

HITCHAM AND TAPLOW
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

NEWS LETTER No. 25

AUTUMN, 1972

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OFFICERS

As mentioned previously, Mr.R.H.Sneyd will not be able to continue as Secretary beyond 1972. However, we are very glad indeed to report that we have recently been greatly helped by Mrs.H.E.Huddart, who has acted as Deputy Secretary for several months, and is willing to be nominated as Secretary at the A.G.M., on 13th October.

We have received with very much regret the resignation of Mr.R.Lines as from the position of Treasurer. He has been living for some time in South East London, but has not allowed this to interfere in any way with his duties as Treasurer; now, however, he feels that it would be better for the Society if the office could be carried out by someone living locally. We are very glad to report that Mr.J.M.R.Stewart Fry is willing to be nominated in his place.

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CURRENT MATTERS REPORTED PREVIOUSLYDropmore

It has now been announced that the new owner of Dropmore is the Mahdi Tajir.

Warren's Warehouse, Mill Lane

The building is now being used as a warehouse only and the retail trading has been transferred elsewhere.

Taplow Court

Your Chairman and Secretary were invited to see over Taplow Court, and were very favourably impressed with the care and attention being devoted to the maintenance of the house and its amenities by Messrs.Plessey. The possibility of a footpath from Mill Lane to the bottom of the Cliveden gardens was discussed but Plessey's past experience with vandalism made this impracticable.

Hill Farm, Taplow

It is understood that the application for the conversion of the barns East of the house into a residence has been refused to the County.

Skindles Hotel Car Park

The car park has now been completed in place of the demolished buildings and the spinney remains untouched.

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NEW ITEMS

Taplow House

An application has been made to demolish the house and erect 24 flats in its place. Your Committee felt that the proposed density of building on the site of the house was high and that it might leave the garden open to applications for further development. It was also felt that the resultant traffic onto Berry Hill might be excessive. A letter making these points was sent to the E.R.D.C.

In correspondence concerning this application, Mr. Ian Skimmings, the son of the late owner, pointed out that he had asked for Tree Preservation Orders on the trees South of the house. It was confirmed with the E.R.D.C. that these remain in force.

Houses in Ellington Gardens

Applications for the erection of twelve three-storey town houses in the garden of the Hermitage, and a further four in Ellington Gardens, were opposed by local residents on the grounds of excessive density, excessive traffic, invasion

of privacy of neighbouring gardens, and loss of mature trees. A letter from the Society opposing the application on similar grounds was also sent. The applications were rejected by the E.R.D.C.

Tithe Barn Hitcham

An application has been made for the conversion of the remaining part of the barn into an extension of the present house, or into another house. Your Committee felt that the present conversion has been well done and that extending it to the remainder would be welcome provided that it is in character. A letter to this effect has been sent to the E.R.D.C.

Club-house and Car Park, Berry Hill

An application for an extension of the Old Paludians club house and car park was supported in a letter to the E.R.D.C., in the hope that it might lead to less parking on the West side of Berry Hill, particularly in the lay-by.

Traffic on Berry Hill

A letter has been sent to the Clerk to the Taplow Parish Council asking whether anything can be done to divert some of the heavy traffic now passing up Berry Hill and Hedsor Hill to the new Marlow bypass and to the proposed Farnham bypass, and emphasising the need to prevent the Berry Hill route being recommended when the new bypasses are fully in use.

Lent Rise Service Station

Opposition to a proposal to erect two advertising signs at Lent Rise Service Station was expressed to the E.R.D.C., on the grounds that one should be sufficient.

Extension to Grovefield Hotel, Taplow Common Road

It was established that this application was for a verandah at the back and a small wine-store, in view of which no action was taken.

Proposed Houses in Heathfield Road, Dropmore

A letter was sent to the E.R.D.C. opposing one application for a single house and one for fifteen houses, both in Heathfield Road, on the grounds that this area is in the Green Belt and is so far free of development.

Matters concerning Burnham

By agreement with the Secretary of the Burnham Society, we have referred to her items concerning Burnham that have come to our attention. Amongst these have been the need for sign posting of footpaths in Littleworth Common and proposals for the erection of houses in Nashdom Lane and Birchfield Lane.

Dutch Elm Disease

The appearance of this disease in trees in and around Taplow has been reported to the Bucks County Forestry Officer.

Aircraft Noise

The installation in July of a new beacon in Lake End Road has caused aircraft from Heath Row to confine their flights to a narrow path over Taplow. The resultant increase in noise has led to many protests, amongst which were letters from the Society to the Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority and to Mr. Ronald Bell, M.P. In these we pointed out the injustice of confining the aircraft to such a narrow lane and asked for the beam from the beacon to be widened so as to spread the aircraft paths as widely as before.

Mr. Bell replied that he had seen the Minister and the Chairman of the Civil Aircraft Authority, who undertook to examine carefully the possible solution which he put forward, including suggestions like ours. Further Mr. Bell

reported that the noise caused at Taplow will be monitored and recorded, and the whole question of the routing of aircraft will be reconsidered in about seven weeks time, that is, early in October.

PLANNING IN THE NEW LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Local Government Bill, now well on its way through the Lords, is not only going to change boundaries; it will also have a profound effect on the way in which functions such as planning, are carried out. Argument continues about some boundaries, which may have to await the decision of the Local Government Boundaries Commission to be set up under the Bill, but the general shape of the new Authorities is becoming clear, and it is not too early to consider how the position of Societies such as ours may be affected.

Our sincere thanks are due to Mr.D.P.Harrison, the Clerk to the Eton Rural District Council, for providing through Mr.H.Hancock articles and reviews on which the following paragraphs were based. Responsibility for the views and statements which they contain are of course our own.

The New Authorities

The objectives of the Bill set out in the 1971 White Paper on Local Government Organisation were to reorganise the various local authorities then existing into a more uniform structure which would provide both the efficiency that can go with centralisation and the control by the people that can arise from decentralisation into small local units. It was argued that functions such as education and personal services can only be efficiently handled in units with populations of 250,000 - 1,000,000 or more, whilst others like museums and art galleries, parks and open spaces are best dealt with by smaller units in closer touch with local conditions. It is indeed for these reasons that the proposed structure of Counties and Districts was preferred over the unitary authorities proposed by Radcliffe Maud.

The proposed system is called a two tier structure, even though Regions consisting of several counties are being considered by the Commission on the Constitution, and the rural Districts will contain Parishes, some of which will arise from amalgamation of the present ones (such as Burnham and Taplow). The responsibilities of the Parishes are not yet clear, the most widely quoted phrase being that they will have 'powers rather than duties'. Some urban areas will be made up of a 'pattern of Districts' which may not include Parishes: this has been criticised, the emergence of 'Neighbourhood Councils' being quoted as evidence of a need.

In England 44 new Counties are proposed of which there will be six metropolitan counties in the predominantly urban areas of Tyneside, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and the West Midlands. Many of the remaining 38 non-metropolitan counties follow more or less the boundaries of the existing Counties. Some smaller towns with a long proud history may resent being brought into the new Counties and this has been pointed out as a possible weakness of the new system.

The existing 1,250 District Councils will be reduced to 370 enlarged ones; none of these will have a population below 40,000 and 200 will have more than 75,000.

All members of the new Councils will be directly elected and there will be no Aldermen, though distinguished members can be elected to be honorary Aldermen without any local government responsibility or powers. All Councillors outside Greater London will sit for four years. The reduction in the number of authorities will of course lead to a substantial reduction in the number of Councillors.

Functions

The allocation of functions between the two tiers has led to much argument. The aims of the Government have been summarised as:-

- a) to reduce the number of local authorities in the country which have executive powers;
- b) to simplify the system;
- c) to encourage good management;
- d) to retain and often to enhance the important part 'the voice of the people' plays in the organisation of services;
- e) to keep responsibility for services as local as possible;
- f) to give local authorities much greater freedom than at present and through flexibility to encourage experiments in management.

With these aims in mind, the Counties would be given functions covering their whole area, such as the construction and maintenance of principal highways, outside education, personal services, fire and police services, libraries, consumer protections. The Districts would become responsible for local matters such as maintenance of unclassified roads in urban areas, housing, building regulations, environmental health, refuse collection, museums and art galleries, parks and open spaces.

Some functions have been claimed by both Counties and Districts; these are being resolved by the debates in Parliament.

Planning

Planning involves both broad plans and local detail. One of the major deficiencies of the present system has been that particularly in the larger counties the planning authority has been unable as a result of its remoteness, to identify many of the problems associated with towns in their area and this has been reflected both in the town map and in the implementation field. On the other hand the district council, whose members and officers know its town intimately, is frustrated from putting into practice appropriate policies by lack of the necessary planning powers. Another criticism of the present system is its negativeness and the lack of dialogue between the developers and the council officers.

Under the new Bill the planning function will be divided between the new district councils and the county councils, both of which will be planning authorities in their own right. In broad principle, the district councils will be responsible for local planning involving development control and the making of local plans and the county councils will be responsible for the preparation of structure plans and broad policies. Powers will also be reserved to them to determine certain matters to be known as 'county matters'.

The cornerstone for the proposed distribution of 'plan-making' functions is the Government's new concept of a 'development plan scheme' within which authorities will co-ordinate their arrangements for making local plans. The distribution of functions in the development plan schemes will vary from one area to another and will reflect the competence of a particular district council to undertake a programme for the preparation of local plans. However district plans and subject plans for recreational areas, conservation, mixed housing schemes and the like will mostly be the responsibility of the district councils, whilst mineral workings, development inconsistent with statements of county planning policy, and developments affecting a principal road will be regarded as county matters.

Local Consultation

Because the area and number of residents whom each new member represents will be wider, and they in turn will reflect the enlarged area and numbers of the district, new district councillors will need to employ practical ways for keeping in touch with local feeling. No longer will the local councillor, normally living in the parish he represents, know all developments within his own community because it is his home too. Even those who live in the ward they represent will only be completely aware of some of the problems and hopes of their electors, and will certainly only personally know a minority of those they represent.

There can be little doubt that the introduction of the new authorities will throw new burdens on local voluntary societies and give them greater importance and the greater remoteness of District councils may lead to a greater community influence of the parishes.

It will therefore be vital for the councillors to keep in touch with the people, for example by arranging more meetings than at present for local residents when new developments are planned for their area, and holding open forums at which questions can be asked of members and officers on any aspects of council affairs. The importance of local societies has already been demonstrated in the past; now they will be needed to assist in such communication between the authorities and the people, and the forging of close links between the societies and both councillors and officers of the District will be an important part of the new system. It is also likely that the time of the councillors and staff of the new Authorities will be occupied in dealing with the many matters brought to them by groups, so that it will be difficult to find time to deal with problems of individuals and opportunities for councillors to seek out information on the ground will be rare. Thus there can be little doubt that the new system will throw further duties on voluntary societies and increase their importance in local government.
