

# Hitcham and Taplow Society

Newsletter 91: Spring 2009  
£2.50 to non-members



[www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://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.*

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Cover picture: Monument in the old graveyard by Taplow Court (Andrew Findlay)

## Editorial

We have another packed issue for you this time so the editors are keeping quiet.

An important planning application has been submitted for the Mill Lane area. It is available on the web and you will find a pointer on the Society website. Please read the application and respond to the planning authorities.

The Newsletter is available on our website, with some extra articles and photographs that would not fit into the printed version.

Enjoy the Newsletter and let us know what you think about the issues raised.

## Newsletter Archive

The Society Archives now hold a complete run of the Newsletters from Number 28 Spring 1974 to Number 90 Autumn 2009. A copy of each of the Newsletters will be available on the Society website by 2010, together with an index that will allow searches for articles by content. This will be a valuable record for members of the Society, historians, feature writers and the general public.

The Society's aim is to complete the Newsletter Archive and all members are asked to search through their bookshelves, files, attics, sheds and garages to see if they have copies of any of Numbers 1 to 27.

Please contact the Chairman, Euan Felton, to report a successful search.

Telephone : 01628 663644

Email : euan@efapresentations.demon.co.uk

## Website

Register on the Society website and have your say in our Forum:

[www.taplowsociety.org.uk](http://www.taplowsociety.org.uk)

# The Celtic Cross

The Celtic Cross stands near the Burial Mound in the old graveyard adjacent to Taplow Court. In 1996 the whole of the disused graveyard became a National Monument under the control of English Heritage to ensure the protection of the Mound – a Saxon burial barrow – the Celtic Cross memorial, the buried remains of the early Anglo-Saxon and later medieval church, and the pagan and Christian cemeteries in the immediate surroundings. The graveyard was in continuous use from 650 AD to the middle of the 19th century.

The original St Nicolas' Church was built just north-east of the Mound. It fell into disrepair in the early 19th century and it was partially demolished in 1828. What remained was levelled during the major refurbishment of Taplow Court after it was bought by Pascoe Grenfell in 1852. A few years later a new St Nicolas' Church was built in traditional style in its present location.

In 1995 the Society, then the Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society, noting that the Cross was in urgent need of repair, decided on a full restoration project. Permissions were obtained from the Church of England Oxford Diocese, the owner and English Heritage, the guardian of its content.

The Diocese had designated the graveyard to be a 'wilderness area' and the Society looked after it for some years before maintenance was taken over by the lay Buddhist Society SGI-UK when it purchased Taplow Court in 1988.

The Cliveden Restoration Workshop was appointed to carry out the restoration project. An archaeologist supervised the critical aspects of the task.

Eva Lipman, then Chair of the Society, began persuading national and local organisations to contribute towards the £5000 cost estimate. The Lottery turned down an application but National Heritage agreed to underwrite 40% of the costs. The South Bucks District Council gave £2000 from its Community Grant Fund and the Taplow and Hitcham Recreation Ground Association offered to meet half of the amount remaining after contributions from official bodies. A significant contribution came from the raffle at the 1997 Village Green Party.

Discovering the original wording round the base of the Cross, which had become indecipherable through the years, proved to be a difficult search. The Church Archives, the County Museum and Library Service, the Oxford Diocesan Registry, the County Archivist and various local historians and newspaper back numbers all failed to produce an answer to our queries.

A search through the archives of the County Records Office by Eva Lipman and Fred Russell found the diary kept by Caroline Georgiana Grenfell for 1868 and the entry for 22 September reads 'The cross in the churchyard put up ... The inscription is "in memory of all who rest in this church yard" ... It is a copy of the Boyne Hill Cross'.

March 1998 saw the restoration of the Celtic Cross to become its original impressive memorial to the souls departed through the centuries.

*Karl Lawrence*

## Village Green Party

**This year's village party will take place on Saturday June 20, starting at 6 p.m. Once again, Mike Sanderson and his band will be providing music for the dancing, and this year's raffle will be in aid of the Scouts. For full details, see the flyer enclosed with your magazine.**

# Our Russian Connection

The weather-worn coat of arms and the fading inscription on the flat tombstone near the south porch of St Mary's Church in Hitcham hide a romantic story. It is the final resting-place of His Highness Prince Alexis Dolgorouki and his wife Princess Francis.

Alexis and Fanny were an autumn love match, marrying when both were just reaching 50. Their marriage ceremony in July 1898 was a two-part celebration at the Russian Embassy Chapel and at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey.



Fanny was the only child and heiress of the rich industrialist Mr Fleetwood Wilson of Wappenham Manor in Northamptonshire. Prince Alexis, a Chamberlain to the Tsar of Russia, came from a long and distinguished noble family in the direct line of descent from Prince Dolgorouki of Suzdal, the founder of Moscow in 1129.

The Dolgoroukis lived a happy social life, entertaining lavishly at their home in Upper Grosvenor Street in Mayfair. Fanny wanted to have a country house in the Thames Valley suitable to hold weekend river parties and Prince Alexis commissioned Sir Edwin Lutyens to build a house



on a site in Taplow. The result was Nashdom – in Russian, 'Our Home'.

After Prince Alexis died in June 1915, Fanny spent most of her days abroad at her villa on the shores of the Mediterranean continuing to be a very generous hostess. She died in August 1919.

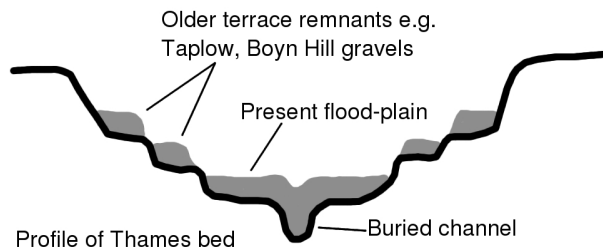
A golden Madonna and Child icon sits at the foot of their tombstone.

*Karl Lawrence*

# The Gravel Terraces of Berry Hill

In September last year a select group including HTS President Eva Lipman and her husband Max donned hard hats and yellow jackets to join a geological exploration of the Berry Hill Gravel Quarry, clambering down into it to look at the still-exposed west face.

The sands and gravels are of Quaternary age (the geological time period that extends from 2.6 million years ago to the present) and are assigned to the Taplow Gravel River Terrace. They are one of the youngest and lowest of the ten recognised Thames river terrace remnants, and were deposited between 130,000 to 190,000 years ago during ice-age conditions when the flow of the Thames was considerably stronger than it is today.



The Thames originally flowed to the north of its present bed and exited not in the present Thames estuary, but near Ipswich. From this time there have been a number of glacial and interglacial periods with the flows changing. When in spate, sand and gravel was deposited, and during periods of lesser flows, silt. During the Anglian glacial event, approximately 500,000 years ago, ice dammed the river in the area near St Albans, causing it to flow south to the present Thames valley. The river has repeatedly cut down into its bed, leaving the former flood plains as a series of stairway-like terraces along the valley sides.

At the Berry Hill site the gravels rest on the chalk, and the boundary between them represents a substantial chunk of missing

history. The chalk was deposited approximately 80 million years ago under marine conditions while the gravels were deposited less than 0.5 million years ago by the palaeo-Thames river.

On going up Berry Hill from the Bath Road, there is clear evidence of the two gravel terraces. The hill flattens out slightly near Berry Hill Farm, and the second terrace starts where Berry Hill becomes steeper again. These terraces retain water, while the silts between the gravel terraces are impermeable layers. This is the reason for the springs on the hill.

*Graham Hickman*



Above: Berry Hill Quarry, west face

Below: Berry Hill Quarry, looking north



# Mill Lane Development

On 26 March, Hunter Page Planning set out a second public exhibition of their plans for the redevelopment of the Mill Lane area.

For those of you who missed the exhibition, the majority of the redevelopment is still focused at the two ends of the site, with a new hotel dominating the southern approach by Maidenhead Bridge and two large areas of residential apartments to the north. One of these, the Severnside site, occupies the parcel of land to the north of the gasometer, and is intended to comprise housing and live/work units; the other is on the old Mill site itself. In total, these will provide 150 dwellings, plus 28 live/work units. Dunloe House, Mill Island House and Glen Island House are all to be retained, the latter two as offices. Sadly, the proposals for a footbridge connecting the Mill site and the island at Boulters Lock have been dropped for financial reasons, although Hunter Page have said that they would be happy to incorporate it if funds can be raised by other parties. The tennis club has also been dropped, keeping the centre of the site open for public access. The new hotel, to be built on the old Skindles site by Maidenhead Bridge, has now been increased in size to 150 beds, with conference rooms, bars and restaurants. Parking for 150 cars is provided, and the service entrance will be via the former Mill Lane/A4 junction, with through traffic on and off the A4 using a new junction to be built further to the east of its present site.

Your committee met shortly after the exhibition to consider the proposals and to respond to Hunter Page. In principle, the Society welcomes the development, which will replace the present ugly and derelict hotel and industrial buildings. However, we believe the extent of development is still too great for the sites.

The hotel, in particular, has attracted strong opposition and criticism from all sides; at seven storeys, it is considered to be far too high and will seriously impair defined Conservation Area views. The large mass of the building and extent of the car-parking area will significantly encroach on the Green Belt. The design seems to lack any quality or empathy with the riverside setting, and although the architect has positioned the taller hotel block away from the bridge, it is still much too dominant. Moreover, its proximity to Maidenhead Bridge, which carries a Grade 1 listing (higher even than the Grade 2\* listing of the Brunel railway bridge), means that any development should be subject to very close scrutiny indeed, by both the local authorities and English Heritage.

The sheer size and extent of the facilities proposed at the new hotel will generate a very high volume of traffic, and there seems to be no provision for cars belonging to employees, or for those who may come to special functions. The proposed service area appears insufficient and may lead to the parking of commercial vehicles in adjacent roads. Residents of Mill Lane have already raised their objections and concerns separately with Hunter Page and have elicited verbal agreement for additional private parking bays and turning circles; they are also trying to negotiate the inclusion of pedestrianised areas and the possible closing-off of Mill Lane to through traffic.

Serious reservations have been expressed about the spread and height of the residential blocks of both the Severnside and Mill sites, which rise to six storeys. Currently only the centre of the proposed Severnside site is occupied by buildings, so the new development would cover a much larger area, presenting an unacceptable impact on its setting within the Green Belt. The proximity of new building to Glen Island House, which is listed, is overcrowded, awkward and out of scale and results in an undermining of the character of the existing building. The removal of the plan for the footbridge is also regrettable as there will now be no reason for public access through the site, which may result in a closed development and will make the public green space at the north tip of the site even more remote and inaccessible.

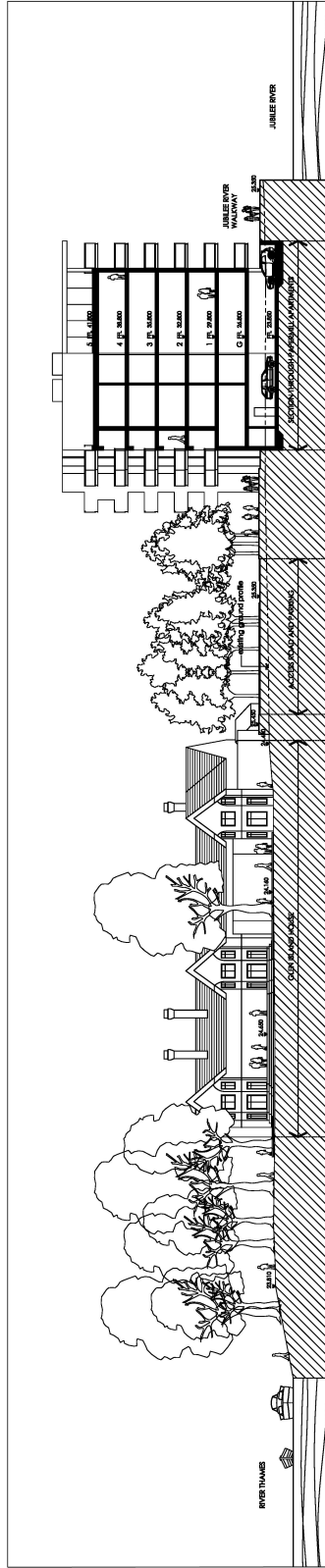
Clearly, the visual impact on the present riverside setting will be huge: we have suggested to Hunter Page that it might be useful to compare photo montage visuals of the suggested development against existing views, in order to judge this properly.

Overall, our view is that the benefits of improvement – and there undoubtedly are some – must be weighed against the protection of the area. When a planning application is finally submitted, it is imperative that it should be for Full (Detailed) Planning and Listed Building Consents, with clear information on all aspects of all buildings. An Outline Application is not acceptable for a development of this scale in a Green Belt site with Conservation Area status and significant listed buildings such as Maidenhead Bridge.

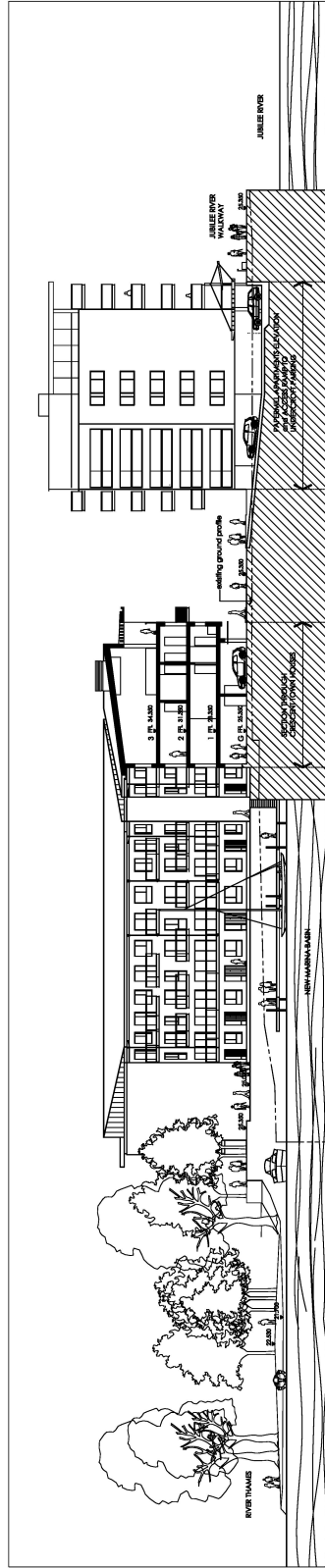
*Gill Holloway*

*An outline planning application was submitted on 24 April 2009 - Ed.*

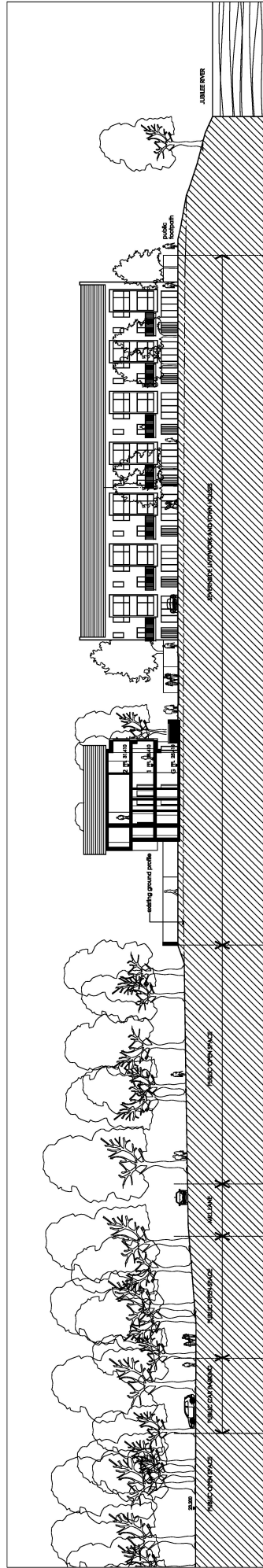
# Proposed site sections at Mill Lane



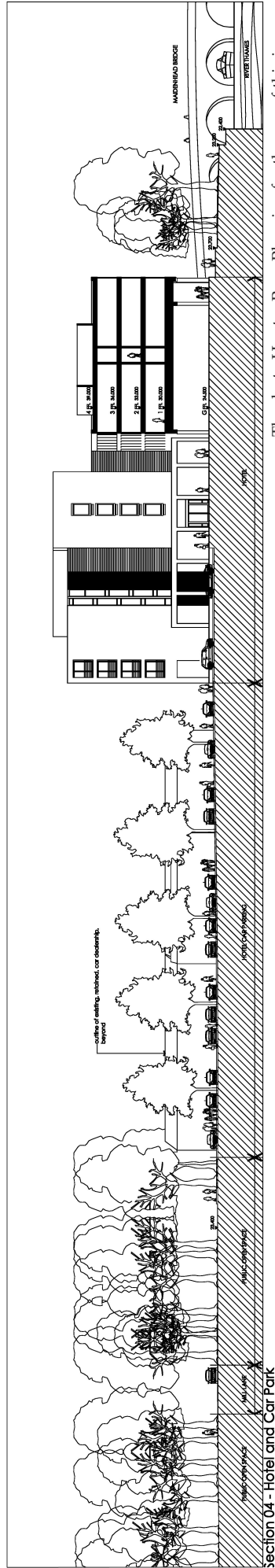
section 01 - Existing Glen Island House and Papermill Apartments



section 02 - Marina-side Crescent Housing and Papermill Apartments



section 03 - Severn-side Housing



section 04 - Hotel and Car Park

Thanks to Hunter Page Planning for the use of this image

# A Footbridge to Boulter's Lock



During Victorian times, the island of Boulter's Lock near Taplow won fame and notoriety across the country, as the upper classes flocked to the River Thames, particularly on the Sunday of Ascot Week, when there were pageants, carnivals and regattas. However the general enjoyment of the island has been limited for a long time by the lack of access to the river.

With the development of the 48-acre Taplow Paper Mill site there is at last an opportunity to connect Boulter's Lock and the Thames Path with a pedestrian-friendly route, via a footbridge over the river to Taplow. We are fortunate in having a local architect specialising in bridges, Knight Architects, who, together with consulting engineer Schlaich Bergermann und Partner, have produced an illustrative design to show what it might look like. We are grateful for permission to reproduce their pictures here.

The shallow arch design is inspired by Brunel's nearby Maidenhead Bridge. This famous railway bridge boasts the widest and flattest brick arches in the world, and this form is echoed in the slender new steel box structure of the 35-metre-span footbridge. A filigree parapet with discreet LED lighting completes the highly transparent composition.

Unfortunately, the developers of the Mill site have stated that the footbridge is not currently in their budget, but that if another organisation were to find the money, then they would be happy to build it. This would be a wonderful addition to the Taplow Riverside environment. One question remains: can we find a sponsor?

*Images copyright Knight Architects Ltd.*





# Baron Arid Rosenkrantz



*He that hath an ear let him hear what The Spirits saith unto The Churches  
To the Glory of God and in loving memory of Julia Louisa Rosenkrantz b Oct 13 1840 † in Rome Sep 10 1911*

Dedicated to his mother Julia Louisa, these stained glass windows in the Lady Chapel of St Nicolas Church are the masterpiece of the distinguished artist Arid Rosenkrantz who lived in The Porches in the High Street.

Baron Arid Rosenkrantz, 1870–1964, first worked in stained glass in the USA where he designed the King Alfred the Great window for Tiffany. His creative output included sculpture, watercolours, portrait painting, ceiling panels, stage design and book illustrations. There is a permanent exhibition of his work at Rosenholm Castle in his native Denmark.

His many important works include *The Omnipresent*, a sculptured war memorial at St George's Church, Camberwell, ceiling panels in Claridges Hotel, stained glass windows in Berkeley Castle and St Paul's Church, Kensington,

and illustrations to an edition of Edgar Allen Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*.

In 1911, Rosenkrantz was commissioned to paint pictures for the entrance to the new Royal Academy of Music in Marylebone Road. Just two months after the unveiling ceremony, the pictures were removed because it was thought that the displays of nudity would offend the female students. The pictures were 'lost' for more than 70 years and then 'found' in 1989 in a private wing of Rosenholm Castle, the Rosenkrantz family home near Aarchus in Denmark. The pictures were returned to the Academy on a 30-year loan and reinstalled in February 2007.

In 1912, Rosenkrantz designed, choreographed and staged the ballet, *The Gate of Life*, set to piano music by Beethoven, including his *Moonlight Sonata*.

*Karl Lawrence*

# Too Precious to Lose

## The unique river environment around Taplow Mill

The River Thames between Boulter's Lock and Bray Weir is a unique and special stretch of water. Many years ago the river was tapped into, to provide power for the mill at Taplow, and this created a large area of slack water that has become a haven for wildlife. One reason for this lies deep under the water, where deep living silt beds teem with countless millions of bloodworm. These tiny creatures are preyed on by tens of thousands of fish, while those that survive to hatch out provide a feast for the birds that gorge themselves on the abundance of insects struggling to break free of the surface.

In between the two cuts that lead to the mill there is a row of weeping willows. Many have fallen over and stretch their tangled branches some 40 feet out into the sheltered bay, providing us with a stunning, 60-foot curtain of green. Willows are amazing survivors, and will sprout roots all along their submerged branches. The biodiversity that sleeps, hunts, nests, hatches and matures beneath their canopy seems endless. Nearly all the river's species of fish come here to feed on the larders of bloodworm and the many different types of freshwater snail and mussels but, more importantly, they also come here to spawn. The roots and branches are the perfect setting for those fish who prefer a slower flow to perform their mating rituals and when the eggs hatch the willows' hairlike roots sway and rock in the flow providing the perfect cover for pinhead fry.

As an angler for more than 30 years, I have fished a vast variety of wild lakes and many different rivers but I have never come across anywhere as rich as the Thames around Taplow Mill. The life around both marinas is incredible. On a summer's day when the river is drifting past lazily, thousands of small fish swarm away from the bow of my boat, and hundreds of pike lurk unseen, in constant residence, whatever the flow.

Only a few yards out from the sunken trees, large beds of weed thrive in the slow water created by the mill cut, stretching out into the strong current. Where slow water meets fast, this has carved out long gravel runs, providing the barbel, kings of the Thames, with an ideal

site to spawn. Their offspring also head for the cover of the weed and sunken trees and the slow water of the streams.



Whatever the weather there are always millions of young fish close to the mill, attracting huge numbers of coots, moorhens, grebes and swans that fight each other for the right to mate and to defend their sites. The tango-like mating ritual of the great crested grebe is a fascinating performance. The two birds sit, beak to beak, facing into each other's eyes. They tilt their heads from side to side, in a mirror image of each other, many times, always in perfect time. This dance may go on for several minutes, as if they are trying to perfect it before moving on to the explosive finale. Suddenly they swim away from each other quickly, then dive to the bottom at the same time, resurfacing a few seconds later carrying in their beaks a piece of bottom debris. They then swim toward each other at full speed until, just at the point of collision, they rise up together, entangling their necks like snakes, slapping their bodies together. Their momentum is such that they appear to stand on the water, necks intertwined, reaching for the sky for a split second, before crashing back down in unison.

Kingfishers nest here, a pair in each stream. Every year they fight for the right to these prime

hunting and nesting grounds. If you are ever lucky enough to see these most beautiful birds in flight, you would be amazed at the ferocity and violence of their encounters. I have spent many hours trying to photograph these birds as they hunt, so far without success, but the joy of seeing them fly past with their electric blue markings or diving and returning to the same branch in a split second with a fish in their beaks is a sight I will never tire of. Their markings seem even more vibrant when in contrast with a grey winter background. Kingfishers are a protected species and may turn out to be crucial in the conservation of this area.

Away from the water, night brings another predator to the table, beautiful bats by the hundred, whose nesting sites in the eaves of the house on Mill Island are protected by law. Their habitat can only be disturbed between November and March and in that time a new building has to be built with space in the eaves so the bats can return in time for the next breeding season. The tawny owls that prowl

the area of woodland nest alongside the downstream cut, where I hear their first call of the night. Then there are more intimate encounters, like my disturbing of the heron in the pitch black, each of us scaring the life out of the other.

I believe that what we have at Taplow Mill is too precious to lose. A proper scientific study of the wildlife in this area is urgently needed, before any development occurs. If the proposed development of the mill and adjacent marina goes ahead it will cut a scar through nesting sites of protected birds and bats, it will tear out huge nursery sites that provide shelter for millions of pinhead fry. The knock-on effect could be catastrophic. The local river could take decades to return to its present glory.

Change is always coming and it would be naïve to think otherwise; however, I believe that preserving the good that we have is equally important.

*Des O'Sullivan*

## Taplow Heritage Day, 2009

Saturday July 4, 2009, will be the first Taplow Heritage Day. The highlight will be an exhibition at the Village Centre. The day is intended to be interesting, fun and informative, bringing a taste of Taplow's rich heritage to people, young and old. The aim is for the Heritage Day to appeal both to those who have recently moved into the village, and may not be aware of what a special place they live in, and to those who have lived in the village for most of their lives.

In conjunction with the Heritage Day, St Nicolas' School will be running a Heritage Week where the emphasis will be on using the local heritage to make history more fun and relevant to the everyday life of its pupils.

The Heritage Day is the brainchild of Marc Boden and Miv Wayland Smith who discovered that they both had an interest in Taplow's history when they were bidding against each other for an item relating to Taplow on the Ebay auction site.

It was soon apparent that one exhibition cannot do justice to the enormous wealth of heritage associated with Taplow. It was therefore

decided to focus on this first occasion on just eight subjects: Houses & Shops; Sports; Military & Aviation; Film, Music & TV; The Railway; Art & Artists; The River; Taplow in the Future. The prospect for an annual Heritage Day is good.

The exhibition will run from 10.30am until 5.30pm. Entry to the exhibition will be £1 for adults, children free.

An evening event will be held in the Village Centre where the combination of the visual surroundings and flowing wine is sure to bring the telling of many colourful stories of days gone by. Tickets will be £15. All proceeds will go to a local charity.

The search is on for old photographs of Taplow, or events in Taplow, up to the 1970s to be stored in digital form and kept for permanent reference in the Village Centre

To contribute by lending old items of interest for exhibition, writing related articles, joining one of the teams assembling exhibits or to obtain more details of the Heritage Day, contact Mark or Miv:

Marc\_boden@talk21.com  
mivvictoria@aol.com

# What Are They Planning for Us?

In the not-too-distant past, 'they' usually meant the District Council or the County. However, the goal posts have been radically moved in recent years: the District Council have been required to replace the existing simple system with a multitude of documents forcing it to accept diktats from both the unelected South East Regional Authority and central government itself. There is now a clear and very present danger that we will have little say in what is being planned for us.

The old Local Plan was derived from sets of local policies and national guidelines. These local policies were cognisant of local issues. However, there now exists a South East Plan (SEP), which covers the whole South East Region; this in turn has spawned a raft of local authority documents, known collectively as the Local Development Framework (LDF), the sole purpose of which appears to be to enact what the government demands. There is a local consultation process, but this is so structured as to provide a confirmation of the answers they want, rather than what we would like.

One of these documents is the Core Strategy, which is meant to define the way in which all local development plans will realise the government's aspirations, as laid out in the SEP. The Core Strategy for our area is now in the public domain on the South Bucks website. The consultation phase finished on April 27 and South Bucks will produce the final draft deposit version at the end of the year.

Let's take a look at what they're offering. South Bucks has been allocated 1,880 houses, to be built in the period 2006–26, i.e. 94 houses a year. The Core Strategy document tells us that in the last three years we have already built, or approved to build, some 1,272 homes, so on the face of it we only need to build about 600 houses in the next 18 years – that's 36 a year – to meet our target. If we narrow this down to Taplow, we are planning some 180 on the Mill Lane site. So just by our little selves our parish can supply one third of the entire South Bucks allocation of houses for the next 18 years! And this from a parish with just 2% of the whole South Bucks population. However, when you

read the Core Strategy carefully, you will find that the 1,880 houses is a minimum figure. So it's still open house for the developers' charter known as the SEP.

Reading even more, you will discover that there are more issues in the south Bucks Core Strategy that will materially affect Taplow. The following is a summary.

- Protection of the Green Belt is no longer a key consideration, as ministers prepare to sweep aside planning controls as part of the government's pledge to carpet England with 3 million new homes by 2020.
- The government is fiercely critical of the 'restrictive' planning policies which it considers local authorities are using to protect rural communities of less than 3,000 inhabitants. Councils will be encouraged to grant exceptional permission to build affordable homes, if necessary by releasing marginal Green Belt land. The Core Strategy document identifies 'developed' sites within the Green Belt, which could be likely development sites. Mill Lane is one such. The document also states that the new Mill Lane development 'will not cause any traffic problems'. You should also be aware that the Mill Lane site has much more potential building land than that needed to accommodate the 180 houses currently proposed. Section 2.106 of the document suggests that the gasometer could be removed at some time to make further land available for development.
- Farmers and other landowners will be given incentives to sell land to developers, and councils will have to earmark sites for new affordable homes in every village and community where locals are struggling to afford homes. Some 250 hectares of land in 60 such sites are identified, capable of accommodating more than 7,000 houses altogether.
- There appears to be a major unstated policy shift regarding the labels GB3, which permits infill development, and GB1, which does not. The Riverside Settlement has long been campaigning to have its label GB3 changed to GB1. So far as can be seen this differentiation has been dropped and 13 villages in South

Bucks, including Taplow, are now defined as Rural Settlements. The implications are that Taplow Village as well as the Riverside may have to accept infill development.

- The Council have hedged their bets by offering four possible development scenarios in the Core Strategy. The first involves urban intensification around Burnham, etc., which would permit new limited development by allowing infill. The second focuses on Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross, and would involve rather less infill in Taplow. The third focuses on small settlements, which would result in small scale 'rural exceptions', by provision of affordable housing on Green Belt land adjacent to Taplow. This is in addition to some infill within Taplow. This would be the green light for Church Bros, to develop their Hermitage site in the Riverside Settlement. The fourth concentrates on settlements near or adjacent to Slough. This would focus all development on the south of the district around Burnham, Iver and Richings Park (but would we avoid this?)
- Very little was said about Conservation Areas, other than that they would be 'reviewing' them...
- The SEP requires that 25% of all houses should be rentals (social housing) with a further 10% to be cheap housing. So this means that over one third of all houses are to be 'affordable', which smacks more of social engineering than catering for need.
- South Bucks reckon they will build about 500 affordable homes in the next 18 years, which is just under the SEP requirements. So these affordables must be in addition to the 600 they are already committed to. South Bucks would (sensibly) prefer to build this extra lot as small developments of 100% affordables.
- New housing, whether private or affordable, must support the needs of the whole community, including families, young people, older people, disabled people, black and minority ethnic groups and gypsies and travellers. Additionally, SEERA has set out four options for South Bucks,

ranging from 11 to 23 permanent pitches for gypsies and travellers. One wonders where these might be, especially since we have to cater for both their business and private needs.

- An Air Quality Management Area was declared for corridors along the M4, M25 and M40 motorways in 2004. The A4 is not included, despite being identified as an area of high traffic congestion.
- Over half the strategic site at Mill Lane Taplow is in Flood Zone 2 (medium probability of flooding) although some of the site is in Zones 3a (high probability) and 3b (functional floodplain). However, the Core Strategy states, 'There are strong planning reasons for the redevelopment of this important site' but adds 'Development of the strategic site at Mill Lane Taplow must ensure that vulnerable uses such as housing avoid the parts of the site at highest risk of flooding.' No houses are now planned by the developers in the high flood risk areas of Mill Lane.
- Crossrail was given the go-ahead in July 2008 and will have to stop at Taplow and terminate at Maidenhead. The effects of electrification on the raised embankment and Brunel Bridge viewpoints are not discussed, yet both are in or adjacent to a Conservation Area.
- The Government is to introduce a Community Infrastructure levy as a standard charge applied to new developments. This is a concern because at present most developers contribute their tithe for infrastructure development and if it becomes a government levy it is unlikely to be ring-fenced and will disappear into the general tax income pot. There is therefore no guarantee that it will be available to councils for the infrastructure to support a massive house-building programme.
- None of the schools in South Bucks is projected to have surplus capacity, which begs the question of where all the extra children are to be educated.

I hope the above gives you an outline picture of what is being planned for us all over the next 18 years.

*Fred Russell*

# Democracy at the Grass Roots

## A Disaster in the Making

My article in the Spring 2008 edition of the Newsletter addressed the proposal by Buckinghamshire County Council (County) to establish 19 Local Area Forums (LAFs) throughout the County. The proposal purported to be getting closer to communities. South Bucks District Council (District) and the South Bucks Association of Local Councils (Local Councils) expressed strong opposition to the proposal declaring **the exact opposite would be the result.**

## The Reason Why

The proposal is in contravention of the provisions of Local Government Act, 1972, and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007, and contrary to good governance and democracy. It goes against all principles for effective public administration. In particular it combines accountable (elected) and non-accountable (nominated) people as decision-makers.

The proposed structure would be disadvantageous to both the District and its Local Councils.

- The additional bureaucratic structure would incur unnecessary costs.
- It would add another tier to local government.
- Access by Parish Councils to executive departments of District and County would tend to be obscured.
- Decision-making on parish issues would be sieved through a body the majority of members of which would be not elected to represent parish communities on parish matters.
- It would depart from the principle that a body capable of representing a community's aims and aspirations must be accountable, independent and capable of raising finance.

For South Bucks the present arrangement works very well. District and Parish Councils have an effective and harmonious relationship with good access for the latter to District departments. Access by Parish Councils to most County Departments, with the exception of Highways on local policy, is also good. Neither needs the intervention of an additional tier of decision-making. The South Bucks Partnership, with representatives from each

level, is capable of dealing with any additional roles that might be assigned to LAFs and at no extra cost. **If it ain't broke don't fix it.**

## A Non-negotiable Situation

A reliable source has expressed the view that County intends to go ahead with the reorganisation in decision-making and the formation of LAFs irrespective of the concerns expressed. Nevertheless, both District and Local Councils made their opposition to the proposals known. At a meeting of the County and Parishes Liaison Committee, the Local Councils' representative expressed firm opposition to the formation of LAFs and was supported by other parishes. This was followed by a meeting of Local Council representatives and the County officer responsible for introducing the new system at which the former stated their conviction of the effectiveness in South Bucks of the present system, their wish for it to continue and their opposition to the proposals. The County representative appeared to recognise that in the case of reorganisation 'one size does not fit all'.

Despite acknowledging that varying situations may need to be accommodated, the County has persisted in stating that Local Area Forums must be set up as proposed. At a number of meetings opponents to the concept appear to have been subjected to a bullying, patronising or insulting response. All the records show that the County simply does not recognise that there is any opposition. It is clear that neither Councillors nor Officers are willing to address the concerns expressed and to discuss the situation with a view to exploring possible compromise solutions leading to a consensus. Buckinghamshire County Council has had a poor record in public participation for some time. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand their uncompromising attitude. **It does not auger well for future relationships.**

## The Plot Unfolds

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007, has revisited the introduction of Unitary Authorities which the people of Buckinghamshire rejected. Investigations have revealed that a significant number of local authorities have put in a bid to the department for Local Government and

Communities for unitary status in which Counties have been prominent. These bids have not necessarily been welcomed within the local government structure or by the local press. In several cases, opposition to a county's proposal by districts has not persuaded the government to reject the proposal. In many cases, the rationale for reorganisation is not apparent. In one case, four elected councils were abolished to be replaced by three partially elected 'area committees'. In another case, 'committees' have been established, comprising seven councillors, seven appointed members and representatives of the police, fire service, etc. Hazel Blears attended and welcomed the inauguration of this Unitary Authority. Parish representatives do not appear to feature in this or other cases.

It is difficult to reconcile this with the rhetoric by government regarding 'power to the people', 'communities in control' and the assertion that parishes are the 'bedrock of democracy'. Is it possible that the present posturing by the Buckinghamshire County Council represents preparation for putting in a bid for unitary status? In the light of the

Council's disregard for meaningful public participation, a status that would give it overall control without effective checks and balances as exist under the present system, would be most unwelcome.

Local government in Britain has tended to be weaker than in other comparable European countries and the past two decades have seen the erosion of democracy in both central and local government. What is needed is a root-and-branch approach to local government by a Royal Commission or similar structure, rather than an ad hoc 'fix' that appears to be based on a lack of either any rigorous analysis by knowledgeable people or an understanding of the principles of a representative democracy.

It is said that the British love democracy as long as they do not have to do anything about it. Charles Arnold-Baker dedicated his book entitled *Local Government Administration* to 'The knowledgeable amateurs without whom democracy is impossible'. GK Chesterton wrote in his poem, *The Secret People*, 'But we are the people of England and we have not spoken yet'. **Isn't it about time we did?**

*Bernard Trevallion*

## Thank you Taplow House Hotel

The Society would like to express its thanks to Sam Goss, the general manager of the Taplow House Hotel, for kindly allowing us to use a meeting room free of charge for our regular Committee meetings. It is most helpful and very much appreciated that we can meet in such excellent surroundings.

## Membership Secretary

We are delighted that Gill Holloway has agreed to take up the new post of Membership Secretary. Gill will support the Committee to improve communications with members and increase membership of the Society. One of the first tasks will be to compile a list of e-mail

addresses for those members of the Society who would like to be able to be contacted by e-mail. If you would like the Society to have your email address or if you know anyone who would like to become a member, please contact Gill at: [gillholloway@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:gillholloway@tiscali.co.uk)

# Sir John Page, 1919 – 2008

Sir John Page was a founder member of the the Hitcham and Taplow Preservation Society in 1959 and an active Vice-President until 1974.

Each newspaper obituary paid tribute to the long list of achievements and the significant high influence of Sir John Page on the national stage. Here in Taplow we remember the huge contribution of Jack Page to life in our village community.

Jack was one of the founder subscribers to the Taplow and Hitcham Recreation Association in 1956. The Association was formed to rescue the gravel pit on Boundary Road and so secure permanent Taplow headquarters for Boy Scouts and Girl Guides and a club house and playing fields for rugby, soccer and cricket teams from local schools and social clubs.

After distinguished military service in World War 2, Jack became an active member of the Royal British Legion. At the millennium, he became the President of Hitcham and Taplow branch, leading the November 11 Ceremony of Remembrance at the St Nicolas Church War Memorial. In his last words to his Legion companions he said that bringing to a new generation the awareness of the magnitude of the sacrifices made to preserve our freedoms within democracy was his most worthwhile

endeavour. Each year Jack and his wife Anne opened their Hitcham Lodge home to give a generous thank-you evening to the Poppy Day sales volunteers.

Ever alert to an opportunity to compose a telling limerick or a topical poem to entertain

his fellow guests, Jack was a joyful presence at all village gatherings – our annual Village Green Party was his particular favourite. Taplow people will long cherish the memory of the great fun his rich humour and ready wit brought to every occasion.

Sixty residents travelled in two coaches to join the 500 family, friends, dignitaries and members of the Houses of Lords and Commons at the Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of Jack Page at St Margaret's

Church, Westminster, on March 4. The Service was conducted by the Rector of St Margaret's Church and Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, Reverend Robert Wright, and moving tributes were made by friend and neighbour, Terry Wogan, and long-time House of Commons colleague, John Gummer.

*Karl Lawrence*



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Unless otherwise stated, the views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Society or its Committee.

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