

HITCHAM & IAPLOW

PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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NEWS LETTER NO. 13

AUGUST 1966

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All communications should be addressed to:-

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## DEATH OF LORD ASTOR

We record with deep regret the death of our President in March.

Members who have attended our Annual General Meetings will remember that he presided over all but one since the Society was formed. But they may be less well aware of the other work which he did for the Society behind the scenes. Lady Astor also attended several of our meetings and we offer her our sincere sympathy.

## OUTRAGE

No other word can describe the abominations which are now being erected in Taplow Village on the site of the Bible College by Span Developments Ltd.

How has it come about that these frightful constructions could be approved for the centre of a village famous for its quiet charm? How has it happened that the efforts of this Society and of the Parish Council to limit the number of new buildings and to see that what does go up is in harmony with the rest, have been in vain?

In the first place, it must be said plainly that the Eton RDG refused quite categorically to allow this Society to see the plans and elevations for the new buildings. In 1961, we wrote to ask that we might be allowed to have a say in the design of the Council houses now being erected at the northern end of Taplow village. The Clerk replied on November 7th, as follows:

"I have to say that your request has now been considered by the Council's Housing Committee and I am to inform you with regret that the Committee is unable to agree to make available to the Society plans of the above-mentioned proposed development.

"You will appreciate that if the Committee were to agree to your request it would create a precedent which could cause interminable difficulties in view of the enormous number of Societies and Associations of various descriptions which operate in the rural district. Such action might also be regarded as an affront to Parish Councils, which authorities are not afforded the privilege you now seek.

"Plans for any development proposed by the District Council must, of course, be approved by the Bucks County Council as Planning Authority, and will also be the subject of appropriate consultation with the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

"In conclusion, I can assure you that there will be careful consideration of design and elevational treatment of the dwellings to be erected on the site within the limitations imposed by economic factors."

We have raised this matter informally on several occasions, and we have invariably been told that this is none of our business.

It is true that we have been led to believe that we could trust the judgement of the Local Authority. We have noted with approval the terrace houses at Stockwells; we have been assured both in the letter quoted above,

and on other occasions, that the design of the Council houses would blend in with the rest of the village; we have seen the houses on the Priory estate, without enthusiasm indeed, but without a sense of shock and outrage. And we have heard officials promise that special consideration will be given to the new buildings in Taplow, because it was recognised as being worthy of rather more than usually careful planning. So it was hardly to be expected that after all this the Council would perpetrate such a gross blunder.

As to the question of why so many houses have been permitted in place of one; Members will recall that the Bucks County Council drew up a "Village Plan" to cover this very point, but this Society has never been allowed to see it. We have only had an account of what it contains, and assurances that it would protect us from excessive building. But apparently, when it came to the test, it was found that the plan allows for new buildings to cover the same area of living space, which appears to include attic bedrooms and outhouses. The Span estate does not infringe the Plan if it is read in a strict legalistic sense, whatever may have been the intention behind it. So this Plan, which Mr. Pooley, the County Planning Officer, announced at one of our early AGM's, turns out to be very much less of a protection from the excesses of development than we were promised; it is not clear what more we could have done.

It remains something of a mystery how the RDC accepted this situation and agreed these plans and elevations. We do not believe that they are happy with what they have approved, nor do we suggest that they have done it with the deliberate intention of ruining Taplow. It seems to us that it is much more likely that it was just plain incompetence and muddle, coupled with the belief that designs by Span Developments Ltd. are bound to be good. Certainly they are of a sort which are much favoured by the County Council.

There is only one way to prevent a repetition of this dreadful blunder. Plans must be published in advance, and the public must be allowed to comment on them before it is too late. We intend to press very hard for this in the future. Eton RDC is much too fond of secrecy. No doubt it would set a precedent (something which the official always fears) and no doubt it would add to the work if the people of Hitcham and Taplow, who have to live with the new buildings, were allowed the opportunity for objection. The necessity for it has clearly been demonstrated.

Shocking though this story is, there is a brighter one to tell about the future of Taplow village. The Village plan may prevent - indeed probably has prevented - some building, and preserved some land and some trees. And the Village green is to be in the proper place, namely on the corner opposite the church. Our congratulations are due to the Parish Council which has carried out a series of delicate negotiations to correct a number of stupid Planning decisions by earlier R.D. Councils.

#### GOODBYE TO THE ETON R.D.C.?

The Slough and Maidenhead take-over bids are in cold storage. As your Chairman predicted at the 1965 A.G.M., the Boundaries Commission has decided that it cannot usefully continue its work while the Ministry for Town and Country Planning is considering changes of a much more fundamental character. Subsequently, the Minister announced that a Commission would be set up to recommend a new form of Local Government. At the present time we cannot foresee what form this is likely to take, except that it is very probable that the major units will be very much larger than at present. We can only hope that local people will be permitted some say in local affairs; the Minister has promised as much.

## GRAVEL

The Planning Application to dig a large area near Barge Farm was to have been the subject of an Inquiry in December. It was unexpectedly cancelled (or postponed). Meanwhile a much more modest proposal was submitted, by the same applicants, and was also rejected by the County authorities. So far no appeal has been registered.

The chief argument of those who support these and similar proposals is that "Gravel must be got from somewhere". Until very recently, "somewhere" meant gravel beds most of which are situated in fine countryside, and often in the Thames valley. It was very interesting, therefore, to learn that the gravel companies have begun to win very large amounts from the seabed. We believe that London is getting substantial amounts from the North sea, and that the Bristol Channel is proving to be another good source. No doubt transport costs will make it uneconomic to use sea gravel for inland districts initially. Also, the sea cannot be a source of hoggin for roadworks. Hoggin has a clay content, which is needed to bind the stone. Despite this, the coastal gravel scheme is an important development for those of us who live on riverside gravel beds.

Meanwhile we are trying to discover just what is happening at Wraysbury, and what is planned at Datchet. At both these places, vast reservoirs are to be built. The Datchet one has not yet been started, but we are told that it will be about 90 acres, and all the gravel to be dug out (which will be top grade "Terrace" material) is to be used in a wall around the reservoir, which will be well above river level. It seems to us an appalling waste of gravel to use it in this way. At Wraysbury a huge army of machines is excavating another 80-90 acres; there is some mystery about what is happening to all this gravel, but we have heard disturbing rumours that it is being disposed of as if it is a waste material to be got rid of by whatever means comes to hand, rather than a precious and scarce commodity.

## OTHER SOCIETIES

We are in touch, from time to time, with the following (and many others) --

River Thames Society  
C.F.R.E. Penn Country Branch  
Maidenhead Civic Society  
The Chiltern Society

We are glad to acknowledge our appreciation of their work, which often impinges on our local interests.

The Chiltern Society is a very new one, and its first objective was to get the Chiltern Hills officially registered as an "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty", (a.o.n.b.) The Chiltern Society, so as to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the area, organised a deputation to the Minister of Town and Country Planning last autumn and was entirely and immediately successful. The area was designated as an a.o.n.b. late last year. Taplow is, of course, not included, but we do not have to go very far North to reach the Chilterns. We hope the official registration will help to preserve this beautiful countryside.

The Chiltern Society held a Conference on 2nd April at High Wycombe on the subject of the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; the Conference was attended by two of our Committee Members who reported as follows:-

The Chiltern a.o.n.b. stretches from near Luton and Dunstable in the north to Goring in the south, and averages about 8 miles in breadth. As the area spreads over part of four counties, co-ordination is essential, and the Chiltern Society's executive council and membership is representative of Bucks, Berks, Herts and Oxfordshire.

At the Conference, Mr. J. R. James, C.B.E., Chief Planning Officer of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, explained the practical meaning of an a.o.n.b. He emphasised that nothing in connection with preservation happens automatically, but the designation a.o.n.b. gives the opportunity of taking the initiative to confer certain benefits. Government grants, usually 75% of the total cost, are made available for a wide range of improvements, including: restoration of derelict land, removal of unsightly buildings, cost of land, materials and labour required for tree planting, tree preservation including compensation when felling is disallowed, acquisition of land for public access, the provision of a wardening service, cost of erecting notices, fences, stiles etc. Local authorities can make bye-laws to protect landowners.

Mr. Hookway, of the National Parks Commission, said that the Commission was responsible for designating a.o.n.b. although the final decision rested with the Minister. It should be made clear that such areas are distinct in purpose from Green Belt land in which Hitcham and Taplow are situated, but it is good to know that the Chilterns a.o.n.b. comes as close as the outskirts of Marlow.

The President of the Chiltern Society, Viscount Esher, emphasised the importance of the Chilterns being designated as a.o.n.b.

The talks were followed by a "forum" when the audience put questions to a panel made up of the chief speakers, planners from Chiltern area local authorities, and representatives of amenity societies.

### "LEISURE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE"

The Government White Paper (Cmd.2928) contains three sections of immediate possible interest to us. We quote -

#### "Gravel pits"

39. Excellent opportunities for the creation of recreational facilities are provided on a substantial scale by disused gravel pits. In south-east England especially these are mostly wet workings. The Government intend to examine, with the local authorities and the industrial interests concerned, the possibility of creating well-landscaped lagoons in many places, especially near to towns, for the enjoyment of sailing and other water sports.

#### "Trees and woodlands"

51. Changes in agricultural practice and the continuing emphasis on increased efficiency in farming are together making for a striking change in the face of the countryside because of the loss of trees and hedgerows,

particularly noticeable in lowland England, which for generations has characteristically been a country of small fields, scattered woods and hedgerows. Charges there must be, but the losses can be made good by new planting. Trees may also be used with good effect to screen obtrusive buildings and eyesores and to cover spoil tips; and even a well-designed group of buildings can often be improved by judicious tree-planting. The Government will therefore ask local authorities to embark on an extensive programme of tree-planting in the countryside, not in the main in large woodlands but in small woods, clumps and rows, and to manage them themselves or arrange for their management by other public authorities or landowners. It might be convenient in suitable cases to enter into agreement with landowners for the planting and management of trees on their own land. Local planning authorities already have power to acquire land and plant trees on it, but an Exchequer grant is payable only in the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In future, approved expenditure will be eligible for grant elsewhere in the countryside.

"52. Although the felling of trees and hedgerows is often necessary if changes in agricultural practice or planned development are to proceed, not all fellings are justified by genuine economic or practical needs; and some trees or clumps of trees may have special value in the landscape which entitles them to special consideration. The Government therefore propose to ask local planning authorities to review, in consultation with the Forestry Commission, their arrangements for the making of Tree Preservation Orders, with a view to identifying those trees and woodlands which are of particular importance as features of the landscape and which ought not to be felled without the consent of the planning authority and before arrangements can be made for their replacement. The Government have been reviewing the procedure for the making of Tree Preservation Orders and its relation to the felling licence provisions of the Forestry Act 1951, and will propose any necessary legislative changes."

#### "Eyesores.

55. Much of the countryside is disfigured by structures such as huts, shacks, and dumps of abandoned cars and other unwanted material. It can be expensive to get rid of these eyesores, both because of the cost of removal and because compensation may have to be paid. But the problem has to be tackled. The Government propose, therefore, that the Countryside Commission and the local planning authorities should combine to work out a programme of action, covering some years, concentrating at first on removing the more obtrusive eyesores from the most attractive places. Approved expenditure by local planning authorities, including compensation under discontinuance orders, will be eligible for grant aid. This proposal is separate from the Government's recently announced proposals for the rehabilitation of land which has been so damaged by industrial or other development as to be unusable without treatment.

"56. Voluntary effort can be very useful here. The Civic Trust hopes to announce very shortly its campaign (for town as well as country-side) under which local bodies and organisations, civic societies and all others interested in the environment, will be encouraged to co-operate with the local authorities, largely by undertaking the work of physical removal or improvement. The Government will encourage local authorities to make full use of their powers to assist voluntary efforts of this kind by lending equipment and contributing to administrative expenses."

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Section 51 is very relevant to us, because we have been urging the County Council to plant trees in Taplow in just the way described. So far, County has flatly refused to plant even in replacement of what it cuts down. We are calling their attention to the new lead by the Government, and hope for a change of heart.