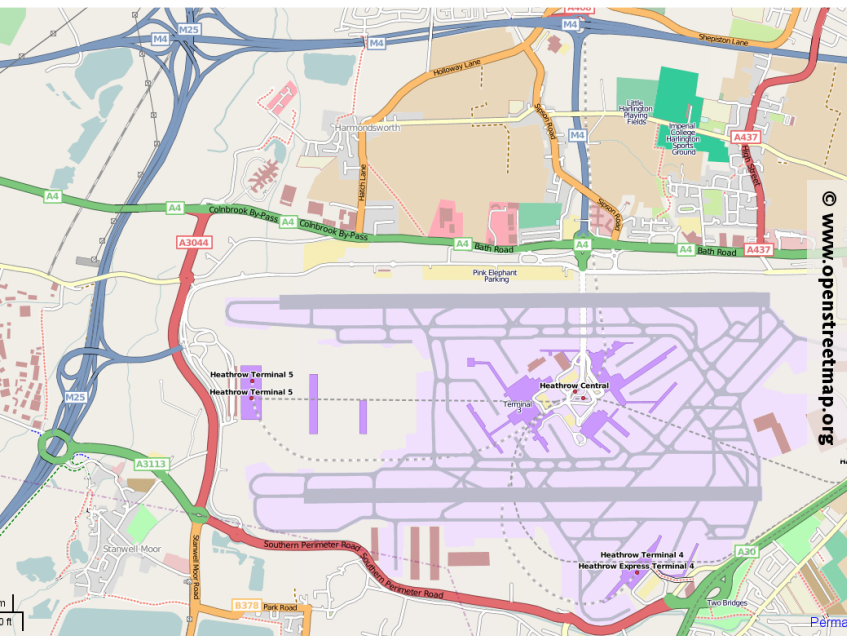
What a wonderful way to remember Jo's life by bringing light to the village for Christmas!

Liz Forsyth



London Airports – The Future

With the current debacle at Terminal 5, it does not seem appropriate to discuss the merits or otherwise of a third runway at Heathrow. At the present time, while it seems clear the Government, British Airways and BAA would like to see a third runway – with possibly a sixth terminal at Heathrow – all the surrounding County and District Councils, together with many Action Groups, are strongly against any such development, primarily because of the inevitable increase in noise, damage to air quality, increase in emissions and further disturbance to the environment. Indeed one Action Group is seriously considering taking judicial action to try to prevent such a development. This is understandable when one considers the consequential infrastructure requirements that such a development would entail, leaving aside the destruction of property, etc. that such a runway and terminal would require to make way for such a development.



However, no decision has yet been reached – or announced – so maybe this is an appropriate time to consider some of the wider issues. Indeed, this is why I have chosen the title of this article to be as wide as possible. I am very mindful of the time in 1997/98 when I represented Hitcham and Taplow at the Terminal 5 Inquiry and it was our declared policy not to oppose the Terminal, but to do all

we could to lessen the environmental impact that we saw coming. Our prime reason for taking this position was that we could see the economic advantages to the country of the fifth terminal expansion. Now those same arguments are being put forward again. However, I venture to suggest that the context is somewhat different today. To quote a former Labour minister, Nick Raynsford: 'Many people, like myself, accept the economic case for further capacity increases in the UK and particularly in the South East'. Note, not necessarily Heathrow. I am glad he went on to say he would want to see this implemented in the most sustainable and environmentally responsible way. He even went on to say this is impossible in the case of Heathrow.

Unfortunately these comments are not mirrored by his colleague Ruth Kelly, the Transport Secretary, who in referring to the problems that have been experienced at Terminal 5 said, 'After the delays and inconveniences suffered by many passengers it will play a vital role in helping Heathrow meet the increasing demand in the years ahead'. She went on – just as effusively – about expanding Heathrow, saying that an 'expanded Heathrow was vital for Britain's economic interests'.

Frankly I think this whole issue has got to be thought through on a wider basis than simply expanding Heathrow, as I implied earlier.

While it is true we have, in aviation and economic terms, to maintain the 'London Hub', we have to remember the competition from airports at Paris Charles de Gaulle, Schipol in Amsterdam and Frankfurt in Germany. This said, we must not overlook the current developments in this country with planned expansions at Stansted and possibly Gatwick, and increases in traffic from London City Airport, let alone the existing possible increase as a result of the opening of Terminal 5 at Heathrow. In saying this I am mindful of the fact that with the potential to cater for 700,000 flights and 120 million passengers a year it is always going to impose a very big environmental cost on its neighbours.

It is important, therefore, before we consider increasing air traffic at existing airport locations, that we give serious thought to other airport developments, which could be both

feasible and environmentally favourable. In the past thought was given to an airport development that could be approached over water, indeed the case for siting a new airport away from the main centres of population was made in 1960 with the ill-fated Maplin Sands. However, since then there was a half-hearted option of building an airport at Cliffe on the Hoo Peninsula in Kent. Some I am sure will remember the outcry from the bird-watching and bird-sanctuary community.

Today I believe we have a different situation and a society that is more far environmentally conscious. If we consider, for a start, the developments that have taken place and are scheduled to take place on the banks of the Thames Estuary (I am thinking particularly of all that has gone on at Canary Wharf and all the developments taking place/or planned in the Thames Gateway and the other developments arising from the 2012 Olympics), is it not possible to consider building an airport development within the Thames Estuary itself? Using land reclaimed from the sea is not new in airport developments internationally – Kansai in Japan and Hong Kong are two that come readily to mind. I do believe it is possible, feasible and highly advantageous to build an airport in the Thames Estuary. The technology is not a problem and placed correctly it would be relatively easy to construct fast road links to the motorways both north and south of the estuary. Think then of the benefit this would provide of easing the traffic congestion that is so much a part of the Heathrow picture, and which incidentally is very much part of the air-quality problem that exists there. Equally, a high-speed rail link could be established to London and the High Speed 1 service that runs through the Channel Tunnel.

Building a new airport such as this should not be seen as negating anything we have now: far from it. While the costs would be high, given the developments already referred to, such as the Thames Gateway, and considering that such costs could very well have a 30 to 40-year time frame, the real question we have to face is this: having regard to the economic, environmental and social interests of our country, can we afford not to proceed with such a development?

Derek Walker

Planning Bill Update

A criticism of the Planning Bill, at the 'white-paper' stage, featured in the Winter edition of the Newsletter. Further scrutiny reveals that the little-advertised sub-clauses 154 and 155 to Clause 150 in the Bill remove the right of appeal to an independent Inspector against refusals determined by officers under delegated powers. Refusals can be reconsidered by a Local Members Review Body comprising district councillors, if requested. Applications dealt with under delegated powers represent over 90% of all applications. This clause has been strongly opposed by the RTPI, RIBA, RICS and national amenity and conservation societies. It would appear to be against natural justice. At present the main parliamentary opposition does not propose to challenge the clause. The views of Taplow Parish Council have been made known to the constituency member of parliament.

Bernard Trevallion

Close Mill Lane!

Letter to the Editor

With all the development being proposed in Mill Lane there will have to be improvements to the junction with the Bath Road. Whatever is done is likely to make it easier for traffic to get in and out of Mill Lane, thus increasing its use as a rat-run.

There is one very easy solution to the rat-run problem: close the road to motorised traffic. If the closure is on the steep and narrow section east of the Jubilee River it will have minimal impact on the people who live and work on Mill Lane while reducing the rat-run traffic across the whole of Taplow. I suspect that over 80% of peak-hour traffic on Mill Lane is rat-runners so this simple measure could improve the quality of life for a lot of people.

How about it? Will the Society adopt this as a target to campaign for?

Andrew Findlay

Ripe for Development?



Boarded up and abandoned, this small cottage on Amerden Lane awaits its fate. Will this be the site of the next hotly-contested application for high-density housing, or can a more interesting use be found? The location, with commanding views over the Jubilee River and Taplow Lake, argues for a single dwelling of architectural merit.

Andrew Findlay

Edited by the HTS committee

21 Byways, Burnham SL1 7EB

E-mail: editor@taplowsociety.org.uk

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