

BOOKER COMMON AND WOODS PROTECTION SOCIETY

(Registered Charity : No. 289871)

"...A STORM IS COMING ON THE CHILTERN HILLS"

(G. K. Chesterton 1874-1936 'A ballade of the first rain')

Chesterton seems to have been blessed with foresight. Pressures for yet more developments at Booker and Sands continue unabated. The Society is continuously engaged in bringing counter-pressures to bear against the would-be developers of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and 'Green Belt' which would obviously be detrimental to the peaceful enjoyment of your local environment, both now and for future generations.

Our work involves researching the facts for every case from which we compile documentary evidence to demonstrate the deleterious effect on your local environment. Thus we weigh the short-term financial gains against the long-term environmental loss.

Armed with this evidence the Society brings these important issues into open public debate before irrevocable decisions are made, enabling local residents to make representations before it is too late. We, then, put our case before the Councillors to ensure that their debates in the Chamber take full account of the effects of their conclusions on the local environment.

"..all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is...

...THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS"

(St Matthew - circa 1st Century AD)

We must oppose those who interpret this concept as "The Law and the Profits" in this 20th century AD. There are numerous laws and policies designed to protect the environment in its various aspects. It is vital that everybody acquires a general understanding of what they are about if their defensive representations are to be effective.

For this reason we were greatly indebted to Mr Christopher Swanwick, Chief Planning and Development Officer - Wycombe District Council, for giving his time to explain the multi-faceted environmental protection policies to the 70 members of this Society present at the Annual General Meeting in May 1992.

He presented a wide ranging and authoritative exposition with particular reference to protection of the designated Green Belt/AONB and the policies adopted in the Wycombe District Local plan. It was emphasised that the District Council policy is to encourage public involvement and comment before firm decisions are taken.

Most Council Meetings are open to anybody to listen to the debates from the Public Gallery and ensure that their particular representations have been considered. Laws and policies define broad principles only. They do not provide text-book answers to the thousands of particular cases that arise.

It follows that the implementation of the laws are subject to different interpretation by different people. For example, Councillors interpret the Council's own policies based on personal priorities and values and vote accordingly.

Consequently important decisions are sometimes made on narrow majorities, and a change of mind by two or three Councillors could swing the vote to the opposite decision. In such Circumstances it is crucial that the voice of the affected residents is heard in the Council Chamber and given due consideration.

The function of this environmental society and others like it is to ensure that voting Councillors are fully briefed on the views of affected residents before the debates begin.

RECENT 'SHOWERS'

in the storm on the Chilterns

Proposed Motorway Service Area (MSA at Booker).

Following the successful result of the opposition to Mobil Oil Co's Appeal for an MSA at Booker in 1990, the government have now moved the goal posts to the advantage of the oil companies. In effect, the new deregulation of MSAs promotes commercial interests to the commanding position previously occupied by Dept. of Transport - i.e. choosing sites; obtaining planning permission; and acquiring the land. In addition the previous rule of MSAs at 30 miles intervals is reduced to 15 miles minimum (12/15 minutes driving time).

This means that any wealthy commercial company, or group of companies are free to target any less wealthy local authority and bombard it with planning applications. Without the support of Dept of Transport, the local Council Tax payers (us) will be faced with increased costs when they appeal against refused permissions.

Wycombe District Council Planning & Development Committee on 14 September 1992 rightly made an uncompromising response, when they resolved to oppose any application within the district's Green Belt/AONB along the M40. The Council can be assured of this Society's full support as we gave them against Mobil in 1990.

PROPOSED BOOKERTIP EXTENSION.

The Society made written objection to Bucks County Council's (BCC) joint application with Grundon's to raise the level of the existing site by several metres, and to extend it up to a Booker residential area. The Society also wrote to Secretary of State for the Environment on 31 July requesting his intervention to prevent BCC granting themselves permission at their planning meeting on September 14 1992. Secretary of State replied on 11 August that he had directed BCC not to take a decision until he had considered the application.

Despite the facts: that BCC application is contrary to its own protective Policies of Green Belt/AONB; they state it is unsafe to move gypsies/travellers to Booker Tip because of methane gas emissions, but apparently safe to move the Tip next to a residential Estate; that Wycombe DC opposes the proposal; that their own professional officers advise against; nevertheless your elected County Councillors would not withdraw their application at their September 14 meeting. We must hope the Secretary of State has a wise judgement in all things.

NOISE-POLLUTION

Motorway Noise. The continuous obtrusive noise arises from tyres on the road surface. Other European countries use 'porous' asphalt on their motorways that can reduce road surface noise by some 50%. Apart from this it has spin-off benefits: reducing spray, aquaplaning and skid in wet weather; tyre wear, fuel costs and pollution is less, less noise in the car therefore less tiring and less need for so many MSAs.

The Society has joined other groups along the M40 in pressing Dept of Transport to lay "porous" asphalt without further delay. Members are asked to write to Ray Whitney MP at House of Commons, London SW1. requesting he twist the Minister's arm.

GUNSHOT NOISE.

The Society has discussed the problem with the management of West Wycombe Shooting Ground at Widdenton Park Wood. They have agreed to establish grass and tree covered mounds round the shooting butts to deflect the noise away from Booker.

The mounds will blend into the woodland on the rising ground behind the butts and therefore will be visibly unobtrusive.

Temporary problems have caused delays in completing the work.

AIRCRAFT NOISE

Meetings of Wycombe Air Park Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) are now open to the public. At the start of meetings 30 minutes is allowed for members of the public to put questions or complaints directly to the Air Park Operators. In addition, the Chairman of this Society has been co-opted on to JCC as a representative of the residents on the eastern side of the Air Park.

This is a substantial step forward, but the Society's primary objective remains. That is for statutory controls over aircraft movements, and the consequent noise, be granted to local District Councils.

The Society therefore supports John Denham MP private members Bill which aims to achieve our objective. The Bill is due to receive its second reading in House of Commons on 4 December 1992. Affected members are advised to write to Ray Whitney MP requesting him to vote for the Bill.

ANOTHER INTRUSION INTO YOUR GREEN BELT/AONB

Following several refusals by Wycombe D.C. and Appeals (deferred) to Dept of Environment, the Football Club Management has re-applied to extend the stadium area. This time for a synthetic practice pitch and an extension to the car park.

Not even 1st Division Football Clubs have practice pitches adjoining their main grounds. for example, 'Arsenal's' practice pitch is at London Colney, near St. Albans and some 15 miles distant from their Highbury ground.

By contrast Wycombe Wanderers are already better placed. At Bisham Abbey, Marlow, is the internationally renowned sports centre with extensive facilities. Even closer is the Barcelona Olympic standard synthetic sports pitch at Cressex with impressive and full modern facilities. The Hire fees are remarkably inexpensive.

Some 20% of members of this Society are resident in Sands and directly affected. They can rely on the Society to support their objection as they supported our objection to an MSA in Booker.

FUNDING: Members freely donate their time and professional expertise to Society work. but the overheads of purchases, printing, postage etc are increasingly costly. Annual subscriptions remain at £2 p.a. (minimum) but please donate extra if possible when our official collector calls shortly for your annual subscription.