



The Newsletter of the Bearsted & Thurnham Society

Multi-Game Area for Elizabeth Harvie Field Rejected

At our request Bearsted Parish Council provided an opportunity at its regular monthly meeting in July for residents to make representations about its proposal to construct a 'Multi-Game Area' at the south end of the Elizabeth Harvie Field immediately adjoining the Holy Cross Conservation Area. The Society stressed that it recognised the need for such an all-weather games facility somewhere in or near Bearsted, but opposed the use of this site for it, arguing that it was incompatible with the Elizabeth Harvie covenant, would carry security, health and safety risks because of its secluded location, and would be unacceptably damaging to the Holy Cross conservation area. Attendance at the meeting was poor, with the result that supporters rather than opponents of the scheme predominated and the Parish Council members present voted unanimously to proceed with it.

The Society remained concerned that this did not reflect the balance of opinion within its own membership, representations received from opponents having always exceeded those from supporters. There was a further marked increase in opposition following publication of the Parish Council's subsequent application to Maidstone Borough Council for planning permission. We therefore submitted a formal objection to that application.

The proposal had always seemed to us to be quite clearly in conflict with Maidstone Borough Council's formally adopted policies on the preservation of the character and setting of listed buildings, conservation areas and public open spaces, but our scepticism about the planning system was such that we feared the planning application would nevertheless be approved. In the event, we are pleased to report that our scepticism for once proved unwarranted: the application was refused for reasons matching closely the grounds of our objection.

We had hoped that the Parish Council would now focus all its efforts on securing a more acceptable site for an all-weather games facility, and that all sections of the community would support them in that effort. Regrettably however it has decided instead to lodge an appeal against the refusal.

Our New Logo

Observant Members will have noticed the addition of a modified version of the Thurnham Parish symbol to our logo. We are grateful to Thurnham Parish Council for agreeing to this.

Society Website

Thanks to much excellent work by Carey Jack, the Society's website is now up and running at www.bearstedandthurnhamsociety.org. Have a look at it. We hope Members will particularly value the rapid links it provides to many other local websites, including Maidstone Borough Council's planning applications and planning policy pages. Society publications can also be viewed and downloaded from it.

Developments at Junctions 7 and 8 of the M20

Members will have seen the prominent publicity given by Kent Messenger and Downs Mail to public relations materials issued by consultants acting for landowners in the areas of Junctions 7 and 8 of the M20 who want to carry our major developments there. The former would involve extending the existing development at Newnham Court (Nottcutts etc) all the way to Hockers Lane, obliterating much beautiful greenfield land in between, to make way for what it is claimed would be a high-quality business park, a university campus, a private hospital, and the park and ride shifted from its present site near the Eclipse Park development. The Junction 8 proposals would involve allowing the owners to construct a business park to the rear and west of the Ramada Hotel in return for accepting financial help from them over the construction of the much-needed Leeds/Langley bypass.

Highly questionable claims are made for the proposed Junction 7 development by the vested interests behind it. We are told that it is a necessary response to the 'threat' posed to the prosperity of Maidstone by the designation of Ashford and Thames Gateway as special development areas. Since both are well within the travel-to-work area of Maidstone it can be argued that they are in fact the opposite of a threat, with residents of Maidstone standing to share in any of the benefits they offer without the large-scale environmental destruction which residents in those areas will suffer.

They tell us that the Junction 7 and 8 developments will be occupied by high-quality businesses which will improve incomes in Maidstone. They are strangely quiet however when asked to say whether any company not already based in the Maidstone travel-to-work area has yet asked for space even in the Eclipse Park development already nearing completion at Junction 7, let alone in any of these further developments now proposed. All the signs are that much of the space will be taken by firms moving from existing old business premises in the borough, perhaps with the latter being lucratively re-developed as housing - in short, much of this may turn out to be housing development by proxy made possible by shifting businesses from brownfield to greenfield land.

To allow the green environment around Junction 8 to be devastated by development in order to finance the Leeds/Langley bypass would be to inflict on the area a treatment vastly more damaging than the condition such a road should be designed to cure.

At present these proposals have no status. But there is a real danger that they, or something like them - possibly something even worse in the case of Junction 8 where there is still talk also of road/rail interchange facilities at Woodcut Farm - will be adopted as part of Maidstone Borough Council's local development framework unless there is a strong public outcry against them.

We need to know whether our Members feel strongly that the Society should fight them. Let us know. Better still, volunteer to get involved in the fight yourselves, and/or write to the press, to your borough councillors and to your MP letting them know how strongly you feel.

Lipscomb Volvo Site Re-Development

The rumour reported in our last issue that both the Lipscomb and BP sites were to be jointly re-developed turned out to be wrong; Lipscomb alone submitted an application for outline planning permission for a single 2storey block incorporating fourteen 2 bedroom apartments and 300m² of office space, with the frontage on Cavendish Way designed to look like a pair of semi-detached houses. The application was clearly intended to maximise the value of the site for sale, with no intention on the part of the present owners to implement it. The Society objected that for a site of such importance to Bearsted only a final detailed proposal by a committed developer should be entertained, and that any re-development of the adjoining BP site which might be under consideration should be brought forward at the same time to make possible a wider scheme for the whole area with adequate greenery and open space. We also objected that the amount of parking space proposed by Lipscomb (even though they had increased it following our earlier representations) was inadequate, and would lead to even greater parking difficulties in the area, threatening the viability of the local shops and bank. In the event outline planning permission was granted. This merely establishes the acceptability in principle of a mixed development of 14 apartments and 300m² of office space, with all other matters reserved. It was made clear that a greatly improved design will be required in the final application. Depressingly, it was also indicated that parking provision will if anything have to be reduced rather than increased to comply with central government targets. The theory behind those targets seems to be that this will force people out of their cars and onto the buses. The reality is that it will drive them on in their cars to the shops in Maidstone, undermining the viability of our local ones on which those without cars depend.

Road Stewards

Our thanks to the following for responding to our appeal for more Road Steward volunteers: **Pam Cooper** who takes over the **Merton Road** area; **Sorel Bagge** - the **Ashford Road** from Yeoman Lane to Otham Lane; and **Jean Barrett** - **The Green**. We still badly need more Road Stewards to help cover **The Street**, **Sutton Street** and the whole length of **Ware Street** and its offshoots. Please contact the Secretary if you can help. The role involves delivering Newsletters to Members three times a year, collecting annual subscriptions, and generally keeping the Society in touch with local issues and opinions in those areas.

Annual General Meeting

We had a good turnout at our AGM on 30 May. The Chairman's Annual Report

presented to the meeting can be viewed on the Society's website. A small increase in the annual subscription rate to £2.50 per person was approved, as were amendments to the Constitution to require 'independent examination' rather than 'audit' of the accounts. Bernard Head kindly agreed to be elected as account examiner for the coming year. The Society recorded its gratitude to his predecessor Mrs Hawkins, and to Jean Spendley who stood down from the Committee after many years as a Member and Executive Officer. Otherwise, all existing Officers and Committee Members were re-elected.

Bearsted Parish Plan

The inaugural meeting for the development of a Bearsted Parish Plan duly took place on 23 May. Attendance was disappointing, but many opinions about Bearsted's good and bad points were recorded, and 30 or so people volunteered to help with the work. Only about a dozen of those turned out however for the first working meeting coordinated by former Parish Council Chairman Tony Extance on 19 September, when it was agreed to aim to produce a questionnaire for circulation to all households by March 2007. Please let us know what issues you think the questionnaire should cover by e-mailing or writing to the Secretary. What are the good things about Bearsted you want preserved, and/or the bad things you want improved?

Garden Grabbing Developers

Our thanks to Members who took action to drum up support for the efforts in Parliament of Mr Greg Clarke, MP for Tunbridge Wells, to have residential gardens re-designated as greenfield land, not brownfield, with the aim of helping local authorities resist garden grabbing by developers. His proposals attracted backbench support from all parties in Parliament, but the government showed every sign of intending to continue blocking his Private Members Bill, and to claim against all the evidence that its planning guidance already gives local authorities adequate power to protect gardens. It looks increasingly as though the government actually wants large, high-quality homes and gardens destroyed, but lacks the political courage to admit it. Given that virtually none of the new housing built on such sites is affordable - indeed developers prefer such small developments precisely because they allow them to avoid having to include affordable housing - one can only speculate as to its motives.

Planning Applications

The developers of the **St Faiths** site made another attempt to secure planning permission to add a large brick structure just inside the entrance to the site from Yeoman Lane, this time claiming that it would be a temporary sales office only. We again objected, and permission was again refused.

We objected also to an application to build a new bungalow at **Jarrack Barn in Caring Lane**, arguing that it would constitute extension of the Caring Lane rural settlement into the countryside. This application too was refused.

The Society submitted observations on an application for outline planning permission to build a chalet bungalow in the garden of **17 Otteridge Road**, arguing that it should be granted only if conditions were attached to ensure that the entire structure remained behind the existing building line for this part of Otteridge Road and had acceptable boundary arrangements with neighbouring properties. Conditions designed to achieve this were duly attached to the

outline planning permission.

The Society objected also to an application for outline planning permission to replace the bungalow at **41 Roseacre Lane** with a pair of semi-detached town houses, arguing that it would be damaging to the character of the lane and would overbear neighbouring properties. Permission was nevertheless granted, but with encouraging indications that the eventual detailed application might still be refused. Meanwhile the only consolations were conditions limiting the roof height to that of the neighbouring properties and requiring preservation of the 'sylvan appearance' of Roseacre Lane.

We objected also to a re-submitted application for major alterations to **37 Yeoman Way** on the grounds that it amounted to an attempt to achieve incrementally all the changes applied for in the earlier application which had been rightly refused as out of keeping with the street scene, and that it would unacceptably overbear and interfere with the privacy and light of neighbouring properties. A decision is still awaited.

Drop Kerbs

We are pleased to report that work has been carried out to provide drop kerbs at the Roundwell/Ashford Road junction, one of the many sites in the village where we suggested to the Parish Council that it have such work carried out to help disabled scooter and wheelchair users and parents with children in pushchairs. We have been asked to help prioritise the remaining work. If there are junctions without drop kerbs that cause you particularly serious problems, please let us know.

Village Fayre

Thanks to the many Members who so generously donated tombola prizes and helped in other ways with the Society's stand at the Bearsted and Thurnham Fayre, and who came to support us on the day, we had a very good day, making a net profit of £125.50 to be divided between the Fayre Charities and the Society, and recruiting several new Members.

Ragstone Place and Chapel Lane

At the time of the planning applications for the Ragstone Place and Bell Lane developments the Society and both Thurnham and Bearsted Parish Councils expressed strong concern about inadequate vehicle sight lines and the lack of proposals for a safe pedestrian crossing on Ware Street. These concerns were dismissed on the ground that Kent Highways had raised no objections, with the result that Maidstone Borough Council missed the chance to use its 'planning gain' powers under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act to require the developers to finance a crossing as a condition of the grant of planning permission. Kent Highways is now refusing to provide one on the ground that the projected number of users does not justify the cost.

A proposal has now emerged to open a footpath from Ragstone Place into Chapel Lane to enable its residents to reach the station and the village

green without crossing Ware Street to pass under the railway bridge. The residents of Chapel Lane are concerned at the damage this might do to the character of their unadopted lane which they own, and to their privacy and quality of life. The Society is supporting them in that concern, and the efforts of Councillor John Horne of Thurnham to find a way forward in consultation with Thurnham Parish Council, the residents, the developers and the Borough Planners. One important point here is that such a measure would not in any case remove the pressing need for a pedestrian crossing on Ware Street at Ragstone Place for children using the Bell Lane route to and from school.

Recent New Planning Applications

Let us know if any of these cause you concern:

Reference	Location	Description
MA/06/1718	66 Birling Avenue	First floor side and single storey rear extensions
MA/06/1709	21 Roseacre Lane	Listed building consent for internal alterations
MA/06/1708	86 Birling Avenue	Rear conservatory and front porch
MA/06/1674	Bearsted Golf Club	Removal of traffic calming condition for access road off Ware Street for previously approved erection of new club house
MA/06/1664	Bell Yard, Bell Lane	Substitution of two town houses for two apartments previously approved (Plots 1 & 2)
MA/06/1652	Willow Wend, Mt Pleasant Drive	Certificate of lawfulness for erection of garage
MA/06/1628	168 Merton Road	Single storey front extension
MA/06/1605	3 Manor Rise	First floor side and ground floor rear extensions
MA/06/1605	111 Madginford Road	Extension of chiropodist's opening hours on weekdays from 09.00-17.30 to 08.30-19.30
MA/06/1597	28 Otteridge Road	Loft conversion with dormer window and roof lights

Amenities and Services for Older People and for those with Disabilities

Older residents and those with disabilities, whether Members of the Society or not, are reminded that free copies of the Society's booklets listing all the many local amenities and services available to them can be obtained by sending a 2nd class (23p) stamped addressed C5 size envelope (9? x 6¼?) to the Secretary (see back page).

Councillor Pat Marshall MBE

The Society is delighted to see Pat Marshall's many years of outstanding service to our community recognised with the award of an MBE. We send her our warm congratulations.

Footpath Group Walks Programme

Date	Start Time & Place	Route
Saturday 21 October	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond. 1.30 p.m. at Hollingbourne Railway Station	Hollingbourne - Pilgrims' Way - Morning Dawn - Colyers Wents - North Downs Way - Hollingbourne. Distance: 5½ miles
Saturday 18 November	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond. 1.30 p.m. at Hook and Hatchet car park	Hook and Hatchet - Pond Farm - Rumstead Court - Applefield - Old Forge Farm - Smokes Wood - Hucking Hill House - Hook and Hatchet. Distance: 5½ miles
Saturday 9 December	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond. 1.30 p.m. at Averanches Road	Averanches Road - Weaving Street - Vinters Park Nature Reserve - Grove Green - Averanches Road. Distance: 3 miles
Tuesday 26 December	10.30 a.m. at Bearsted Green Pond	Bearsted Green - Church Landway - Thurnham Mill - Green Hill - Merriams - Tudor Park - Bearsted Green. Distance: 5 miles
Saturday 20 January 2007	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond	Bearsted Green - Detling - North Downs Way - White Horse Wood - Thurnham Castle - Coldblow Lane - Aldington - Bearsted Green. Distance: 5½ miles
Saturday 17 February	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond. 1.45 p.m. at Langley Village Hall car park	Langley Village Hall - Langley Loch - Lacey Farm - Leeds - Burberry Lane - Langley Village Hall. Distance: 5½ miles
Saturday 17 March	1.15 p.m. at Bearsted Green Pond. 1.30 p.m. at Hollingbourne Railway Station	Hollingbourne - Eyhorne Street - Old Mill - Leeds Church - Leeds Castle grounds - Eyhorne Street - Hollingbourne. Distance: 4½ 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.

Wet Weather may make it necessary for the Walk Leader to change the route. If in doubt, telephone 736467 or 739109.

Diverted Public Footpaths on Bearsted Golf Course

The Society's Footpath Group objected to the diversion by Bearsted Golf Club of part of three public footpaths across the course without an official diversion order. Following a public hearing on 7 June 2006 in County Hall, the Inspector's report has now been published. An Order has been made confirming the diversions but requiring the Club to provide warning notices, both for golfers at the tees and in the Clubhouse, and for walkers on either side of the diversions where they cross fairways with indications of the direction of play. The Footpath Group believes that these notices, which are something for which it has been pressing for some time, will contribute appreciably to the safety of walkers. Monitoring arrangements for the notices are in hand. It has also been made clear to the Golf Club that it cannot divert public paths at will but must go through the official process.



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 Angela Legood for this feature on Robert Fludd, arguably the most illustrious figure Bearsted has ever produced.

Robert Fludd, Holy Cross and the Da Vinci Code

If you look under the tower of Holy Cross church you will not fail to notice a fine, if somewhat battered, memorial with a long Latin inscription. The inscription tells in brief of the history of the gentleman and physician, Robert Fludd (1574-1637) who was born in Milgate House (still standing next door to the Tudor Park Hotel) and is buried in the chancel of this his home church.

He began his adult life with two degrees from Oxford University. Then he travelled for six years on the continent, where he became interested in alchemy, astrology, mechanics, music and other subjects which were part of the world of the early seventeenth century.



He returned to England and became a physician in London. He believed in the power of 'chemical' medicine and in the use of what we might call homeopathy and a magnetic personality. He was a friend and, possibly, an inspiration to William Harvey who discovered the circulation of the blood.

But it is for his books on metaphysics and what modern booksellers called 'esoterica' that Robert Fludd is best known. His writings are liberally illustrated with detailed diagrams to symbolise and condense his thoughts at a time poised between the medieval and the modern. He is still a presence in many modern writings which are influenced by elements of mystery.

Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln's *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail* and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* both contain references to Fludd as the head of the 'Priory of Sion', a secret society concerned with the search for the Holy Grail. I wonder how the Doctor would feel about this?"

Angela Legood

If you would like to read more about this intriguing figure, copies of Angela Legood's book 'Robert Fludd of Bearsted' are available from the newsagents on The Green or from Ottakar's in Maidstone.

Published by the Bearsted and Thurnham Society

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