

# BOOKER COMMON AND WOODS PROTECTION SOCIETY

(Registered Charity : No. 289871)

If you have paid your Annual Subscription and / or have donated to the Fighting Fund in 1990/91 and no receipt is attached please telephone H.W. 25665 or 21994

The Society operates in accordance with the rules of the Charity Commission who scrutinise our audited accounts.

If you are not already a member of the Society and would like to help us to protect you local environment, why not support us? The minimum annual subscription is £2.00 per household, but extra donations are most appreciated.

RECEIPT for 1990/91 fighting fund donation

RECEIPT for 1990/91 Annual Subscription

**THE SOCIETY** has had a busy and successful year. The credit is due to our voluntary helpers and the annual subscriptions and donations from those who support the aims of the Society.

is combined effort has enabled the Society to effectively maintain its environment protection objectives, which are:

- a) Practical conservation work in the 'Ancient Woodland' on Booker Common
- b) Collective opposition against developers who seek to breach the local Green Belt and 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'

## PRACTICAL CONSERVATION WORK 1990

The Society's scheduled conservation programme was dislocated by nature's self culling operation caused by hurricane force winds and two hot summers with dry winters in close succession. The combined effect devastated the trees particularly in the northern woodlands. In addition to those blown down, many others were rendered unsafe and need to be felled as soon as possible. The devastation all round the district overwhelmed forestry experts. But we are glad to report that West Wycombe Estate has started clearing the fallen timber from Booker Woodlands.

Whilst the devastation is distressing we must remember that it is ancient woodland which for hundreds of years has survived similar disasters by replanting and natural regeneration. The cleared areas will be replanted with new saplings.

We have seen the woodland at its best and to ensure our successors also enjoy it, our volunteer conservationists will help with the replanting.

Despite the setback our volunteers soldiered on with Ron Walker acting as Fieldwork Organiser. They planted 60 replacement trees, ensured a colourful show of wildflowers in a recultivated area, strimmed away overgrowth around tree plantations and footpaths and cleared 4 cu metres of rubbish from the woodlands.

This was accomplished by 57 volunteers in 107 workdays. We also appreciate the help given by the Booker Scouts and Girl Guides. The financial grants from the Wycombe District Council towards the cost of our environmental improvement work are greatly welcomed. The grassed area between Willow Avenue and Homes Lane has been kept in very attractive condition for many years and for this we are indebted to Booker Cricket Club.

## THE GREEN BELT (GB) AND CHILTERN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY. (AONB)

Ever since the M40 was planned to link the M25 through to Birmingham there has been increasing pressure for building development along the route. Pressure intensified as M40 came nearer to completion and we may be assured it will continue.

The commercial developers are not just satisfied with eating into the undesignated countryside but also seek to swallow the "Green Belt" and the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These areas comprise the best of the undeveloped countryside and although they have certain legal protections there always remain loopholes.

The developers technique is first to breach the GB/AONB creating a precedent for further developments. Their expert knowledge of the law and exploitation of potential loopholes combined with special pleadings, has enabled developers in other areas to get away with this contrary to the spirit of the legislation.

We have vigorously opposed all building development in the local Green Belt/AONB and must continue to reject any compromise, expediency or special pleading. The Society will support Wycombe District Council whilst they continue to refuse such applications. This leaves the onus on the developer to appeal to the Secretary of State.

The increasing numbers of applications and appeals for building development in the area of Green Belt/AONB between Booker/Sands and Lane End/Marlow residential areas is a matter of increasing concern.

Rising from 6 applications in 1987 to 12 in 1990, there have been a total of 34 to date. The most outrageous application being Mobil's proposed 80 acre Motorway Service Area adjoining the 'Ancient Woodlands' at Booker. If their Appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment succeeds the remaining local Green Belt / AONB will inevitably disappear under concrete.

The Green Belt/AONB must be respected by everyone and kept intact for the future. Their Appeal must fail and a decision in our favour will give us a much stronger precedent to resist future building applications. If it is considered inappropriate for an MSA, which is a necessity at some point on the M40, to be built then it would also be inappropriate for anything less.

We still await the decision on the MSA Appeal at the time of going to press.

## MOTORWAY SERVICE AREA (MSA) AT BOOKER APPLICANT : MOBIL OIL CO. LTD.

Our last Newsletter described proceedings of the Booker MSA Public Inquiry of January/February 1990. On the evidence given the Inquiry went well for those contenders who were opposed to the Booker site. Mobil then proposed that the Booker Inquiry should not be closed but be adjourned and re-opened at the forthcoming Tetsworth MSA Public Inquiry.

Surprisingly not one of the contestants opposing the Booker MSA objected except this Society. The Inspector upheld our objections and closed the Booker Inquiry. Nevertheless we took precautions in advance to counter any attempt by legal devices to reverse the Inspector's decision.

## PUBLIC INQUIRY FOR MSA AT TETSWORTH APPLICANT : DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

Prior to the Tetsworth Inquiry the Society wrote to the Inspector stating that we had reason to believe there would be attempts to reopen the Booker MSA Inquiry and listed our reasons for objection. Subsequently the Inspector convened a Pre-Inquiry Meeting of all contestants to discuss procedures at the main Public Inquiry.

Oxford County Council and South Oxford District Council (OCC/SODC) jointly demanded the right to discuss alternative MSA sites to Tetsworth, including Booker quoting a precedent from Case Law to support their contention. Again no contending party objected except this Society. Society Chairman, Allan Duggin challenged them, pointing out that their OCC/SODC representatives had sat next to him during the three week Booker Inquiry. They had taken notes but said nothing.

If they truly believed it best for an MSA to be on a statutory Green Belt Site at Booker rather than the non-statutory site at Tetsworth they had ample opportunity to give formal evidence at that time. Therefore their quoted case law precedent was invalid in the case of the Booker site.

The Inspector upheld the Society's objection. He ruled that evidence would not be heard on Booker but he would hear evidence of the two alternative MSA sites nominated by Dept. of Transport as their second choice after Tetsworth (West and East of Stokenchurch). Allan Duggin informed the Inspector that his firm ruling did not now necessitate the Society's continuing participation, but that the Society representative would sit as observer throughout the Tetsworth hearing.

We are greatly indebted to Society's Hon Secretary Gaynor Taffurelli who drove to and from Benson, Oxon, and sat through three weeks of intense summer heat to observe on our behalf. Gaynor reported that contrary to the Inspector's firm ruling the contesting parties still introduced the Booker MSA site into their written 'Proofs of Evidence'. The Inspector firmly ordered that all such written evidence be struck from the record. Had it been otherwise Gaynor would have intervened and phoned for Society Chairman and Legal Advisers to join the party.

This serves to illustrate that developers never stop trying and we must never cease resisting. The surprise is that the Oxfordshire Local Authorities should argue that any Green Belt/AONB area anywhere should be breached whilst their statutory duty is to protect them.

Subsequent to the Tetsworth MSA Inquiry there has been curious turn of fate. In July 1990, Michael Heseltine MP gave evidence against the Tetsworth MSA site, quite properly supporting the local interests of his constituents. Four months later he was appointed Secretary of State for the Environment, responsible for planning appeal decisions in the wider national interest and in accordance with Government policies. Sometimes national interests are seen to conflict with local interests. Nevertheless his duty now is first to the national interest. Having recently taken a partisan stance he is now obliged to give a non-partisan decision. In the meantime Booker can only stand and wait.

## WYCOMBE AIR PARK in respect to THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT (DTP)

For almost 50 years local residents have lived in reasonable amity with the Air Park, but recently there has been a dramatic increase in flying activity. Wycombe Air Park now ranks third after Heathrow and Gatwick in terms of numbers of aircraft movements.

Aircraft Movements in Years:	1983	1989
Booker Gliding Club	50,712	71,868 (+42%)
Skyline Helicopters	2,994	16,864 (+463%)
All aircraft types inc. above	121,837	175,971 (+45%)

In 1987 the Society made formal representations to Wycombe District Council requesting they take action to remedy the worsening situation detrimental to local residents. Among other things, the Society suggested the Council could request Department of Transport to specify Wycombe Air Park for the purpose of Section 5 of Civil Aviation Act 1982.

The effect of this would be to impose a duty on the Civil Aviation Authority to minimise adverse effects on the environment and disturbance to the public from aircraft noise, vibration etc.

After investigation the Council formally applied to DTP in 1988.

On 28 November 1990 the Minister for Aviation wrote deciding against implementing Section 5 at Wycombe Air Park, but added that in view of the local concern, DTP would mount their own investigation.

On 20 February 1991 representatives from this Society attended a meeting with DTP's representative and discussed the aircraft noise problem as it affected residents of Booker & Sands on the eastern side of the Air Park. We will report any further progress.

## WYCOMBE AIR PARK in respect to THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

Co-incident with the Dept. of Transport refusal of Section 5 the DOE published its "Noise Review Working Party 1990". DOE stated that excessive noise had deleterious effects on the public and Government is considering what needs to be done.

The DOE's Working Party made 53 recommendations for alleviating noise pollution from all sources. Among them were several recommendations specifically concerning aircraft noise including 'general Aerodromes' such as Booker. In particular they recommended "... formally increasing the involvement of local authorities in measures to control and monitor noise and aircraft movements from airfields".

The Society then wrote to Secretary of State for the Environment, Rt Hon Michael Heseltine, supporting all the Working Party's recommendations. We submitted that voluntary noise abatement procedures were insufficient and that the above recommendations should be strengthened by imposing a statutory duty on local authorities to control noise and aircraft movements.

It is encouraging that one Government Department now recognises that there is an increasing noise problem and are considering ways of coping with it.

In the meantime any complaints about aircraft noise? Then phone Airways Aero Associations at HW 29261/23426. Then write to Health and Housing Manager, Wycombe District Council.