

HITCHAM & TAPLOW
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

NEWS LETTER No. 23

AUTUMN, 1971

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CURRENT ITEMS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY.

DROPMORE

We have regretfully to report that Dropmore has been vacated by the United States International University. The relationship between them, Eton Rural District Council and ourselves had become very cordial, and we had hoped that the future of Dropmore in such good hands would be ensured. The University have recently decided with regret that they must move to larger accommodation; it has been disclosed that they have acquired Ashdown Park in Sussex as a site of a European Campus for 350 students.

The future of Dropmore is now uncertain; the property is for sale, and warning notices about private property have been posted. There is nothing that the Society can do at present.

TAPLOW PAPER MILLS

The extensions authorised at Taplow Paper Mills have now been made, and the site is now in much better condition.

WARREN WAREHOUSE, MILL LANE

The appeal against the closure notice has been made, and the Inquiry will be held at the Eton Rural District Council's offices on 21st. October. The Society is making representations in writing; it is undesirable to continue with this commercial development in a green belt area, especially as the area is very vulnerable and car parking is inadequate and potentially hazardous.

COMMON LAND

Members will recall that as a result of recent legislation, the Society applied about two years ago for registration by the local Council of several pieces of common land. Since then there has been a request for the withdrawal of some of these registrations.

In one or two cases the rights have been sold and the proceeds invested for the benefit of the poor of the parish. In other cases however, the Society has felt justified in maintaining its claims for registration; in the face of the argument that responsibility for such common land might incur public expense, the Committee has pointed out that it has a responsibility to protect public rights against unwanted development, rather than abandon a heritage through indifference. The negotiations in connection with the areas adjoining Burwood House are continuing.

BURNHAM HIGH STREET

Our interest in developments in Burnham High Street have now happily been greatly reinforced resulting from the formation of the Burnham Society. We welcome the appearance of this neighbouring organisation and look forward to much valuable co-operation with it concerning the area immediately adjoining our own. We have already agreed on an exchange of information on matters of common concern.

FOOTPATHS & BRIDLEPATHS

- (a) Hitcham Lane to Hunts Wood
This track has now been correctly labelled as a
bridlepath.
- (b) Dorneywood Road to Burnham Beeches
Proposed upgrading to bridlepath.
- (c) Footpath (No. 23) leading off Abbey Park Lane to
Littleworth Common across Lord Portman's estate.
Re-opening as bridlepath.

Items b & c above, mentioned in our last Newsletter,
are being pursued, but there is little progress to report.

NEW ITEMS

BERRY HILL - CARAVANS

We have made representations regarding a group of
caravans that were kept on Berry Hill; it appeared that a change of use
might be taking place. Following an enforcement order, the caravans
have been removed from the site, but there will be an appeal.

PROPOSED NEW HOUSE AT BERRY HILL

The Committee have supported the Eton Rural District
Council's objections to an application for a house to be built at Berry
Hill, and the appeal against the planning refusal has been rejected.

In presenting his reasons for this rejection, the
Inspector of the Department of the Environment was concerned both with
the area and with particular matters related to the individual application.
With regard to the former he pointed out that Berry Hill lies within a large
area allocated in the County Development Plan as one of Great Landscape
Value where development adversely affecting the landscape will not be
permitted. The approved Metropolitan Green Belt extends to the east
side of the B. 476 of which Berry Hill is part; and the land to the west
forms part of a proposed extension of the Metropolitan Green Belt now
before the Secretary of State. The area is close to the built up edges of
Burnham, Maidenhead, the A. 4 and Taplow Village, and if permission
for one house were granted it would be difficult for the planning authority
to resist further pressure for new residential development within this
small pocket of relatively unspoilt country.

These are views with which the Society fully concurs.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Among the many newer planning applications considered
at each meeting are some that the Committee felt should be further
investigated. For example:-

- (a) A nest of six grain silos and a covered loading area
were proposed at Lake End Road, Taplow. On
investigation we found that these would comprise
agricultural buildings in an agricultural area and so
would be acceptable.

(b) Hillmead, Boundary Road. The proposal here was to erect three four-storey blocks of eight flats. On inspection of the plans it became clear that this would not increase the overall density of housing on the site, and might well lead to a desirable improvement in its appearance.

There are many applications such as these which call for no action by us. However, it is only by considering all the proposals that are made that we can pick out the undesirable ones early enough for our representation to have effect.

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CAN ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS EASE THE PRESSURE FOR GRAVEL EXTRACTION

One of the main recurring themes during the Society's existence has been the threat of gravel extraction. This threat might be reduced if alternative materials could be used. With this in mind Dr. N.V. Hanson and Mr. C.I. Snow visited the Building Research Station at Garston (near Watford) on the 23rd June 1971, for the purpose of finding out, on the Society's behalf, what alternative materials to gravel might have been investigated for such purposes as building and road making. This investigation was stimulated particularly by the threats to obtain more gravel from areas in the neighbourhood of Burnham and Taplow: threats which if carried out could result in the desecration of the natural beauty of greatly treasured parts of the countryside. These threats have been emphasized by the recent publication (February 1971) of "Gravel Supplies in South Bucks (Buckinghamshire Department of Architecture and Planning, Feb 1971)" where it is estimated that "the yield from existing permitted gravel working land in the service areas will fall 24,000,000 cubic yards short of probable demand over the period to 1980. This will probably require the granting of planning permission between now and 1980 of at least double the arithmetical short fall of 1,200 acres". The County Planning Committee "considers that the longer-term needs of the area should not be met by the release of yet further land in South Bucks but that urgent consideration should be given by the Government and the gravel industry to the development of substitute materials or of alternative sources where the effect of gravel working or amenity would be less damaging".

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This awareness of the acute environmental problems involved in gravel extraction, and the possibilities of alternatives to gravel, has also been brought out in another recent report - "Sand and Gravel Extraction" by working parties of the Standing Conference on London and South East Regional Planning. The Working Party on Western and Maidenhead Gravel Service Areas urge that, "because gravel is a wasting asset on which the construction industry depends, and because the extraction of land-based gravel over wide areas is a matter of serious concern to the public at large, Government Departments should set up a working party urgently to study the wider issues including the likely availability of sea-dredged gravels".

The visitors first had a discussion with Dr. B.R. Steele, Assistant Director of the Building Research Station. Dr. Steele is a member of a Ministry of Environment Working Party on gravel and its alternatives; recommendations to the Minister are being drafted and are likely to be published soon. The general trend will be that the extra cost, due largely to transport, will have to be borne to pay for preserving amenities.

Dr. Steele said that a motorway in Wales could have used colliery waste, but at additional costs of £ 50,000 to £ 100,000 per mile on a total cost of about £ 1 million per mile. Other difficulties such as the pressure of reactive impurities or the risk of spontaneous combustion of colliery shale can be overcome.

There had recently been a series of Open Days at the B.R.S., in celebration of the Station's Golden Jubilee, and the matters that were discussed with Dr. Steele were afterwards considered in practice by a tour of the exhibits under the guidance of Dr. Smith. Many types of industrial waste or by-products have been examined as alternatives to concrete or gravel in construction materials. Among such materials is the slag from iron manufacture, blastfurnace slag or bfs of which about one million tons were produced in 1968. This is an important possibility, as slag can be used for roadstone or dense aggregate for concrete. The Station has carried out research on bfs for many years, and a larger project - for a new steelmaking plant at Sounthorpe will use nearly a million tons of bfs as aggregate in concrete. A lightweight aggregate (e.g. "Lightag" made by John Laing) can also be made from pulverised fuel ash (pfa) which is produced at the rate of about 9 million tons per annum. This by-product has in fact been used in the A.1 construction, north of Baldock.

The most abundant wastes from coal mining are the shales, which form massive tips and spoil heaps that might now contain as much as 3,000 million tons. Again lightweight aggregates can be made from shale, and also from slate waste and crushed rock. One problem is that when a tip has been removed, the landowner becomes responsible for rates.

Around 200 million tons of gravel are now used each year, divided approximately equally between building and road making, and this quantity was increasing until recently. Industrial waste could only replace part of this, but might prevent any further increase in the demand for gravel; whilst the use of waste from mineral extraction and of old tips and dumps might prevent further damage to the environment around and even reduce damage already done. Thus the environment could be improved, both where there are gravel deposits and where there are mines, by using substitutes for gravel.

To achieve this there must be a public demand strong enough to bear the extra cost of transport. Public awareness is growing of the damage that gravel extraction can cause: now we need to make it known that such damage can be prevented at a comparatively small cost, and as a bonus some improvement achieved in the environment in mining areas.

DEPUTY SECRETARY

It is with the greatest regret that we have received notice from Mr. R.H. Sneyd that he will be unable to continue as our Secretary for more than a further year owing to other commitments. We are therefore seeking a new member for our Committee to assist Mr. Sneyd as Deputy Secretary with a view to becoming Secretary in due course.

Volunteers or nominations would be most welcome at the Annual General Meeting on the 29th. October or, if preferred, in writing to our Chairman Mr. B. Durham.