



Bearsted & Thurnham Report

*January
2006*

The Newsletter of the Bearsted & Thurnham Society

New Name, Same Society

Following approval of several amendments to our constitution at a Special General Meeting of the Society held on 11 November at Madginford Hall, we are now The Bearsted and Thurnham Society, the word 'Amenity' having been dropped from our name. New name, but no change in our objectives, which are to encourage civic pride and a sense of responsibility for Bearsted and Thurnham; to promote schemes for the benefit of the people of the two civil parishes; to provide an effective channel for local opinion on all policies and plans affecting them; to oppose inappropriate development, and to communicate to the appropriate authorities the views of residents on any matters affecting their general wellbeing. In pursuit of all these objectives, the Society will aim to keep residents informed about developments affecting them; about the amenities locally available to them, and about aspects of our living environment that are either a cause for concern or a source of pride in and affection for Bearsted and Thurnham.

Amenities for Older Residents

The many residents who tell us they have found the Society's booklet on Amenities and Services for Older People in Bearsted and Thurnham a valuable source of information since it was first published in 2001 will be pleased to know that its author, Joan Brown, has completed an updated and expanded version. Covering everything from sheltered housing and care services to adult education, travel, active retirement and sports facilities for older people, it is a mine of useful information with the potential to bring greater comfort and enrichment to the lives of many. It is available free of charge to all residents of the two parishes. If you would like a copy, simply send a 2nd class stamped addressed C5 size envelope (9" x 6¾") to the Society Secretary (see address on back page). We are grateful to Bearsted Parish Council for agreeing to make a contribution towards the cost of producing the booklet. Recipients who would like also to make a voluntary contribution, however small, towards its cost are

most welcome to do so, and any cheques should be enclosed with the stamped addressed envelope and made payable to The Bearsted and Thurnham Society. But this is purely voluntary.

New Committee Members

The Society is delighted to announce that four new members have joined its Committee: Jennifer Collier, Tracey Shelley, Jenny Taylor and Caroline Vanhecke, bringing the Committee's strength to 11. They bring much needed energy and fresh ideas to our work and are most welcome. But we remain three short of our maximum Committee strength of 14, so more volunteers would still be welcome. We are particularly keen to hear from anyone able to offer expertise or experience (not to mention a great deal of hard work!) in the field of development and planning. Are there any recently retired members of borough or county council planning departments out there, or recently retired legal practitioners, architects or developers, looking for a new purpose in life and a way to make a contribution to the wellbeing of Bearsted and Thurnham?

New Road Stewards

Our warm thanks also to David Hoxey, Pam Fleck, David Garner, and Mathew and Elizabeth Dunk for responding to our appeal for more Road Stewards, bringing much needed relief to some overstretched patches. David Hoxey takes over Spot Lane, Greensands Road, Ragstone Road and Gault Close from Susannah Jack; Pam and David take over Otham Lane and the part of the Ashford Road between there and Crismill Lane from Tony Fisher, and Matthew and Elizabeth take over The Grove from Muriel Greenstead.

But other Road Stewards are still having to look after much larger patches than we would like, and we are always keen to hear from more volunteers. We particularly need volunteers in the Merton Road and Ware Street areas. The role involves distributing Newsletters several times a year, collecting annual subscriptions after the AGM and issuing membership cards, and generally helping the Society to keep in touch with its members' views, wishes, ideas and problems.

Membership Passes the 1220 Mark

As we go to press our membership total has reached 1229 in 741 households. One of the constitutional amendments passed at our

recent Special General Meeting provides that new members joining between 1 January and 4 April secure membership at the current annual rate of £2 per person not only for the remainder of 2005/6 but for the whole of 2006/7, so tell your neighbours this is a good time to join us. Membership forms are available from the Secretary (see back page).

Planning Applications Recently Opposed by the Society

The Society has been working hard in recent weeks opposing the more objectionable features of planning applications for housing developments in Bell Lane, 2 and 9 The Landway and St Faiths Lane/Yeoman Lane; the re-siting of the Ashford Road laundrette to a shed close to properties in Tasker Close, and revised proposals for the extension of 2 Winifred Road .

Despite our efforts we were unable to stop these applications being approved, but some improvements were secured: permitted weekend opening hours for the **laundrette** were reduced to lessen the disturbance to neighbouring properties; all perimeter greenery at **2 The Landway** is to be saved or restored at the end of construction; landscape screening at the **9 The Landway** site is to be improved and no windows are to be allowed in the elevation closest to neighbours; the natural green appearance of **Yeoman Lane** at the **St Faiths** site is to be preserved as far as possible; tile hanging is to be used to the front elevations of the St Faiths site buildings reflecting the character of the former care home they will replace; bonded gravel in the style of a large residence drive is to be used for the access road from Yeoman Lane to the St Faiths site rather than tar macadam or brick pavers; the design of the front elevation of **2 Winifred Road** is to be improved to preserve the existing roof line and its symmetry with the adjoining semi-detached bungalow, with small improvements also to the footprint of the extension to reduce the impact on neighbours; and there will be some reduction in the loss of greenery at **Bell Lane** and modification to its access road to improve road safety.

Even after these improvements however, all these developments remain thoroughly objectionable. As always, the fact that Bearsted is classed as part of urban Maidstone and therefore not entitled to the same degree of protection from housing development as rural areas, proved a major stumbling block. We felt we were able to demonstrate that strong grounds for the rejection of all could be

found in Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council policies. Council officials themselves listed all those policies as relevant considerations when submitting the applications to the Planning Committee, but nevertheless recommended approval, arguing that the numbers of dwellings proposed were well within the targets set in PPG3 - the policy guidance on housing development issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to all local authorities, and that this overrode Borough and County policies. In the case of the **laundrette** the Council's own environmental health officers advised that their tests on noise and emissions demonstrated the application to be acceptable. The Council solicitor starkly warned Planning Committee members that if they were seen to be taking a stand against PPG3 or ignoring the advice of expert officials, the Council was likely not only to lose on appeal but to face heavy appeal costs. Our own Councillors put up strong resistance, but were massively outvoted by other members.

Oak on the Green Appeals

The Oak on the Green public house has appealed against the decision of Maidstone Borough Council Planning Committee, reported in our last Newsletter, to refuse its application for planning permission for a block of five apartments in the Bearsted Green Conservation Area. The Society has sent representations in support of the refusal to the Planning Inspector.

New South East Plan

All planning decisions are at present required to take account of policies set out in Kent County Council's Kent and Medway Structure Plan and, subordinate to that, Maidstone Borough Council's Borough-Wide Plan. These, particularly the former, contain much clear and strong provision for the protection of urban areas such as Bearsted against cramming. In recent times they have afforded only limited protection because, as noted above, they have been increasingly overridden by central government guidance set out in PPG3. But even that degree of protection is now under threat, because the Kent and Medway Structure Plan is in the process of being superseded by a new South East Plan prepared under central government guidance by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) in Guildford; and Maidstone Borough Council is being required to draw up numerous new Development Plan Documents, all of which will replace the

current Borough-Wide Plan and will be subordinate to the new South East Plan and to PPG3, virtually writing Kent County Council out of the local planning policy scene. So far there is no sign that any of these new plans will contain language of the same clarity and strength as that in the existing Kent County Council plan designed to protect urban areas such as ours from cramming and character-destruction. The first draft of the South East Plan actually earmarked the Maidstone area for slightly less new housing than currently under construction, but Maidstone Borough Council has asked for more, and has voted also to approve “high-tech” commercial development between Junctions 5 and 8 of the M20.

The Society has been able to secure listing as one of the organisations to be consulted at each stage of the development of these new plans. We have already submitted detailed criticism of the proposed South East Plan, describing it as fundamentally flawed and likely to lead to warehousing, trucking and retailing operations along the base of the North Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in the Special Landscape Area near Junction 8; to urban cramming, serious water shortages and to even greater strain on the area’s inadequate transport infrastructure. We have urged concentration instead on improvements to Maidstone town centre, on the preservation of the special character of its urban and surrounding rural areas, and on improvements to its educational and transport infrastructure as the only effective means of attracting high-quality business investors.

Affordable Housing and Open Spaces

The first two new Development Plan Documents on which Maidstone Borough Council has now invited the Society’s comments are those on Affordable Housing and Open Spaces. Both seem to us to suffer from the same flaw, with serious implications for cramming in Bearsted. The former sets targets for the percentage of affordable (i.e mainly subsidised social) housing which developers must include in all new developments, and the latter sets targets for contributions to be made by developers to create new green open spaces to replace any they destroy. But in each case developers are excused from meeting these targets in developments below a certain size, which will give them a huge incentive to avoid large-scale developments and go for smaller ones such as those we are now increasingly seeing all over Bearsted, pulling down single characterful period properties with large gardens and replacing them with higher density pastiche

housing. Bearsted is particularly vulnerable, since much of its rapidly shrinking supply of greenery is in the gardens of its houses, much of which could be lost and the character of the village changed beyond recognition over a relatively short period of time, and without even the consolation of replacement greenery and space being required to be provided elsewhere in the village. The Society will press for measures to avert this threat.

Copies of the comments and objections submitted by the Society on all the above planning applications and policy issues are available from the Secretary (see back page).

Footpath Group Walks Programme

| Date | Start Time & Place | Route |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Saturday 21 January | 1.00 p.m. at Bearsted Green (Pond). 1.20 p.m. at Linton Public Car Park | Linton Car Park - Greensand Way - Wierton - Linton Park - Linton Car Park. Distance: 5 ½ miles |
| Saturday 18 February | 1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green (Pond). 1.30 p.m. at Jade's Bridge, Detling | Jade's Bridge - Boxley - Boarley Warren - North Downs Way - Detling. Distance: 6 miles |
| Saturday 18 March | 1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green (Pond) | The Green - Milgate - Fulling Mill - Old Mill Road - Leeds - Forge Lane- Spout Farm - Milgate - The Green. Distance: 6 miles |
| Saturday 15 April | 1.30 p.m. at Bearsted Green (Pond) | The Green - Barty - Five Wents -Snarkhurst Wood - Eyhorne Street - Strickets Garden - Ripple - Barty - The Green. Distance: 7 miles |
| Saturday 20 May | 1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green (Pond). 1.30 p.m. at Cobham Manor | Cobham Manor - Whitehall - North Downs Way - Hucking Hill House - Coldblow - Aldington - Cobham Manor. Distance: 5 miles |
| Saturday 17 June | 1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green (Pond). 1.30 p.m. at Penenden Heath Children's Playground Car Park | Penenden Heath - Boxley - North Downs Way - Harp Farm - Boarley Warren - Boxley- Penenden Heath. Distance: 6 miles |

Neither the Society nor the Walk Leaders accept any responsibility for any accidents occurring to or caused by any person, animal or dog on our walks. Walkers are urged to be vigilant when crossing or walking on roads, paths, etc. Dogs are welcome but must be kept on leads and under control at all times. Adults should be members of the Society, and children should be accompanied by a responsible adult. See September issue of this Newsletter, page 4, for detailed advice on footwear, clothing, etc. For further details call Mike Perring on 739109



Round The Oasts

An occasional feature page in which we review interesting aspects of life past and present in and around Bearsted and Thurnham. We are indebted to the Bearsted and District Local History Society for permission to base this article on extracts from their pamphlet "Baroness Orczy and Bearsted".

We seek him here, we seek him there. Those Frenchies seek him everywhere. Is he in heaven? - Is he in hell? That demmed, elusive Pimpernel?

Actually, we find signs of him all over Bearsted, for it was to Snowfield in Yeoman Lane that his creator Baroness Orczy came from London via Thanet to live some five years or so after the inspiration for Sir Percy Blakeney, The Scarlet Pimpernel, first came to her on a cold, foggy, smelly day in 1903 on the platform of Temple underground station. In her autobiography written in 1944 she relates how she saw him there *"just as you know him now ... his exquisite clothes, his slender hands holding up his spy-glass his lazy drawling speech, his quaint laugh."*

The Baroness loved the size and location of Snowfield, which she bought from the banker Henry Tasker, but thought the front of the house ugly, so commissioned the architect Andrew Prentice to replace it with the lovely Queen Anne style façade we see today. And it is her we have to thank too for the delightful Little Snowfield, also designed for her by Andrew Prentice and built as a home for her widowed mother Emma Orczy.

In 1912 the Baroness founded the boy scout troop in Bearsted, one of the earliest in the country, naming it after her famous hero. Her husband, Montague Barstow, painted the Troop Flag which bears the device of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and every member of the group still wears a small badge on a scarf which depicts the scarlet pimpernel flower. The Baroness provided a signed copy of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* every year for the winner of the troop competition. How many copies, we wonder, still survive in Bearsted and Thurnham's bookcases?

The Baroness felt she should be treated as the Lady of the Manor, and made a great impression as she drove about the village in her carriage and pair, with little girls expected to curtsy and boys to raise their caps as she passed. A postillion sat behind her and sounded his horn as the carriage swept towards Snowfield along Yeoman Lane. Hearing it, the domestic staff assembled in two lines in the hall as she entered the house. We are told she regarded Pelham Warner of cricketing fame in Caring House some two miles away as her "nearest neighbour", suggesting a low opinion of all in between.

Tasker, Blakeney, Caring, Pimpernel - ring any bells? Imagine the Baroness in her carriage and pair sweeping past you next time you walk down them or down Yeoman Lane.

New Planning Applications

These are the most recent planning applications for locations in Bearsted and Thurnham registered with Maidstone Borough Council. If you have particular concerns about any of them, please let us know.

| Reference | Location | Description |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---|
| MA/04/1608/03 | St. Faiths, St. Faiths Lane | Application for approval of reserved matters of landscaping |
| MA/05/2358 | 36 Manor Rise | New 4-bedroom 2-storey house replacing existing bungalow - revised plans |
| MA/05/2363 | 25, Mynn Crescent | Conversion of existing attached garage to living accomodation |
| MA/05/2309 | 162 Ashford Road | New detached house on land to rear of 162 Ashford Road |
| TA/0146/05 | Eylesden Court | Notification of intention to fell one Cypress tree in Conservation Area |
| TA/0147/05 | Eylesden Court | Application to fell one and crown lift or remove limbs of 4 other protected trees |
| TA/0148/05 | Majors Lakes Ashford Road | Application to fell 2 and crown lift 8 protected trees |
| MA/04/1608/02 | St Faiths, St Faiths Lane | Conversion of existing Bungalow - part approval of reserved matters of design and external appearance |
| MA/05/2251 | 100 Ashford Road | Single and 2-storey extensions to side and rear (amendments to previously approved application) |
| MA/05/2253 | St Faiths, St Faiths Lane | Erection of double garage and groundsman facility, to be used as sales office for the development |
| MA/05/2202 | 30 Fauchons Close | Rear conservatory |
| MA/05/2185 | 23 Bodsham Crescent | First floor side extension over garage |
| MA/05/2154 | 14 Tydeman Road | Retrospective: double detached garage |
| MA/05/2158 | 27 Ashford Road | Rear extension, part two storey, part single storey |
| MA/05/2160 | Nanesta, Roundwell | 2-storey rear extension replacing existing extension and conservatory; 3 dormers to each side elevation |
| MA/05/2169 | The Old Cottage Sutton Street | Listed building consent: new 2-storey extension to south elevation and single storey extension to west |
| MA/05/2124 | 1 Tasker Close | Two-storey side extension |
| MA/05/2126 | Cara Cottage, The Green | Reinstatement of rear boundary fence |

Published by the Bearsted and Thurnham Society

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