



Charity No 2324205

HENLEY SOCIETY MAY 2014 NEWSLETTER

Editor: Sandra Moon

Dates for your diary:

18th June – Trip to Kenwood and Bentley Priory - see separate application form
6th December – Christmas Lunch at Badgemore Golf Club

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

On 7th December thirty seven of our Members enjoyed an excellent lunch at Badgemore Park Golf Club. Unfortunately our numbers were down on the previous year but several members had other commitments. Once again we were blessed with good weather. Whilst there have been comments that some members would like to try an alternative venue we have researched this but not only is Badgemore an ideal location with picturesque views but it offers ample parking a choice of menu and provides very good value for money. Once again our thanks go to the staff for their excellent organisation. Unfortunately Peggy Beeson was not available to run the raffle but we tried hard in her absence and with a good selection of raffle prizes thanks to the generosity of Members we managed to raise £180.



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NOTE FOR YOUR DIARY A booking has been made for 6th December 2014 at Badgemore Park and we hope that we will get good support from our Members.

The next outing is to Kenwood House and Bentley Priory on 18th June.



Details of this events are enclosed.



Henley Society AGM

46 people attended the Society's AGM at the River & Rowing Museum on the 4th April. Our Vice-President Lord Phillimore took the chair.

The Chairman, Errol Facy, and the Chairman of the Planning Sub Committee, David Whitehead, reported on the events of the year. (His report is given below). The accounts were approved. The honorary officers and members of the committee were re-elected.

After the formal business was completed, members heard a very interesting talk by Matthew Kinghan NSc MIED, of Nexus Planning, the lead consultant on the joint Henley and Harpsden neighbourhood plan. He described the government's town planning regime, with particular reference to the Localism Act 2011, the replacement of planning circulars on particular subjects by the National Planning Policy Framework and the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It was the duty of planning

authorities to develop a core strategy based on these provisions; SODC produced theirs in 2012. The Localism Act introduced the concept of neighbourhood planning to give local communities more say in planning matters through neighbourhood plans. Such plans had to conform the planning authority's core strategy. Nexus had started work on the draft neighbourhood plan, which was due for publication in May. Working groups were meeting to discuss particular issues, such as housing, employment, traffic/transport, environment and recreation/leisure provision. The final plan should be published around the turn of the year.

After his talk, Mr. Kinghan answered questions, most of which related to the provision of housing in Henley and possible housing sites.

Planning Report given by David Whitehead, Chairman of the Planning Committee.

The Society's planning committee has continued to look at all the planning applications for Henley and, on those that it considered should be either modified or rejected, it has submitted appropriate comments to SODC. These comments appear later on the Society's website. The total number of applications during the past year was 311, the highest number for at least 10 years. As usual, the majority of applications were for house extensions of various sizes, though there were applications for 14 new builds on infill sites. At this point, I would like to thank the other members of the committee for making it possible to monitor the planning applications, and also thank the Town Council for making available their copies of the actual plans.

At the AGM last year I mentioned three major applications that were in the pipeline. All of these now have planning permission but their impact on the town has not yet materialised, but each of them could have a substantial effect in the future. The first is the Townlands Hospital redevelopment which, as you know, has been delayed many times, but now appears to have overcome its problems apart from minor details. In the context of planning, it's worth noting that it will add 56 dwellings to the town's housing stock. And, due to the limited on-site parking, it will almost certainly add to parking problems in the area surrounding Townlands. The second of the three applications is not in Henley itself but is for a large extension to the gravel quarry at Sonning Eye. This has now been approved by Oxfordshire CC and, once it starts operating, trucks going to and from the quarry are inevitably going to add to Henley's traffic and air pollution problems.

The third of the outstanding applications dates from 2007 and is for a major development at Market Place Mews and the Kings Road car-park. This would entail the building of 14 apartments plus a substantial number of new shop and restaurant units. It would also entail the loss of about 35 car-parking spaces, admittedly privately owned spaces, that are currently in use. Last year I pointed out that the permission for this development would expire in October 2013, unless work was started before then. Members may be surprised to know that the widening of the passageway from the Market Place to the Kings Road car-park, carried out last summer, was included as part of the original application and this means, as I have been assured by SODC planning department, that work on the apartments and shop units can now begin at any time and with no expiry date.

A major issue at the present time is the Henley/Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan. This is still in a state of flux but, as a member of the Housing Working Group, I'll give an assessment of the progress so far. Those of you who were present at the AGM of two years ago may remember that I questioned the wisdom for the town of embarking on a Neighbourhood Plan rather than allowing the planning process to continue as previously. I expressed two concerns in particular. The first was that, if the required 400 houses were to be built, then, on the basis of the sites proposed by SODC in the Core Strategy, there appeared to be little flexibility in where to put them. The second concern was that the process was likely to result in conflict between one set of residents and another, and I mentioned Blandy Road vs Fairmile as a likely possibility. However the Town Council decided to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan and to appoint Nexus Planning Consultants to steer it. Whether this was the right decision we shall never know. In its favour, the process has resulted in a number of additional, mainly brownfield, town sites becoming available. However, these additional sites have not yet been

matched by an equivalent removal of greenfield sites from consideration. On the question of conflict between residents, disagreements have of course been inevitable. Another problem that has arisen with the Neighbourhood Plan is that the 'goal posts' have been moved, and they may well be moved again. Nexus have prepared a draft Baseline Report which is intended to provide the framework for the final report, and a copy dated July 2013 contains the sentence: 'The Neighbourhood Plan allows local residents to **determine** where development should go.' However the website now has a later version dated October 2013 where the sentence has been changed to 'The NP allows local residents to **influence** where development should go'; a subtle but significant change.

Another instance of the goal posts being moved is on the question of numbers. At the outset, it was generally understood that sites had to be found for 400 dwellings in accordance with the SODC Core Strategy but, during the process, we've been informed that unless this number is increased to at least 450 the plan is almost certain to be unacceptable either to SODC or to the government inspector who has to approve it or, at a later stage, to a government inspector deciding on a developer's planning application. Not only that, but Nexus have strongly recommended that the final plan should include a number of reserve sites, providing a total of 80 – 100 additional dwellings, to guard against the possibility that one or more of the allocated sites may be withdrawn for some reason. However to publicise the existence of reserve sites in the Neighbourhood Plan is a clear invitation to developers to just wait for a few years and then submit a planning application. An application for a reserve site at that stage would then be hard for SODC to refuse. This leads to the conclusion that the policy of publicising reserve sites, if it's agreed, could raise the total number of dwellings that Henley has to accommodate to well above 450, perhaps to 550.

So what should the Society's attitude be? Since its formation, two of the Society's basic aims have been to maintain the character and viability of the historic town centre and to conserve the landscape setting of the town. In the centre, the main impact of the additional housing will be the indirect effect on traffic congestion and air quality; and, wherever the houses go, these traffic problems will only get worse, though some sites would have a slightly greater effect than others. In terms of Henley's landscape setting, an important feature is, of course, the river but, apart from that, the features of most significance within the plan area and the features that people value most are, I think, the Fairmile with its avenues of trees, and the Harpsden valley with its well used public footpaths on both sides. If plans already proposed by developers go ahead, the attractiveness of both the Fairmile and the Harpsden valley will be significantly damaged by new housing estates but, now that less damaging sites have become available, neither the Fairmile site nor the Harpsden Valley site (known as Lucy's Farm) is, in fact, needed to meet the target numbers, especially if reserve sites are excluded. So, if both the Fairmile and Lucy's Farm were removed from the list of potential sites, and if the Neighbourhood Plan stated that they had been assessed but were considered too valuable in terms of their landscape value, then in my view, this would be to the long-term benefit of the town and its residents. As a bonus, any reason for a feud between Blandy Road and Fairmile would disappear. And perhaps more importantly, by ruling out these unpopular sites from development, it might then be possible to reach a general consensus. This is an outcome that, so far, has not been achieved by the Group, though it is under pressure to do so quite quickly. The intention after that is for Nexus to draw up a Draft Neighbourhood Plan and to make this available for public consultation, probably at some time during May or June. It will then be up to members of the Society to make their own opinions clear, and I would encourage you all to take this final opportunity to express your views. (As it is possible that the Draft Plan may be changed after the consultation, I would suggest making it clear where you would object to housing, as well as indicating sites that you would consider acceptable).

New Members

I would like to welcome the following as members :

Thomas and Vanessa Bowlby, Mrs Elizabeth Nutter, Victor Basil and Elisabeth Wilkinson.

Committee

Errol Facy – Chairman

Ian Giuliani – Vice Chairman

Nora Scanlon – Hon Secretary 01491 579619

Sandra Moon - Hon Treasurer & Membership Secretary 01491 573887

David Whitehead – Chairman of Planning Sub Committee

Jenifer Copeland

Pauline Fleming – Events Organiser

Valerie Alasia

Cllr. David Clenshaw – Henley Town Council Representative

President

H.R.H. The Duke of Kent KG GCMG GCVO

Vice Presidents

The Lord Camoys GCVO DL

Sir Martyn Arbib

The Baroness Buscombe of Goring

The Lord Phillimore of Shiplake

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