

HITCHAM & TAPLOW

PRESERVATION SOCIETY

NEWS LETTER NO. 20.:

SPRING 1970.

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MR. J. MORRISON

Arrangements have been made for a Mountain Ash tree to be planted in the North East corner of the Taplow & Hitcham Recreation Grounds; the tree is being supplied and planted by Mr. Newman, Rose Hill Nurseries, (a member of the Society). We thank members who have contributed to this memorial.

DROPMORE.

GRAVEL:

It was to be expected that the sale of the outlying portions of the Dropmore Estate would attract the attention of the gravel industry, and indeed six lots on the northern perimeter were sold to the Summerlease Gravel Co. We understand that the mineral rights on some of the other lots have been acquired subsequently by gravel firms.

The Society has been in touch with other Amenity Societies in the area about the action which should be taken. We take the view that there is little that can be done at this stage. In due course a Planning Application will be lodged. It will be a remarkable change in policy if the County Council allows it at this stage without a public Inquiry. Indeed, the County Planning Officer, Mr. Pooley, was reported to have told a reporter 'over our dead bodies'. It is therefore a reasonable supposition that it will be refused, that an appeal will follow, and that there will be an Inquiry.

Two years ago there was an appeal over the Barge Farm Application. We were given exactly one week's notice of the fact! The appellant had a very strong and well-co-ordinated team; the objectors were unco-ordinated and by no means all were very effective. We believe that our evidence, very ably given by Mr. Blee, was what tipped the balance in our favour. We cannot risk such casual tactics in the case of Dropmore. We have therefore reminded the County Planning Officer of the facts of the Barge Farm case, and suggested to him that County (which must inevitably lead the opposition) should co-ordinate the defense, starting from the moment that an Application is refused. We understand that both Penn Country Branch of CPRE and the Wooburn Society accept this strategy, and we hope that other amenity Societies will fall into line.

The remarkable case of the White Place Farm Inquiry shows what determined opposition can achieve.

TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS:

At the suggestion of the Society, a TPO was applied to the whole Estate (we overlooked the fact that a small portion lies in the High Wycombe RDC; the TPO arrived just in time for the sale!).

Naturally, no TPO can be expected to remain for ever over a whole estate. We were however a little disconcerted to find that the RDC had given permission to clear fell 4 acres by the Feathers Inn, with the condition that replanting is done with 'a suitable conifer' and at least 30% beech (there were a few other useful restraints on the felling). Much of this work is complete; a further 8 acres has subsequently been applied for, and we are given to understand at the time of writing has been allowed.

Members of the Society may be interested to know that applications to fell trees which are the subject of a TPO do not appear in the Planning Register. There is no way of finding out what is happening, or what is proposed. We have therefore suggested that any further proposals to negative the TPO on Dropmore should be advertised in the local press. The RDC have not commented on the

suggestion, and it is improbable that they will accept it willingly. If, however, members agree that it is a sensible and useful suggestion, they may care to write to the RDC saying so.

Our own view is that much more selective felling (as opposed to clear felling) ought to be stipulated. This might be less profitable, of course, but it would be much less destructive of amenity.

THE HOUSE:

The United States International University would have been wise to have taken expert advice on the English planning laws and regulations when they bought the house. They appear to have assumed that they could use the premises for educational purposes, and when, very late in the day, they applied for change of use from residential to educational, they were refused. The grounds for refusal have not been made public, so far as we are aware. There appears to be some discrepancy over the matter of the number of students they propose to house, and the consequential building programme. One figure quoted is 800; but they told the Chairman of the Penn Country Branch of CPRE that it was to be 300.

If they leave and put the house up for sale, it seems probable that the house and the gardens will deteriorate very rapidly. The more this takes place, the less likely is it that a worthy use will be found for the place; the Decline and Fall of Dropmore seems all too probable.

POSTSCRIPT.

We showed the above in draft to the Director of the United States International University, who commented as follows:-

"You may have heard.....that we shall be opening the gardens of Dropmore to the public on 25th May in aid of the Nursing Association, as well as receiving members of the Royal Horticultural Society who wish to visit our pinetum on October 9th as part of their Conifer Conference. I trust that these actions, and others which we intend to take, will be regarded as evidence of our earnest desire to serve the Community and maximise the benefits to be obtained from ownership of this superb estate".

With regard to the numbers which we have proposed to accommodate here, the total of 800 simply appals me!.....We hope eventually to accommodate between 300 and 350 and, should we be fortunate enough to be able to remain here, we would propose building on the area which is now the vegetable garden". Dr. Rowlands goes on to say that Mr. Rouse (Chairman of Penn Country Branch CPRE, Mr. Verney (Chairman, Bucks CC Planning Committee), Mr. Pooley (County Planning Officer), and Mr. John Cleverley (a National Trust Architect), have all examined the site and have agreed that a tasteful two storey building could be constructed around a courtyard facing on the terrace, which would not in any way diminish the beauty of the existing buildings - - indeed, it would not even be visible from the south of the main house. He continues:

Of course, we are still without planning permission for change of use and, in these circumstances, the University administration in San Diego have found it necessary to look for alternative sites. All of us here at Dropmore, staff and students alike, have a very great love for the estate and we should be broken-hearted to have to leave. But of course it is now very late in the day and matters are, to a very great extent, out of our hands.

Finally, Dr. Rowlands hopes to be able to let us have an account of the university, comparable to the one on Stanford by Prof. Hastorf, which we sent to members.

### HISTORIC BUILDINGS.

The Government has 'recognised' amenity societies at last! In a circular to local authorities, it has asked that all Planning Applications relating to graded Buildings which would, if granted, mean the destruction of the building in question, should be referred to certain amenity societies for comment. This Society is one on the list (presumably supplied to the Government by the Civic Trust). We shall be given 21 days in which to submit our observations.

The survey of buildings which Mrs. Ibbetson is making will put us in a strong position to make a reasoned and useful comment.

### CREEPING INDUSTRIALISATION.

There are at least three places in our area where we are concerned at the growth of industrial activities which, if unchecked, would eventually acquire user rights. One is referred to elsewhere in this Newsletter. Another is the Hedsor Sawmills. Our latest information is that the RDC has at least decided to take legal action to prevent any unauthorised manufacturing activities there.

### PUBLIC INQUIRIES.

Written evidence has been submitted to two Inquiries, following refusal of Planning Applications:-

- (1) We opposed an application to build at Huntercombe, on the grounds that it was in the Green Belt. The Appeal was refused.
- (2) We have written objecting to a part of the Application by Texaco to pull down and reconstruct the Blue Star Garage on the Bath Road. Our objection is to the proposal to destroy the adjoining house (which is sound and sensibly situated), on the grounds that there is a shortage of houses, and that there is ample space for a filling station without pulling it down. We have also asked that the design be closely controlled, so that we are spared another Maidenhead Autos monstrosity. The findings of the Inspector will not be available for many weeks yet.

### MILL LANE, TAPLOW.

The Cliveden Reach is probably the most famous part of the Thames Valley, and the National Trust and others have worked hard to protect the adjacent riverside. It would, therefore, seem particularly unfortunate if European Conservation Year were to be marked in Taplow by the permanent despoilation of the area around Mill Lane - an area which seems naturally suited as a recreation area because it lies between the Green Belt and the river, and close to the Cliveden Woods.

Yet, there are developments in this area which are causing considerable worry to the Committee and to other members. One or two applications have been submitted for industrial developments and, of course, there is what now seems to be a super-market attracting cars and vans to create congestion in this narrow lane.

Worst of all, an area of about five acres has rapidly degenerated into an eyesore, littered with rubbish and scrap, and with waste paper which blows over the adjacent countryside. This area is used by the Paper Mills, but approaches to the management have not even been acknowledged by the normal courtesies. It is possible for industrial premises to be operated without polluting the environment, and indeed for many years the Paper Mills succeeded in operating discreetly and inoffensively. The recent deterioration seems deplorable and, therefore, the Committee is making fresh approaches to local councillors in an attempt to interest them in more effective control, and better planning for this area.

TIME LIMITS AND PLANNING PERMISSION.

In the last few issues of the Newsletter, we have attempted to deal with some of the reforms and innovations introduced into planning law by the Town and Country Planning Act, 1968. Sections 65-68 deal with one very important topic - the duration of planning permission.

Before the 1968 Act, the position was that unless a specific time limitation was imposed by the local planning authority or the Minister when it was granted, planning permission enured for the benefit of the land and of any person for the time being having an interest in the land.

The law as it stood was unsatisfactory for two reasons. Firstly there was the problem of unused planning permissions. With social change taking place as quickly as it has done since the war, planning permission granted in 1950 and not acted upon might be totally contrary to current planning policy by 1965. Also the existence of a large number of unused planning permissions would seriously hamper coherent planning. Secondly there was the problem of the land hoarder or speculator who obtained planning permission without any intention of developing the land, but merely to attract the development value.

The Act attempts to remedy the situation in this way. From 1st April 1969, the date on which this part of the Act came into force, development in relation to a planning permission granted before that date must be begun within five years of the 1st April 1969. Development in relation to a planning permission granted after the 1st April 1969 must be begun within five years of the grant, but here "the authority concerned with the terms of the planning permission" (i.e. the local planning authority or the Minister), has a discretion to vary this period upwards or downwards if circumstances warrant.

There are certain exceptions to the time limit rule, including "permitted development" under the General Development Order, and outline permissions are subject to special rules.

Where outline planning permission has been granted before the 1st April 1969, and development has not begun before the 1st January 1968, any matter reserved for later approval must be dealt with within three years of the 1st April 1969, and the development itself must commence within five years of that date, or within two years of the final approval of any reserved matter, whichever is the longer.

As to outline permissions granted after the 1st April 1969, the time limits are the same, except that here the authority concerned with the terms of the planning permission has a discretion to vary them.

The Act has provisions relating to the completion as well as to the commencement of development.

If development has been begun but not completed before the expiration of the time limit, a local planning authority may, if it thinks that it is unlikely that it will be completed within a reasonable period thereafter, serve a "Completion Notice" on the owner and occupier of the land, and on anyone else whom the local planning authority thinks is likely to be affected by the notice.

The notice will state that planning permission will cease to have effect on the day specified in the notice, which day must not be earlier than twelve months from the date of the notice. Before such a notice can take effect it must be confirmed by the Minister. Anyone served with a notice has the right to be heard by an Inspector before the Minister confirms it.

Finally, it should be noted that one may always apply to the local planning authority for the renewal of planning permission which is nearing expiry. Here, perhaps, lies the key to the success of these measures. One can see two dangers inherent in the discretion granted to local planning authorities in respect of renewals. One is that the liberty of the subject will be prejudiced by a harsh interpretation by authorities of their statutory powers. The other is that renewals will be granted so frequently as to drive a coach and four through this part of the Act. Parliament has given local planning authorities a powerful new weapon, and here, as in other parts of the 1968 Act, it may be significant that the legislators already had it in mind that these powers would soon be exercised by new Maud-type authorities.

March 1970: