



Bearsted & Thurnham Report

April
2006

The Newsletter of the Bearsted & Thurnham Society

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on Tuesday 30 May at 7.30 p.m. at the Memorial Hall, Manor Rise. We have invited the County Highways Officer to speak on his role in the planning applications process, so we need a big turnout for him and lots of questions. Please put a note in your diary and do your best to be there.

The regular agenda will include approval of our annual report and accounts; election of Officers and Committee members; the fixing of the subscription rate for 2006/7, and a small amendment to our Constitution to require 'independent examination' rather than 'audit' of our accounts. If you would like to add any other agenda items, please contact the Secretary (see back page) by 10 May 2006.

Bearsted Parish Plan Meeting

Bearsted Parish Council has called a public meeting on Tuesday 23 May at 7.30 p.m. at the Memorial Hall, Manor Rise, to inaugurate the process of developing a Parish Plan. That process will involve the creation of a committee of volunteers, working independently but with the support of the Parish Council, to prepare the Plan. This exercise is of absolutely crucial importance to the future of Bearsted, because the Plan when complete will constitute the agreed vision for the future of Bearsted which Maidstone Borough Council will be required to take into account when reaching planning decisions. It will therefore be the ground on which the battle to save the character of Bearsted will be won or lost. It is vital that Members turn out in strength to place their wishes for Bearsted on record, and that we have Members from all parts of the Parish willing to serve on the volunteer committee. Your Society Committee cannot do this alone. Please be there, and, if you have time, energy, ideas and skills to offer, please be ready to volunteer. Your decision might make the difference between success and failure.

Services and Amenities for People with Disabilities

The Society has published a further booklet by Joan Brown - *Services and Amenities for People with Disabilities in Bearsted and Thurnham*, covering some of the ground in her earlier booklet *Services and Amenities for Older People* but this time focusing on the interests and needs of people with disabilities of all ages and packed with much new information on services specific to them including grants, transportation, care services, recreational facilities etc. As before, send a 2nd class stamped addressed envelope (C5 size - 9" x 6³/₈") to the Secretary if you would like a free copy.

The Society's Drop-Kerb Initiative

Bearsted and Thurnham's footpaths seem to the Society to have been laid out with little if any consideration for vulnerable wheelchair, scooter and pushchair users who are forced repeatedly to take their chances in the roadway along with fast-moving traffic by the lack of drop-kerbs at key points. We are in touch with the Parish Council about the possibility of using Council funds to put this right. The first problem is to prioritise the work to ensure that funds are concentrated where the need is greatest. If you suffer from this problem, tell us where you would like work done.

Traffic Problems at Cavendish Way

The Society has asked Bearsted Parish Council to reconsider its decision to extend the double yellow lines along both sides of the Ashford Road near Cavendish Way. We fear they will make even worse an already dangerous situation caused by motorists manoeuvring for the extremely limited parking space near the Post Office, and by the widespread violation of the existing double yellow lines on Cavendish Way. We will press for improved enforcement of the latter, and for improved parking facilities in the area.

Almshouses in Maidstone

The Cutbush and Corral Charity provide almshouse accommodation for those in need of it and who live in the Borough of Maidstone. They have 110 almshouses in all, situated in the more central areas of Maidstone. The accommodation is maintained to a high standard. There are two Wardens, but it is expected that residents look after themselves. The rent is low by comparison with other housing organisations. The Charity have advised us that vacancies do arise from time to time, and that application forms can be obtained from them at College Farmhouse, 40 College Avenue, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6YJ or by telephoning 765612 or 678341.

Road Stewards

We are most grateful to Patricia Laws for all she has done for the Society, and send our best wishes for a speedy recovery from the illness which prevents her from continuing as our Road Steward for Bodsham Crescent, Tasker Close, Button Lane and Smallhythe Close. We are indebted to **Jan and John Bowrage** for kindly agreeing to take over from Pat in that capacity. We still urgently need more Road Steward volunteers, especially in the Ware Street and Merton Road areas. Please contact the Secretary if you are able to help.

Do we have your e-mail Address?

We often use e-mail to alert Members to issues that arise between Newsletters. Some of the content of this Newsletter has been previously e-mailed. If you have an e-mail address but have not informed us of it, or if it has changed, you may be missing out on information that is important to you. If in doubt, please e-mail your address to the Secretary (see back page).

New Pavilion for The Green

Bearsted Parish Council has submitted an application for planning

permission to replace the existing single storey wooden pavilion on The Green with a 2-storey brick one incorporating public toilets at the rear and, possibly, a public meeting room. The Chairman of the Parish Council kindly agreed to our request to ensure that residents of neighbouring properties were consulted individually about the proposals before they were submitted. Our e-mail notice to Members about this generated eight responses, three of which gave unqualified support, three were conditionally supportive, and two were opposed. The points raised and the responses to them since kindly provided by the Parish Council are set out below.

Points Raised by Members

Answers from the Parish Council

Whereas the soft natural look of the dark weatherboarding of the present pavilion blends in well, a 2-storey brick structure might at best be obtrusive and out of place and at worst become an eyesore, especially if it has roller shutters that attract graffiti.

The Plans for the new pavilion can be seen in Parish Office.

The interior is in very poor condition
The Parish Council are convinced the new Pavilion will be better than the present building

Are the toilets really necessary? Who will supervise them and keep them clean? They may attract 'undersirables' and loiterers. They could become a nuisance to nearby houses at rear of pavilion.

The Parish Council will need to employ a caretaker or investigate the possibility of volunteer surveillance

Any windows to the rear should not overlook houses.

It should be on the same footprint as the existing structure and have architecture in keeping with the scene of The Green.

The pavilion will sit on the same footprint

Is a new meeting room really necessary?

We are intending to use the tea-room as a meeting place

Multi-Play Area for Elizabeth Harvie Field

The Parish Council is also considering converting the top half of Elizabeth Harvie Field (the end nearest Holy Cross) into an all-weather 'multi-play area' in response to proposals from the Bearsted Youth Forum. Our e-mail notice to Members about this generated nine responses. Two gave unqualified support and three gave conditional support believing it to meet a real need. Five were strongly opposed. The points raised and the responses to them since kindly provided by the Parish Council are set out below.

Points Raised by Members on Elizabeth Harvie Field

The peace of the Churchyard and the field will be destroyed. It is the wrong location - isolated from the village and not overlooked so it will lead to misbehaviour and vandalism. Would it be better to locate it between the Scouts and Guides huts?

Who will supervise it, and will there be a management and booking system for any clubs to use it? Will it interfere with the existing use of the field by children's football development squads? If it is built to a useful size it will restrict the space available to the people who use the field in summer.

It violates the intention of the Elizabeth Harvie bequest. The land was left for children, not for adolescents with nothing to do. It will encourage the congregation of groups of youths and deter villagers from using the facility left to them by Elizabeth Harvie.

Will it set a development precedent? The wide open space of the field with its stunning view of the Downs is a treasure that should not be violated. It should be located on brownfield land not greenfield. We should be preserving what little open land remains in Bearsted, the more so as the many trees planted on the Woodland Trust land mature.

It may disturb Church services and cause car parking problems on Sunday mornings. There may be problems with balls coming into the Churchyard unless it has a high fence.

It will be fine if it is just a playing surface but if buildings are involved it will require careful consideration.

Parish Council Answers

This area was identified by the young people themselves. It will need to be monitored. The Scouts and Guides were asked to release part of their land but refused to do so. If anyone can suggest an alternative site please let the Parish Council know.

The multi-play area will be open to all and the management will be undertaken by the Parish Council. This facility will not stop football being played on the other half of the Elizabeth Harvie Field

The deeds of the Field state that it should be used for general recreation and as a children's play area. Details are in the Parish Office.

The multi-play area will not block views and the land and facilities will be being used by children so no violation of the terms of purchase.

The multi-play area will be fenced off but it is not anticipated there will be a major noise problem. If there is this will need to be controlled.

There will be no buildings of any kind.

Reply to our Letter to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott MP

Members who follow the issue closely will know that the stock reply of Maidstone Borough Council when we object to planning applications which threaten to destroy the character of our village is that the guidance known as PPG3 issued to them by the Deputy Prime Minister leaves them no choice but to approve them. There are four possibilities here: (1) Maidstone Borough

Council are, by accident or design, misinterpreting PPG3, and do have the power to protect the character of our neighbourhoods if they so choose; (2) the Deputy Prime Minister did not foresee this unfortunate consequence of PPG3 and will put it right in the new PPS3 guidance which is to replace it; (3) the Deputy Prime Minister did not foresee or intend the consequence, but now feels it cannot be helped and proposes to do nothing about it; (4) the Deputy Prime Minister did foresee and intend this consequence and intends to continue the policy in PPS3.

Our MP, Hugh Robertson, wrote at our request to Mr Prescott in January asking him to say which of these four possibilities is the correct one. The Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper MP, replied on his behalf in March saying that because of Mr Prescott's role in the planning system she could not reply to our specific question, only 'set out the government's expectations under national policy planning guidance'. This is what she then had to say:

'We expect new housing to be secured in the most sustainable way possible, giving priority to previously developed (brownfield) land, bringing empty homes back into use, and converting existing buildings, in preference to greenfield development. New development should be well-designed; make efficient use of land; be sensitive to the needs of people; and be sensitive to the impact it has on the environment and the surrounding area. It should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the area. Design and layout should be informed by the wider context, having regard to neighbouring buildings and also the townscape and landscape of the wider locality.

Developments in the past have tended to be too wasteful of land, which is unsustainable, increasing reliance on the car and putting pressure on the need to release greenfield land. That is why our policies require the best use of land that is available to meet housing need.

However, just because proposed development might be on brownfield land and contribute towards making an efficient use of land, this does not automatically mean that it should be developed for housing. These are not the only aspects of the policy that applications for housing development should be considered against. PPG3 policies do not give an open invitation to new development whatever it is or wherever it is. They stress the need for a well-integrated mix of housing development in the right place and at the right time. In determining planning applications for new housing development, as well as brownfield and density issues, local planning authorities need to consider other aspects, such as whether they are suitable for housing and whether the site should be released now. They should test a site's suitability for housing against a number of factors, including whether there is sufficient capacity of both existing and potential infrastructure and local services to absorb further development. They should also consider the appearance of the proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings as material considerations, and reject those that have been badly designed.

It is ultimately for local authorities to make judgements on the basis of all relevant information, weighing in the balance the need for housing development, the need for wider housing opportunity and choice, the design of the development, the value of preserving certain forms of housing and the capacity of other sites to meet housing need.

Draft PPS3 retains the priority of development on brownfield land and making the most efficient use of land by building at higher densities- This approach weighs up

density policies in relation to the location of development, and the need to consider efficient use of land, the impact on service provision, promoting good design and the desirability of maintaining the character of particular areas. We are asking local planning authorities to be proactive about their design aspirations for their areas and develop a clear vision with local communities about the types of residential environments they wish to see.'

Members may feel that if this reply can be taken at face value, then there is something very wrong with Maidstone Borough Council's claim that PPG3 leaves them powerless to prevent re-development of our characterful, low-density neighbourhoods. Conversely, if the Council are right in that claim, then this reply cannot be taken at face value. With the forthcoming local elections in mind, we showed this correspondence to the Conservative Shadow Housing Minister, Michael Gove MP, and to his Liberal Democratic counterpart, Andrew Stunnell MP, and asked them to say what policy changes in this field they would hope to be able to introduce in government. Extracts from their replies are set out below.

Reply from Michael Gove MP, Conservative Shadow Housing Minister

'As Shadow Housing Minister, I hear of many communities being affected by this aspect of the Government's planning policy and know of the problems that have been caused. All too often, the effect of the Government's guidance is to change the character of residential neighbourhoods and communities, with the arbitrary density targets leading to town cramming. The Government has altered the planning system to make it easier for them to meet their brownfield development targets - all at the expense of the residents of Britain's suburbs, towns and villages.

I believe that this aspect of the planning system needs a thorough review, and I was delighted to see that my Conservative colleague, Greg Clark MP, has brought forward a Bill that would re-classify gardens as greenfield sites, making them less susceptible to in-fill development. Unfortunately, it is very unlikely that the Government will allow this sensible proposal to progress.

As you will be aware, the Conservative Party is currently in a period of policy renewal, following the election of David Cameron as Party leader. David has established a series of policy groups to undertake the serious, detailed, long-term thinking on the biggest challenges currently facing Britain. The Quality of Life group (www.qualityoflifechallenge.com), chaired by John Gummer MP and involving the environmentalist Zac Goldsmith, will be addressing the important areas of housing and reform of the planning system, among others.

We are moving forward with proposals for addressing in-fill development. David Cameron has recently asked the group to look at ambitious changes that would discourage in-fill development of soulless blocks of flats in inappropriate locations. It is vital that the planning system facilitates the revitalisation of our suburban communities and encourages the development of the homes with gardens and parking spaces that families want. Failure to address the issues that you raise can only result in the growth of grey urban deserts around our city centres.'

**Reply from Andrew Stunnell MP, Liberal Democrat
Shadow Minister for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister**

'You will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of the cases you cite in your village. However, my own planning authority in the North West of England has been facing a similar set of circumstances. Its newly adopted planning guidelines are designed to provide the protection you seek for your area. They have now been tested and upheld at appeal by the Planning Inspectorate.

I note that success has been achieved not least because the total number of housing units for which approval has already been given exceeds the total allocated to the local authority area as set out in the Draft Local Plan. Hence it has been possible to restrict redevelopment of existing housing sites to a one-for-one level which is rather unattractive to developers. If that is also true for your area, success may be possible using the same line of reasoning.

More widely, having taken up my role only in the last few weeks, I am undertaking a review of the Liberal Democrat approach to planning and housing policy, and will be feeding practical cases such as yours into the study we do.'

PPS3 Consultation

There is certainly no sign that the second of the four possibilities we put to Mr Prescott (see pages 4/5 above) is the correct one; the draft PPS3 Guidance issued for public consultation appears in places to allow Councils scope to set their own housing density levels, rather than use those prescribed by PPS3, in order to protect the special character of particular neighbourhoods and to protect residential gardens from being built on, but this apparent concession is elsewhere undermined by statements that there should even then be an 'assumption' of an absolute minimum density for developments of 30 dwellings per hectare. On past form Maidstone Borough Council will interpret this as meaning that, unless it is in a conservation area, they cannot refuse any application to pull down a house with a large garden and build several houses in its place. Indeed, rather than refuse, they are more likely to encourage the applicant to increase the number of new dwellings proposed. We are seeing a striking example of this at the moment at 8 Manor Rise, where the owners commendably wish to honour a covenant limiting the site (previously occupied by one house which burnt down) to a maximum of two homes, but are having to resist suggestions from Maidstone Borough Council officials that 7 to 10 dwellings could be crammed on it.

The Society has submitted strong representations calling for the PPS3 guidance to be changed to allow no possible room for doubt as to the right of Councils to preserve the character and gardens of existing low-density neighbourhoods.

Tunbridge Wells in the Same Boat

It is clear that we are not alone. Recent articles in the national press report similar protests from communities nationwide, one of them being Tunbridge Wells. Its MP, Greg Clarke, has tabled a Private Members Bill in the House of Commons calling for the 'brownfield' designation of residential gardens to be scrapped for reasons virtually identical to those we have been arguing.

If the government were willing to accept Mr Greg's and our case, no Bill would be needed, just a few short amendments to the draft PPS3. If no such amendments materialise, and if the Government then kills the Bill by refusing to provide Parliamentary time for it, only two interpretations will be possible: either the Government wants high-quality, low-density neighbourhoods of great character and greenery - the architectural history of our villages - destroyed to make way for high-density housing, or, at best, it does not care enough about the fact that they are being destroyed through misinterpretation of its guidance by local councils to do anything about it.

Local Elections on 4 May

Local elections for one third of Maidstone Borough Councillors take place on 4 May. Current party strengths are:

Conservative	24
Liberal Democrat	20
Labour	8
Independent	3
Total	54

No party currently has the 28 seats required for outright control. A Liberal Democrat/Labour coalition exercises power. Four Conservative gains or eight Liberal Democrat gains would be required to end this situation (because only 18 seats are being contested, a Labour overall majority is mathematically impossible).

Planning Application Casework

It has been a relatively quiet period for new planning applications. The Society objected successfully to a last-minute attempt by the developers of **St Faiths** to add a double garage and groundsmans facility to the development just inside the entrance from Yeoman Lane, which would have negated all the conditions set for landscaping of the site. We also submitted observations on the proposed conversion to office use of a **barn on Caring Lane** in the hope of securing a transport plan to minimise traffic and of improving a dangerous blind entrance while preserving the rural character of the lane. The conditions attached to the grant of planning

permission seemed to meet the last two points satisfactorily but we were unable to secure the transport plan. Thurnham Parish Council are we understand pursuing a quiet lane scheme solution to the problem.

We objected also to proposals to cut back to 6 feet all 7 trunks of the **tree in the grounds of the White Horse pub**, arguing that the reasons given lacked substance and that the more mature trunks at least should be preserved as a significant part of the conservation area's limited greenery. All seven trunks were then cut before the Council had reached a decision in the case. The Council tell us that because the six-week period of notice required had expired, and because the tree was not subject to a preservation order and, being diseased, was not eligible for one, they would have been powerless to stop it anyway.

The Council then did exactly the same thing at **Eylesden Court**, failing to take a decision within the six-week notice period with the result that an unprotected cypress tree was felled. This time they said that the tree did not qualify for the preservation order that would have been needed to save it because it was not visible from The Green. That being so, one wonders why they then lamely expressed to the owners the 'hope' (unenforceable) that they would plant a suitable nursery specimen to replace it. The moral of the story seems to be that if any tree means a great deal to you, start pressing for a preservation order for it now before it falls victim to another bout of masterly inactivity at Maidstone Borough Council.

We alerted residents of **Colegate Drive** to the deadline for objections by them as its joint freeholders to an application for outline planning permission to create an access route through the Drive for a new bungalow to be built at the rear of **The Limes**. We are opposing the application to build the bungalow because we believe the land concerned is greenfield, never having been a part of any garden; because it is a known habitat for slow worms and grass snakes, and because we believe the setting of nearby listed buildings will be impaired.

A similar public notice has appeared in the Kent Messenger in which '**Lipscomb Cars, Yeoman Garage**' give freeholders and tenants of land in their area notice of their intention to submit an application for outline planning permission for a 50-bed care home, 14 residential units, and an office development. There are indications that the proposed site will include both the Volvo cars dealership and the **BP station**. The implications for the existing extremely difficult parking and accessibility situation in the area, and the right of way down the bridleway to the rear, will need careful watching.

New Planning Applications

Other planning applications for locations in Bearsted and Thurnham recently registered with Maidstone Borough Council are listed below. If you have particular concerns about any of them, please let us know.

Reference	Location	Description
MA/06/0598	15 Fauchons Close	2-storey side extension, conservatory, new front dormer and pitched roof over existing flat one
MA/06/0602	Church Lane Car Park	Removal of embankment to increase parking space
MA/06/0605	The Green	Erection of a 2-storey replacement pavilion with public toilets to rear
MA/06/0623	Weaving Street	New detached house adjacent to Rose House
MA/06/0624	19 Rosemary Road	Single storey rear kitchen extension and new front porch
MA/06/0565	24 Manor Rise	Replacement conservatory
MA/06/0526, 0560, 0561	Black Horse Inn, Pilgrims Way	Extension to letting rooms. Single storey rear extension to kitchen. Listed building consent.
MA/06/0552	104 Ashford Road	2-storey side and single storey front extensions
MA/06/0542	Thurnham Lane	Certificate of lawfulness for proposed detached garage with storage at Thurnham House
MA/06/0535	17 Willington Street	Erection of 3-bed detached house and 2 garages on adjacent site
MA/06/0508	Former KFF site, Ware Street	2½ storey dwelling - amendment to previous approval of plot 7 - MA/01/1297
MA/06/0501	15 Royston Road	Rear conservatory
MA/06/0487	Church Landway	Use of land opposite bowling club as football pitch
MA/06/0428	1 Spot Lane	Double car port
MA/06/0456	Rear of The Limes, The Green	Outline application for one dwelling with garage; means of access only to be considered at this stage; all other matters reserved
MA/06/0370	8 Manor Rise	Erection of 2 detached dwellings with detached garages

Footpath Group Walks Programme

Date	Start Time & Place	Route
Saturday 20 May	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond.	Cobham Manor - Whitehall - North Downs Way - Hucking Hill House - Coldblow - Aldington - Cobham Manor. Distance: 5 miles
	1.30 p.m. at Cobham Manor Riding Centre	
Saturday 17 June	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond.	Penenden Heath - Boxley - North Downs Way - Harp Farm - Boarley Warren - Boxley - Penenden Heath. Distance: 6 miles
	1.30 p.m. at Penenden Heath Children's Playground Car Park	
Saturday 15 July	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond.	Harrietsham - Pole Hill - Waterlane Cottages - Wellesley House - Fairbourne Mill - Harrietsham Distance: 5 miles
	1.30 p.m. at Harrietsham Station	
Saturday 19 August	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond	The Green - Church Landway - Thurnham Mill - Green Hill - Stoneacre - White Horse Lane - Otham Church - The Green Distance: 6 miles
Saturday 16 September	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond.	Jade's Bridge - Stockings Wood - Binbury - Park Valley - Scragged Oak - Amber Wood - Jade's Bridge Distance: 6½ miles
	1.30 p.m. at Jade's Bridge, Detling	
Saturday 21 October	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond.	Hollingbourne - Pilgrims' Way - Morning Dawn - Colyers Wents - North Downs Way - Hollingbourne Distance: 5½ miles
	1.30 p.m. at Hollingbourne	

Friday Evening Walks.

Walks will be held on certain Friday evenings during summer, commencing at 6.30 p.m. at The Green. Dates currently planned are 12 May, 9 June, 7 July, 11 August and 15 September. The distance will be approximately three 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. Walkers need to wear stout footwear, bring adequate wet weather clothing, be prepared to negotiate rough ground, and be able to climb over stiles and up steep slopes. 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. By kind consent of the Local History Society, this piece is based on 'Bearsted Windmill', contributed by R. Spain to 'A History of Bearsted and Thurnham' first published in 1978.

Bearsted Windmill

Few people know that at one time there was a windmill in Bearsted overlooking The Green. It stood on Hog Hill, on the high ground behind Snowfield. It appears on an old map of Bearsted dated around 1840, but had disappeared by 1873.

We are told it was a smock mill, that is either a whitewashed or tarred weatherboard body supporting a cap which would revolve to face the wind. It probably had four sails, which was most common, or possibly six. Nowadays the hill above Snowfield appears densely wooded, but the miller would not have tolerated tall trees causing troublesome wind currents near his sails, so much of the windmill would have been visible from The Green, perhaps looking something like this illustration. Note the sheep grazing on the rough pasture, and the diagonal track that ran across The Green in those days. A steep old road running behind Snowfield House



from opposite Bearsted Station served the mill, down which sacks of flour would have been moved by horse. There are references also to a wind pump erected in the area by a Dr Adams to pump water to his house - the late and much lamented St Faiths Care Home.

Now you know why the street

of houses since built in the area is called Windmill Heights

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