

Hitcham and Taplow Society

Annual General Meeting 3rd December 2021

Chairman's Report

My first thought when starting to write this was that 2021 had been a relatively quiet year as the impact of Covid has had an accumulating effect of slowing many areas of activity. However I was then surprised by the number and breadth of events I started to list. In addition to matters of very local concern there have been many planning related matters that will sooner or later affect us one way or another.

As a committee we worked well over Zoom for most of the year but with a welcome return to face-to-face from October, with a big thankyou to Eva for hosting us with generous tea and biscuits to aid our deliberations. Although earlier indications of progress of the pandemic encouraged us to stage the Village Green Party after a year's absence, evolving government guidance left us with little choice but to cancel for a second year. We did however manage a "Tidy up Taplow" litter clearance thanks to a well organised effort by Jacqueline and Mike Turner. We took the opportunity to buy some high visibility jackets carrying the Society identity which will serve well for all sorts of events in the future. I think people were glad just to be out and about again with the somewhat lower quantities of litter reflecting that people had indeed not been out and about as much.

The filming of "Endeavour" episodes that took place earlier in the year around the church and Green led the company concerned to make a donation of £500 to the Society in recognition of the general disturbance to our lives. We are debating whether we should just add it to our reserves or spend it more specifically on something identifiable, so any suggestions are welcome, such as refreshing the bunting for the VGP or a gazebo to protect the ticket desk in years when the weather is less kind than it has been for some years now.

We are in unsettled times with our Newsletter. Eva has already thanked Nigel for his great efforts of recent years and your committee produced a creditable issue this autumn but to thrive it needs an editor to drive the commissioning of articles and to provide an identity. It is important to us, partly as a visible face of the Society but also as a form of journal of record for Taplow life. Andrew Findlay continues his very significant but largely invisible and unsung role in turning the content into printable form.

We attended the Remembrance Day service at St Nicolas church and our vice-president Fred Russell laid the first wreath on behalf of the Society. As you know we are still awaiting the completion of the addition of WW2 names to the memorial due to illness and commitments of our stone mason Adrian Powell. I spoke with him at the service – he is now in good health and will get the work done in time for the 2022 service.

A local event of considerable inconvenience was the collapse of the Jubilee River footbridge. It was Andrew Findlay who first spotted the failure and alerted Bucks council to the problem. Repair or replacement is a non-trivial matter but as the bridge continued to deform and collapse it has now been removed. We have no date yet as to its replacement but we will keep you updated. It has of course upset a great number of walks around the area.

The developments at Taplow station, although overall very welcome with the improved level of service and maintenance, were giving rise to concerns that the introduction of ticket gates would mean that walkers could no longer use the footbridge when Station Road flooded. In a surprising and welcome response, TfL have added an option of a ticket that allows them access to the footbridge, so problem solved. Not so the parking problems. The Unitary Authority still intends to come forward with a scheme of charged parking in Station, Institute and Approach Roads which sounds horrendous but they are still very resistant to a station car park. Will an expanded Beaconsfield population drive down one of the narrower roads in the county to reach the Elizabeth line?

Rights of Way and footpath access are often brought up, particularly the loss of earlier routes. Your committee collected together all the potential routes that might be rescued and assessed their levels of provenance. Sadly the conclusion was that it was thought unlikely that any of them could be taken forward with anything like the degree of proof required for their restoration.

Now to our sister organisation EDRA who are very concerned about the gross over-parking in Ellington and River Roads. In particular parking at the junction of Ellington and the Bath Roads is creating a serious hazard. This type of problem is getting worse across the area as people acquire more cars in roads that just don't have the capacity for them. There doesn't appear to be any obvious solution. Resident only parking might not help as the problem is generated by the residents in the first place.

Our Society was originally founded in response to various planning upheavals. While the Society has since broadened its interests, planning matters still affect us strongly in various ways.

Some local issues include the application in Marsh Lane for a permanent residence to support the egg business run from temporary sheds (refused) and a series of applications at Stockwells for various extensions, also so far refused. The Marsh Lane refusal has been appealed and it is encouraging that the Stockwell applications have been refused both on Green Belt grounds AND the preservation of the site identity. An application that has been ongoing in Ellington Gardens rumbles on since 2013. An approval for a new house was given but then time expired. A new application was granted but there is still no sign of a house actually being built. More encouragingly, the new owners of Elibank Court have permission now to rebuild the long collapsed Rectory Road wall to a proper standard. We are grateful for this and hope that other old wall owners in Taplow (and there are many) will consider their obligations to preserve this widespread feature of Taplow. On the Mill Lane site the Berkeley project is now complete with the construction of the Dunloe Lodge apartments. The high standard of this development and existence of the associated footbridge owe much to the efforts over many years of the former resident of Driftwood Cottage - Heather Fenn - a former member of our committee. Both the projected pub and the Old Boathouse site are now showing signs of life, with the pub getting many of its approval conditions accepted and with the planning authorities agreeing more practical ways of preserving the Old Boathouse itself.

A much more serious matter arose over the application for an extension of Victoria Cottage. It turned out that an objection was not given serious weight by the case officer but when the objection was resubmitted as a Statutory Declaration (i.e. someone has paid a lawyer to rubber stamp the words) it caused the officer to change his recommendation. This has implications for the success or otherwise of many other objections both past and future, affecting confidence in the planning process.

As part of the overall planning process there have been a number of Consultations across the year. These have included a protective zone around Burnham Beeches, now implemented, that includes Taplow, vociferous responses to one on the implementation of the Hollands Farm development at Bourne End. Others include one on the state and effectiveness of Statements of Community Involvement (don't ask) and a Buckinghamshire one on the desired number of councillors and on potential boundary changes.

Overall, the new county wide Local Plan is unlikely to arrive before 2025, leaving us with an old SBDC 2011 document. I have just circulated a Consultation asking for input to the new Local Plan. This is an opportunity to

make our views clear on some of the matters I have been reporting on – and others – so do please take a moment to look at this. The overall planning reforms projected by the government are back in limbo until Mr Gove decides what to do.

So what of 2022? The government may finally settle on a stable planning policy and we may get a first whiff of a Local Plan. Locally I see remorseless developments at small scale, with developers using loopholes in the present system to nibble at our Green Belt, particularly over the re-use of agricultural and equine properties.

We will see the return of the VGP and my hope is that we will see a strengthening of our committee as newer Taplovians of all ages realise what a truly great place they live in and will wish to contribute to its future.

Finally I must record my personal thanks to Eva, who is a seemingly endless source of ideas and suggestions, together with being a pillar of support. Thank you to her and to my fellow committee members, without whom none of this is possible.

Roger Worthington (acting chairman).