



Maidenhead Civic Society

NEWS

Issue 3/07

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Canoeing on Maidenhead Ditch!! See inside.

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The Core Strategy – a personal view of the Public Examination

Cllr. Derek Wilson on Maidenhead Town Centre

Regular features on Talks, Outings, the Heritage Centre,
Projects and Planning

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

The major occasion of the past quarter has undoubtedly been the examination before the inspector of the Core Strategy document of the Local Development process. The final version of this will have significant implications for the future development of the Borough in general and for Maidenhead in particular. This issue is well discussed and reported in the pieces by Nigel Cockburn and Bob Dulson. However, I would like to let members know what a tremendous effort has been put into it by both of them. There have been literally hundreds of pages of near impenetrable jargon to wade through as well as considered comments to be made and relevant papers and letters written to appropriate authorities. There have also been meetings to attend culminating in the six days from 10 am to 4.00 pm with the Inspector, Council officers and an assortment of other stakeholders and notably representatives of developers. Moreover there is still more to come!!! I am very gratified that throughout the Local Development Forum (LDF) process meetings the Civic Society has always been among the best represented of the stakeholders.

In the last year or so we have introduced a new approach to Talks and Outings extending these to include other activities which we hope will appeal to members and their friends. We have labelled all these activities as Events and we have been working to build up a comprehensive programme for them up to a year in advance. As we have developed the schedule to a satisfactory degree we have published a forward view of the programme in the Newsletter. We hope in due course to develop this and to launch the forward programme perhaps out to six months ahead as a presentation to members thus giving it adequate advanced publicity. This we hope will allow members to plan to take part in the various activities on offer well in advance. Setting these up takes a great deal of time and effort by Tina Sell and Mike Copeland and it is disappointing for all when we either have a low attendance or have to cancel the event. At the same time we do need to know what members like and dislike. If our members do not tell us, it is difficult to know how to modify our ideas for the future. Please phone or e-mail us with your views-all the relevant e-mail and phone number are given at the back of the Newsletter. In this connection it was very disappointing to have to cancel the last Outing to the Biddenden Winery and the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. Was it too expensive? (The price did include lunch). Or was it too far into the time of year when people are going on holiday? Was there local competition on the day? It would help to know why so few wanted to join what on the face of it was a very attractive Outing.

This message would be incomplete without reference to developments on the Society's new constitution. This was approved at a Special General Meeting on Wednesday, June 20th 2007. We will now need a period during which the effects and opportunities of the new constitution can be worked out and put into practice. There will be a close review of the aims and objectives of the Society with a view to invigorating its work for the betterment of amenity in Maidenhead. As always this will depend on the input of those who freely give their time and effort to the Society. Our aim will be to have a reasonably complete picture to put to members in the October Newsletter.

John McIntosh – Chairman

PLANNING MATTERS

Following the Council elections in May Derek Wilson has taken over from Vicky Howes as the Councillor responsible for planning. He has kindly given us some insight into his initial thoughts on Maidenhead's town centre (see below) and we look forward to working with him and his team.

The public examination of the Borough's Core Strategy was completed in June and we look forward to seeing what changes the Inspector makes to the Council's plan. Some commentary on the Examination process appears later in this Newsletter. However, the LDF process continues to roll on and the next stage is consultation on the Sites and Buildings Development Plan Document (DPD) and the Maidenhead Town Centre DPD. There are important issues to be determined such as how many new dwellings are to be built and where, what will be the density, how high are the buildings going to be, where is the open space coming from and how is all the infrastructure to be provided.

BADNELLS PIT DEVELOPMENT "UNNECESSARY, UNSUSTAINABLE AND UNATTRACTIVE," SAYS PLANNING GROUP

Plans to build nearly 450 homes on the site of the former Badnells Pit have been criticised by the Society's planning group.

Members met to consider the plans in June. They described the proposal as over-development - too dense, too big and out-of-keeping with the surrounding homes. Of particular concern were the four and five-storey blocks of flats at the centre of the new site which they said would dominate the skyline.

In a submission to the Council on behalf of the Society, the group said: "This is a massive development in the suburbs of Maidenhead. It could accommodate more than 1,000 inhabitants which represents a 2% increase in the population of the town." There was no evidence that Maidenhead needed or wanted this amount of new housing and there was certainly not the infrastructure or services to support it. While residential development on this site would be welcome, members said the proposed application, which would be called St Mary's Village, was totally unacceptable. The design was utilitarian and lacked imagination, they said. "We are disappointed to find that in spite of the consultation exercise undertaken by the developer so little notice has been taken of the views expressed.

"A density of 71 dwellings per hectare is far too high for this suburban area and will create a sink estate reminiscent of the tower block estates built in the 1960s. The density of the central apartment blocks is even higher. Four and five storeys are far too dominant especially for the houses next to them on the development.

How the blocks of flats might look

(From the developer's planning application documents, online)



And buildings of 3, 4 and 5 storeys are totally out of character with the immediate surrounding area, which consists principally of 2 storey houses. We should like to see a much less dense development of houses and gardens that will improve the environment and raise the quality of the area.”

The Group also expressed concern over traffic. “One major entrance and exit to the site is insufficient and in addition the surrounding roads do not have the capacity to absorb all the traffic that will be generated. The congestion would have a huge impact.”

OTHER PLANNING APPLICATIONS

During the last three months, in addition the Badnell’s Pit application, the Planning Group reviewed a further 27 applications in detail and commented to the Council on 15 of them. Comments on some of the more significant applications were as follows:

Land at 58-70 Queen Street, and behind (Demolish existing and replace with 50 flats)

Last December we commented on an earlier version of this Application, and repeat this below. We are concerned that no account seems to have been taken by the Planning Department about the access through Cullern’s Passage. We continue to support the principle of building residential accommodation on appropriate land in the town centre, and we recognise the need to improve the overall quality of property in Queen Street.

We have serious reservations though about the access to the block B, which can only be approached through the narrow Cullern’s Passage. We note that no parking is provided, and appreciate that potential residents will realise that limitation. But there remains a need for many service vehicles to be given access to the dwellings proposed. Bins need to be emptied, there will be a succession of deliveries of bulky items, contractors will need to work there from time to time, and we might expect quite regular taxi visits to help with shopping. This is before there is any emergency call for ambulance or fire access. We very much doubt whether this narrow lane can cope with the demands of so many dwellings and, while imagination is being shown in trying to utilise the site, there is too much development being requested to allow for this very severe limitation.

Land adjacent to the roundabout at Ray Mead Road and Bath Road (Install 15m slim line Telecom column with lighting arm m high plus antennae and cabinets)

The site is at a key gateway entrance to Maidenhead by an historic bridge and next to the River Thames. The first view when coming over the bridge into Maidenhead is down the wide avenue of Bridge Road and the location of this high telephone mast will be directly in the view. It will be visually obtrusive and out of character with the area. There must surely be a site such as further down Bridge Road and away from it that would be a less obtrusive alternative.

Playground adjacent to Fawley Close (Residential development to provide 2 two-storey blocks containing 4 one bed and 4 two bed flats)

We regret the loss of this precious piece of open space in a built up area. It is an ideal site for a suitable playground for local children but we understand it would need proper management and supervision by local residents. Alternatively the site could provide some sort of community facility. The development itself is very dense with over 110 dwellings per hectare in an area that is already crowded. It lacks sufficient amenity space and appears to be an over-development of the site. While we generally welcome affordable housing such as this in the town, Maidenhead lacks sufficient open spaces and we would prefer to see a community use that protects this piece of land for the community.

102-110 Alwyn Road (Demolition of existing buildings and residential redevelopment at a density of 39dph and associated access and parking)

Alwyn Road is narrow and is usually crowded with parked cars. We are concerned about the sight lines of traffic leaving the development which may not be able to see traffic approaching on Alwyn Road which will be exceedingly dangerous. We are also concerned that this development will set a precedent for other developments to access via Alwyn Road with similar consequences.

Nigel Cockburn

Continuing Focus On Town Centre

Since taking over the responsibility for Planning and Housing, it is time to reflect on the unique character of Maidenhead and to stimulate growth for the future, to compete with other local neighbouring towns that are going through their regeneration proposals.

I believe that by creating the right environment, business can flourish and this can have a knock-on effect of encouraging new businesses to be created within the town centre. Maidenhead is a town that has been developed on the River Thames, but is quite remote from this and there is a desire to enhance the York Stream waterway that will bring back a unique feature of our town centre.

Cllr David Burbage (Council Leader) and myself are focusing our attention on the town centre, having useful dialogue with the Maidenhead Civic Society, the Waterways Group and the Chamber of Commerce in reviewing proposals that could develop the town centre without losing any of the original character that has made it unique amongst the other Thameside Towns.

One of the town's features, which has been under-used in recent times, is the York Stream area and it is our intention working with partnering organisations to rectify this, for the benefit of the town and local residents.

When anyone refers to the York Stream area, many local people refer to the 'infamous' old cinema site and it is our intention to do something about this at the earliest opportunity. This will clearly depend on the type of scheme that might come forward from any interested party.

I recently attended the Examination in Public of the Borough's Local Development Framework, which will replace the existing Borough-wide Local Plan and spoke on the retention of our Green Belt. The Green Belt plays a significant part of our Borough and must be preserved, as it is part of our heritage for future generations to enjoy.

There are constant pressures being placed on our authority from developers intent on developing on every piece of available land and with the recent announcement by the Prime Minister to continue building more housing within the South East, this pressure will continue for the foreseeable future.

Our housing restraint policy is coming under scrutiny by Inspectors at local appeals, to restrict the amount of housing development within the Borough, as we already have enough development being built and in the pipeline to meet GOSE (Government Office for the South East) targets up to 2011.

There are a number of challenges that we continue to face, the results of the recent examination of our new local plan will not be known until towards the end of August, but we hope by working more closely with local partner organisations, such as the Civic Society, we can develop Maidenhead in a positive way that will improve the character, develop new business opportunities and truly live up to Maidenhead 'Jewel of the Thames'.

Cllr Derek Wilson

Lead member for Planning and Housing

Have I Got A “Preposition” To Put To You?

Just three little words first indicated the size of the task when the Society appeared at the public examination of RBWM’s Core Strategy last month (June)

We had been pleased that many of the Society’s suggestions, made during the consultation stage, had been incorporated, particularly with regard to recognising the character of our towns and settlements. Initiatives we had called for had been included too, including the promise of a transport interchange at the station, a regeneration of the town centre and a specific policy for the protection and enhancement of the River Thames setting.

However, there were important issues like housing delivery; Green Belt and open space where we felt further amendments were necessary to strengthen or improve the policies.

The Core Strategy is an important document. When finally agreed, it will be the foundation for other more detailed policies in the Local Development Framework which will set out the Council’s vision and guide planning decisions up to 2006.

Throughout the six-day hearing before a government Inspector, one of our key messages was the need for the Council to consult residents and stakeholders on what is being planned and to enshrine this in the policies.

We were intrigued that while residents’ views appeared to be regularly dismissed, a promoter of wind turbines succeeded in tabling an amendment to policy (CS13.9) to stipulate that a proportion of every new development’s energy shall be from renewable resources! (Bet he gets a bonus!!). On housing, for example, we argued that what was needed was a strategy or policy, agreed with residents, to determine which types of development will be located where.

Housing Numbers

Ironically, this is something developers would welcome too, but for totally different reasons! There was a phalanx of them present on Day Two as the hearing got into the nitty gritty. Should new development, asked one, be focused ‘in’, ‘on’ or ‘at’ existing settlements? The Council had said ‘in’. He suggested ‘at’. Then the penny dropped. This wasn’t grammatical ineptitude. It was a serious “preposition”. ‘In’ would mean within the boundary of the village or community; ‘at’ could effectively be used to erase those boundaries and mean an urban extension. Their only aim was to maximise numbers. And they wanted our Green Belt!

We had to sit up and take notice.

Council representatives came under uncomfortable pressure from developers and the Inspector about how their housing forecasts would be delivered. Policy CS15 says provision will be made for 5,620 net additional dwellings between 2006 and 2026. Developers argued that the requirement in the SE Plan would be much higher and, without a blush, one suggested that the words “at least” be inserted before 5,620. They also wanted greater flexibility and objected in particular to aspects of CS20, which they saw as enabling a restraint policy.

The Civic Society found itself siding with the Council under the onslaught. Controls were vital against the kind of over-development we’d recently experienced, particularly on windfall sites, which are expected to remain the prevalent source of building land in the Borough.

Then, despite the constraints of Flood Plain, Green Belt and lack of infrastructure, one developer said Maidenhead should be singled out as the preferred choice for new development in the Borough.

The Civic Society disagreed. There was no justification whatever for locating 50% of the housing allocations in Maidenhead, let alone elevating it to priority status, said the Society's delegate, Nigel Cockburn.

Green Belt

Protocol dictated that only those who had objected to a particular policy were entitled to discuss it at the Hearing. As far as the Green Belt was concerned, the Civic Society had thought the Council's draft policy was solid but in the interim others, including GOSE and, of course, the building industry, had suggested amendments which queered the pitch. So it was under pressure from both ends. However on the day, Cllr Derek Wilson, the Tories' new Cabinet member for planning, spoke out strongly in defence of preserving the Green Belt, which accounts for 83% of the Borough's total area.

Throughout the proceedings the Society used every opportunity to attempt to build in a requirement for providing more public open space in Maidenhead. Maidenhead fell 50% short of the national norm for open space in town, said Nigel Cockburn. "Policy CS25 is reliant on developers for the delivery of the shortfall. It contains no other commitment to providing much-needed open space." The Council's reason for the omission was the financial implications and that to amend the policy now would require a "political decision". The Society regarded this as a blinkered view – it did not even leave the door open to other opportunities (benefactors, patrons, etc.). The existing Local Plan recognises the need and this should be carried forward into the new Core Strategy.

Together with the River Thames Society and the Marlow Society, we welcomed the inclusion of a policy (CS8) to protect & enhance the River Thames setting.

However, concern was expressed that the SE Plan might not include a similar overarching plan and therefore RBWM should get together with its neighbours and partners to define and map the River Thames Corridor. The Civic Society proclaimed that "the River Thames should be seen not merely as a boundary but as a shared amenity", which seemed to catch the Inspector's eye. With Skindles and the Taplow Mill in mind, we need to be assured that where there are genuine mutual interests a mechanism exists that requires cross-border collaboration.

Arithmetic

They say you can make statistics prove anything! And on Day Six the Borough was called on to justify its projections for employment land – the provision of office and retail premises.

Like the Housing Delivery session it was a game in which the developers, looking always to push up the figures, enjoyed bowling googlies; and the Council, on the back foot, persisted in playing a straight bat to keep the targets within manageable limits. As 'umpire', the Inspector remained creditably impartial on the day. We await his decision.

The Council said it aimed to meet the "smart growth" objective – matching employment opportunities to housing growth. Local jobs for local people meant less strain on infrastructure and environment. But a developer with a keen wit and mental arithmetic to match calculated a sizeable imbalance twixt houses and jobs. "It follows that more housing would help smart growth," he opined.

For the Society, Nigel Cockburn complained that, just as with the Urban Potential Review on housing, there had been no consultation on the Council's proposals for employment land. "In some places they assume six and even eight-storey buildings," he said. And the figures meant that Maidenhead would be accommodating 80% to 90% of the Borough's total office development.

Asked by the Inspector how they had decided that a site was appropriate for an eight-storey building, the Council said a couple of them had gone out and had a look!

Town Centre

Nigel suggested that a quick walk round the town would show there was an over-supply of sites for employment. There were empty offices and empty shops everywhere. So there was scope for making use of business land for housing.

But a developer disagreed. “Even on the tenuous evidence given by the Council it’s apparent they are under intense pressure and juggling all three requirements. Their ability to meet employment needs is at best debateable,” he said.

However, there was some good news on Maidenhead Town Centre. It will be the subject of an Issues & Option Paper in November, with Preferred Options next year. “The importance is increasing the viability and vitality of the town centre,” said RBWM Head of Planning Policy, Peter Hitchen. His sidekick, Sarah Ball, added that this would involve “vigorous consultation” – or did she say ‘rigorous’? (One way or another, we thought, they’ll be getting their own back!)

Once Legoland and Arena Leisure (Windsor Racecourse) had pleaded their case for special treatment, there was little to be had from the discussion on “Tourism & Leisure” – though it contains little specific to the latter. The Society proposed special mention for the River Thames and for footpaths but by this time... the priority was tea.

Bob Dulson

Riverside Development Opportunity?

Members may have seen reports that the Taplow Mill site, which includes Skindles, is on the market – again.

But even if you’re interested with several millions to spare you may be too late. The closing date for unconditional offers for the freehold was June 29th. However, the earliest we can expect to hear anything of the outcome is mid-August, according to agents, King Sturge.

Last August mill owners St Regis caused ripples across the river by selling the 48-acre site to Watchword a small company of property speculators in an unconditional sale, reportedly worth £30 million.

To try and make sure that this important and environmentally valuable area of Thames riverside is protected and improved, the Civic Society has been liaising with colleagues in the Hitcham & Taplow Preservation Society, local residents and the River Thames Society.

With the backing of amenity groups like ours, South Bucks District Council moved swiftly to extend the Taplow Riverside Conservation Area to include the part of the site which borders the Thames. The Area has recently been the subject of another character appraisal consultation to which the Society has made a submission.

English Heritage were also alerted and, we were pleased to hear, granted Grade II listed status to Glen Island House (pictured) which St Regis has used as its HQ.

Originally it was a “gentleman’s residence”, built in 1869 by Irish baronet and man of renown, Lt Gen Sir Roger Palmer, who rode with the 600 in the Charge of the Light Brigade.



Glen Island House – a Grade II listed building

The site also includes four other buildings of architectural and historic significance as well as Skindles. These include a remarkable U-shaped stabling and carriage building, built in 1880 which bears Palmer’s initials.

Now, however, the whole is being sold again, through the London offices of King Sturge, one of Europe’s largest independent property consultants.

Their full-page colour advertisement in *Estates Gazette*, the journal of the commercial property sector, at the end of May proclaimed: “The property benefits from significant water frontage to the River Thames and Jubilee River.” The existing buildings extend to 15,802 sq.m and, according to the advert, there’s scope for “extended development incorporating residential, commercial, hotel and leisure, health care facilities, care homes and retirement village developments.” Though, with the site being in the Green Belt and the flood plain, it was careful to add: “Subject to the necessary consents.”

The illustration in the advertisement seemed to imply that the site might be subdivided but the agents told us that this was not their intention, although it would depend on what potential purchasers had to say. King Sturge had talked with SBDC who had given an indication of what they want to see ... “something different from what’s there now!” A shortlist of possible buyers has been drawn up and early feedback suggests a leaning towards care homes, an hotel and homes for the elderly – but, sadly, nothing specifically water-related.

Bob Dulson

EVENTS

The Events Group has been busy putting together a programme for the remainder of this year and into 2008 and for the next few months we have:

TALKS

FIGHTING CRIME IN THE ROYAL BOROUGH - Wednesday 19th September 2007 by Peter Bennett

Peter has been a Police Officer in this area for 30 years and is now employed as a civilian Crime Reduction Adviser. He has been in his present position for three years and will be talking about general crime security measures and personal safety.

VISIT TO THE TOWN HALL – Wednesday 17th October 2007

We have arranged a visit to the Town Hall, in St Ives Road, Maidenhead. This will entail a tour and talk on Civic Matters by David Lunn, and will include a glass of wine and canapés. Please remember to return your booking form for this event as we will need to confirm the numbers of those attending. Members are encouraged to bring along any prospective new members, and there will be no charge for them.



The Town Hall, St Ives Road

David Lunn OBE (right) is a lawyer by profession and has spent his career in Local Government. He was articled to the Town Clerk of Hastings and there progressed to Senior Assistant Solicitor in 1974. On local government reorganisation he moved to Brighton Borough Council as Assistant Borough Secretary. In 1982 David joined the Royal Borough, initially as Borough Secretary responsible for the corporate governance of the Council, the legal, administrative and mayoral support services. In 1996 he became Chief Executive and played a key part in creating and shaping the Royal Borough as a unitary authority in April 1998. For those of you who can remember ‘Yes Minister’ and ‘Yes Prime Minister’ David compares his role with that of Sir Humphrey. David takes a particular interest in the Royal Borough’s successful partnerships and chairs a number of them



and is also a board member of the Berkshire Learning and Skills Council.

REPORT ON CROSSRAIL TALK – WEDNESDAY 20th JUNE 2007

The presentation by Simon Bennett, Consultations and Petitions Manager for Cross London Rail Links proved very popular, as shown by the good attendance. Unfortunately Mark Houghton, who is responsible for the Western part of the Crossrail scheme was unable to be present.

Simon spoke very informatively about the need, the design, the route selected and the Parliamentary process to be gone through, in order to achieve this ambitious project of Cross Rail Links from east to west of our capital city. The aim of the project is to help to de-congest rail travel. The Mayor of London foresees 8 million people to be moving around London in 5 to 6 years, therefore rail capacity will require an increase of 20%. The new links will be time saving, cost saving with improved comfort. The proposed route, terminating at Shenfield, in the east, and Maidenhead will be electrified across four tracks. There will be 21 new stations, 28 stations will be upgraded, shafts will be sunk and there will be new signalling and new rolling stock.

The impact on Maidenhead is still under discussion with RBWM. Further consent is needed before going ahead with proposals for the station and surrounds. The widening of Shoppenhangers Road, during construction, is now considered to be no longer necessary. This must be of some comfort to us all after the recent upheaval in that area of the town. Guards Club Park will not be used for storage of materials. These will be stored on alternative land belonging to Railtrack, under the viaduct arches. Equipment will be delivered by rail for the alterations to Maidenhead Railway Bridge. With the coming of the Olympics, it is hoped to work on some areas with urgency. Stratford Station should be completed for 2012.

The Hybrid Bill is still going through Parliament. 466 Petitions were lodged, a third of which have been heard by the Select Committee. The rest have been withdrawn after agreements with the Official Undertaker – Crossrail. The final Report should go to the Lords in January 2008 and it is hoped that the Assent of Parliament will be given in May 2008 enabling construction to begin in late 2008 or early 2009. It will take 6 to 7 years to build so should be completed in 2015, so providing us with improved links and allowing London to remain competitive with other cities.

Most questions from the audience, were addressing the issues of the access into London for Maidenhead commuters. There is a worry about the time spent travelling into Paddington, as it is clear that Crossrail will be a slow service, using two dedicated lines, with trains stopping at most stations en route, taking 45-50 minutes. Are we going to have alternative choices? It seems it is dependent on the operators who share the other lines. This is an issue that requires some clarification and some definite answers. The coming of Crossrail should not make access from Maidenhead into a longer journey than at present. We still need fast trains into London.

The thorny question of parking was also raised. Simon said they were increasing the number of parking spaces by 100 but that it was the responsibility of the local authority to fund this. This conflicted with press reports which indicated that Crossrail would make some contribution to the increase in parking spaces. On speaking to Mark Houghton recently, he confirmed that the matter is still under discussion with RBWM. It is possible that, if they can agree the terms, there will be some funding from Crossrail for a number of car parking spaces in the vicinity of the station.

Although there are still unanswered questions about this project, the talk proved to be most interesting and clearly presented. It was helpful to be able to seek information and Simon was an accomplished speaker whose justification for the project was somewhat appealing. We wait now for the publication of Register of Undertakings and Assurances for the Crossrail Hybrid Bill and will follow closely its journey through the House of Lords.

Tina Sell

OUTINGS

Unfortunately our planned visit to the Biddenden Vineyards and the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway on the 1st July had to be cancelled due to lack of support.

DOWN HOUSE & LULLINGSTONE CASTLE

However, we do have a visit planned for September. We will be visiting Down House, in the village of Downe in Kent - the home of Charles Darwin, the Victorian scientist, who published his theory of evolution 'The Origin of Species' from his study here at Down House. We will see his study, his recreated experiments, an interactive exhibition and the beautiful gardens. The house and the village of Downe have been nominated as a World Heritage Site.



Down House – Charles Darwin's house at Downe, Kent

After Down House we will visit Lullingstone Castle, which was the subject of a recent BBC2 series featuring the unique World Garden. The castle and grounds are magnificent and the World Garden has been created to illustrate the type of plants to be found around the world.



The present Manor House at Lullingstone

We do hope that you will support this very interesting outing.

Mike Copeland

PROJECTS

GREEN WAY/YORK STREAM

The Green Way

York Stream in the town centre is looking good at the moment: Sainsbury's S106 money has been used to improve the section next to Hines Meadow car park (see below) and as predicted there is still plenty of water in the town centre section of the stream.



17th May: York Stream before work started



1st June: digging out the channel



4th June: meandering stream formed by planted coir



18th July: planting complete

We still have concerns about this renovation. None of the aggregate dumped when the car park was built was removed. It was just shifted to the side. Also, we were worried that the planting next to the path may, when fully grown, obscure a view of the stream. We have been assured it won't. Time will tell! The planting included willow and reeds. Willow, while its shade will stop reed growth in the stream underneath it, does create problems due to the trees cracking and ending up either in the stream or on the path (examples of both of these problems can be seen by walking along the Green Way north of the A4 bridge). According to Sainsbury's landscape architect the new willows require annual pruning. If the Royal Borough is responsible it will not happen.

The other element of the Sainsbury's improvement scheme is the repair of the barrier on the Green Way path as it passes under the A4 that is supposed to stop the path flooding. Apparently, the barrier will be inspected by CARO Flood Defence Systems on 23rd July (but see photo below). It would appear that the path has already flooded since the renovation scheme was completed so we hope they can work out why their barriers are ineffective. However, it does look better than it did, so enjoy it before the reeds etc get going and you can still walk along it without wellies!

Perhaps one should forget the above – this is what the stream looked like after the very heavy rains of Friday 20th July.



We would like to see further improvement in the rest of the stream system, so in conjunction with the East Berks Ramblers we are putting together a plan to create “windows” onto the stream all the way north to the flood control gate. The Green Way was designed as a streamside path but in the summer the build up of weeds on the bank screens the stream and reeds clog it. Both weeds and reeds need controlling. We will be submitting our proposed plan to the Environment Agency (EA); they will obtain an estimate from their contractors and hopefully we can find the money to implement it. Who knows if it works it may be possible to canoe more easily down the stream from Cookham than you can at the moment (see below).

York Stream

As noted in the last Newsletter the increased flow of water into the town centre is due to four years of dredging the White Brook by the Environment Agency, assisted by some spraying of the reeds in the stream near to North Town Moor. Undoubtedly the recent wet weather has also helped. The EA have confirmed that dredging will also occur in 2007. Interestingly the justification for the years of dredging was not to increase flow so that we had water in the town centre rather than a smelly muddy mess; it was justified on the basis of flood relief - as a means of getting floodwater away from the Strande Lane area. In the flood of 2003 this area became a lake due to the impounding of water by the new North Maidenhead Bund. Residents were understandingly concerned and the EA are currently proposing placing bunds around Marsh Meadow at Cookham

with the aim of forcing more water back into the Thames (they will increase the capacity of Olney weir) and placing bunds in the Strande Lane area.

As the Green Way starts at Cookham and water flow from there influences what reaches Maidenhead we have been in contact with the Cookham Society with regard to the Strande Lane Flood Prevention scheme.

In order to gather insight into the degree of obstruction we enlisted the support of local resident and member of East Berks Ramblers, Don Betts who had in April canoed from Cookham to Bray marina. He had done this by pulling himself in his canoe through any clogging reeds and when faced with fallen trees either found a way under them or took the canoe out of the water and walked round the obstruction.



Setting off from Cookham



Walking the canoe round because of trees blocking Strandwater



Canoeing towards the flood control gate – or trying to! Don is just visible in the centre of the picture



...and as it should be!

On 22nd May he attempted to repeat this feat (see photos above) but found that in the intervening interval the reeds had become denser and less easily broken so were harder to get through. We are very pleased that he managed to get as far south as the bridge on the Green Way to the east of Halfway Houses; he even got through the flood control gate! It is clear from his experience and our own observation that Fleet Ditch, Strand Water and Maidenhead Ditch all have a problem with reed congestion and in places fallen trees obstruct flow. If fallen trees were removed regularly and the spread of reeds was controlled the stream would be largely “navigable” for canoes and punts from Cookham to Bray.

In view of the above it is to be deplored that the Environment Agency do not propose to do any clearing of reeds/silt from this watercourse as part of the Strande Lane Flood Prevention scheme which is designed to relieve future flooding problems for Cookham residents.

We were hoping that work the Environment Agency was supposed to do on Maidenhead Ditch would help clear it but this now looks unlikely. The Royal Borough are currently deciding whether to agree to the Environment Agency’s application to delete work on Maidenhead Ditch from their planning approval (part of the Jubilee River scheme). What has happened is that the original plan to build bunds and berms alongside the Ditch and channel 17 cumecs (cubic metres per second) of water down it was replaced by the North Maidenhead Bund and instead allow 11 cumecs down it. At some point this was reduced again to 5 cumecs, obviating any need to do work on the Ditch as almost *all* of the floodwater will in future accumulate north of the flood bund forming the Strande Lane lake. The proposed Strande Lane scheme will try and bounce back some of the flood into the Thames by building bunds on Marsh Meadow. As the Jubilee River has a shortfall in its design capacity (can only take 180 cumecs instead of 215cumecs) one must assume that even more water added to the Thames will cause problems downstream.

MILLENNIUM WALK – missing links

Unfortunately little progress has recently been made in creating the missing links needed to create a path from Hurley to Maidenhead. However, it would appear that Mr John Edwards, who owns White Place farm, will be giving permission for the Rotary Club to cross the farm along our “missing link”, for the Boundary Walk in October. If this proves to be the case the Society, with help from other organisations, will be clearing the path in September and will be providing marshals on the day itself. If you would like to help with either of these please let me know (01628 620280). Alternatively, if you have any grandchildren looking to do some community work e.g. for a Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, we would be grateful for their help. All necessary equipment will be provided.

NEW THAMES PATH LINK

Readers may have noticed in the Maidenhead Advertiser edition of 19th July the picture of members of the East Berks Ramblers Association (EBRA) taking part in a celebratory walk along the new Thames Path link recently constructed opposite the Thames Hotel. The new footpath will avoid three road crossings and improve the safety of walkers using the Thames Path and the Maidenhead Boundary Walk, as well as residents and visitors to the area. The Civic Society assisted EBRA with this by helping search Council records for evidence of ownership of the steps on which the link is constructed. This link is once again due to the efforts of EBRA Footpath Secretary and President, Margaret Bowdery for which we should all render grateful thanks.



The new pathway opposite the Thames Hotel

CIVIC TRUST'S HERITAGE OPEN DAYS (HODS)

St Luke's Church, where we have our Executive Committee meetings, is opening this year for HODS on Saturday 8th September from 10 am-midday and from 2.30-4 pm. St Luke's is a Grade II listed building which boasts a magnificent fresco tile painting "Jacob's Ladder" on the chancel arch and many fine stained glass windows.



Detail from the "Jacob's Ladder" fresco tile painting in St Luke's Church

It is well worth a visit. You can get an idea of what can be seen by viewing the picture gallery on the church's new web site www.stlukeschurchmaidenhead.org.uk. Teas will also be available.

Ann Darracott

HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS

PARK STREET CONVERSION WORK STARTS SOON

It is expected that the contract for the structural alterations to 18 Park Street, future home of the Heritage Centre, will be signed before the end of July. It is hoped that work will commence in September and be completed at the end of the year, allowing for an opening to the public in early 2008. It has taken several months to refine the project so that it meets all the latest building regulations and requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, and fund-raising continues to raise the final £65,000 needed to complete the work. Donations may be made at the Heritage Centre in King Street.

In the meantime, the Heritage Centre will remain in King Street until at least August, with a series of short exhibitions to maintain public interest and a wider range of prints, postcards and souvenirs available in the Heritage Centre.

ROTARY HELPS HERITAGE CENTRE GO INTERNATIONAL

Thanks to the Rotary Club of Maidenhead Thames, we now have translations of our 'Outline History of Maidenhead' available in German, Italian and French. Irmgard Murcott did the German translation, while Pat Cairney did both the Italian and French versions; many thanks to them both.

EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

Exhibition: Maidenhead Bridge - built in 1777 and still going strong: 1st – 31st August 2007.

Exhibition: A Pint of Nicholsons - remembering Maidenhead's brewery: 5th – 29th September (provisional dates).

Exhibition: The Romans in Maidenhead: 3rd – 27th October.

Lecture: Fairey Rotodyne – Technology Before Its Time? Tuesday 25th September at 8pm.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Rotodyne's first flight at White Waltham in November 1957, we present the definitive lecture from Fairey Flight Test Engineer David Gibbings. Rare archive films and photographs of the world's first vertical take-off airliner will be shown on the big screen at Norden Farm.

This is a fund-raising event in aid of Maidenhead Heritage Centre. Tickets £10 available now from the Heritage Centre in King Street

Maidenhead Heritage Centre is open from 10 am to 4 pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays

3 Kingsway, King Street, Maidenhead SL6 1EE, ☎01628 780555.

Website: www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk; email: info@maidenheadheritage.org.uk.

Newsletter Distributor

In response to our appeal in the last edition of the Newsletter for a volunteer, Mrs D Rowley has very kindly offered her services, and will take over from Daphne Line who sadly died in April.

SIR JOHN SMITH, CH CBE

Founder of the Landmark Trust

Sir John Smith, who died on 28 February, was a former President of the Civic Society and one of the Heritage Centre's greatest supporters. He was also a former President of the Historical Society, under whose auspices the first Heritage Centre opened in 1993, and from the very beginning he encouraged and supported its development. It is not generally known that for over three years his Manifold Trust paid for our administrator, and we are delighted that the Manifold has just agreed a £10,000 grant to the conversion works at the Cricketers Arms.

In matters of conservation he was far ahead of his time and an obituary in *The Independent* paid this tribute to him: "John Smith changed the fate of historic buildings in Britain. Houses and cottages, factories and workshops, disused stations and forts – yeoman buildings which 50 years ago were disparaged, ill-used or disregarded – are now the subject of reality television programmes, of competitive efforts of restoration, and the source of national pride. Without the Landmark Trust and his no less significant contribution to the funding of other preservation projects through the Manifold Trust – for ships, museums, libraries, canals and countless other causes – the picture might be very different."

His aim was not merely to preserve old buildings but to "rouse people's interest in their surroundings in the widest sense – in time as well as place". In making the Landmark Trust such a success – it has saved over 200 buildings in Britain, Italy and the USA – he helped change attitudes to old buildings, so that "... History is part of our environment; so is the way people live, their scale of values, and how they treat each other and the rest of creation."

Maidenhead has no 'Landmark' buildings, but for many years it did have the elegant Jesus College barge which graced Bridge Gardens; Sir John had helped fund its restoration. It was known to us as the High Steward's Barge, because Sir John was the High Steward of the Borough of Maidenhead until local government reorganisation in 1974. It now sees service as a floating restaurant at Richmond Bridge, a new use of which I think Sir John would approve.

With his great sense of history and love of buildings he was one of my personal heroes. I remember being inspired the first time I read his elegant introduction to the Landmark handbook, encouraging visitors to breathe in the spirit of the building where they were staying. Sir John's old-fashioned courtesy and charm were two of his greatest characteristics, but he also had the most incisive of minds. He wrote in 1998 "It is those who still preach cheapness at any price who are out of date, while those who preach against waste, whether of buildings or of other resources, are modern. Far from being restrictive, preservation is now constructive, and creative as well". This change and the astonishing achievements of the Landmark Trust are Sir John's enduring legacy.

Richard Poad

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Wednesday 19th September 2007
Talk by Peter Bennett

“Fighting Crime in the Royal Borough”
Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

Sunday 23rd September 2007
Outing

Down House and Lullingstone Castle/Roman Villa

Wednesday 17th October 2007
Visit and Talk conducted by David Lunn

“Civic Matters”
Town Hall, 8 p.m.

Wednesday 21st November 2007 (AGM)
Talk by Paul Jefferies

47th Annual General Meeting
“Emergency Care Practice”
Methodist Church Hall, 8 p.m.

CIVIC SOCIETY OFFICERS

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2007

Parish Centre in St. Luke's Church, at 7.45 p.m.

10th January, 14th February, 14th March, 11th April, 9th May, 13th June, 11th July, 12th September, 10th October, 14th November, 12th December.

The AGM will be held on Wednesday 21st November 2007 in the Wesley Hall at the Methodist Church at 8.00pm.

**The closing date for copy for the next issue
of the Newsletter is 12th October 2007.**

News Editor **Brian Darracott**
6 Medallion Place, Maidenhead, SL6 1TF (01628 620280)