

# The Cookham Society



Photograph by Mick Vogel Photography

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July 2020 Newsletter

## FROM THE SOCIETY'S CHAIRMAN

Despite the difficulties resulting from the coronavirus and the associated lockdown, I am pleased to say that we have been able to keep working on your behalf by meeting remotely, on Zoom. Indeed, we have stepped up our planning meetings to two a month in order to meet the Borough's new planning timetable. I hope this newsletter gives a good illustration of the range of topics we have been working on during the last few months and we hope you have been able to stay safe and well.

Tom Denniford

## DOGS AND BATTLEMEAD COMMON

Is Battlemead a public open space or is it an exclusive nature reserve? Dog walking seems to be one of the main bones of contention between these two positions. The entrance signs on Lower Cookham Road and the towpath ask visitors to keep to the mown paths and that all dogs be kept on leads. Furthermore, dog-proof fences prevent entry to the most ecologically sensitive areas and all access to 'East Field' is currently banned. While there are no dog control orders at present (bye-laws) affecting Battlemead,

RBWM is considering them. They would either require dogs anywhere on Battlemead to be on leads, or at least to be on the leash on the path round the East Field or along any newly designated paths. The one area of shared opinion is that all professional dog walking should be ruled out. We have sympathy for the nature reserve position and the Society, backed by the Maidenhead Civic Society is pressing for lighter touch orders.

Bill Perry



East Field (Photo by Barry Weare)

## BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN LATEST

The Local Plan inspector has now come back to the Borough with a long list of questions arising from the modified plan the Borough put out to consultation last autumn. There is also an opportunity to make further representations. The Examination in Public is not likely to resume before the autumn.

## What next for The Chequers?

At last summer's Cookham Dean Fête, we highlighted the poor condition of the exterior of this Grade 2 listed building, since its closure as an ethnic restaurant. Since then, things have gone from bad to worse. As our photos show, the frontage is in poor condition and recently a car was abandoned in front of it.



The Chequers (Photo by Tom Denniford)



The Chequers with car (Photo by Ruth Bowley)

## Wildflower Meadow, Cookham Dean CE Primary School

Cookham Dean school children sowed this wildflower meadow last autumn with stunning results! Fenella Reekie, the Headteacher, told the Society that the National Trust, which owns the land, supplied the seeds and helped the children with the planting. The school and the NT should be very proud of the outcome.



Wildflower meadow

## CAR PARKING IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN COOKHAM

Parking problems in the Cookhams will continue to worsen, says the Society, if highway consultants employed either by developers or the council, continue to ignore the requirements of Cookham's Village Design Statement.

### What the VDS says:

*"Car parking in all new developments should be sufficient for residents and their visitors. Car parking should be arranged discreetly, avoiding visually dominant hard-standings at the front of houses and providing adequate screening at boundaries"* (VDS G6.16; p.30).

The VDS was not merely about the design of individual buildings but adopted a holistic approach, with the aim of improving the urban design and street scene in our lovely villages. Its authors took the view that car ownership was a fact of life and that under provision of parking, would lead to unwanted spill-over onto nearby streets.

Regrettably, some recent applications have not followed this guidance and the Borough's own highway consultants have not taken it into account.

## THE BOROUGH'S PARKING STRATEGY

The council's 16-year old Parking Strategy is based upon the restriction of parking spaces and accessibility to railway services. If a site is within 800 metres of a station with a full half-hourly train service, it is considered to have 'good accessibility' and the maximum number of spaces required will be lower than if the site were further away.

**Cookham only has half-hourly services during the rush hours and the Society considers it does not enjoy 'regular half-hourly services'.** In fact, Cookham has the worst train frequency in the Borough.

When it produced its first National Planning Policy Framework in 2012, the government was well-aware of the criticisms of its predecessors' restrictive car policies, which in some cases had resulted in the streets of new developments being overcrowded with vehicles.

It therefore stipulated that maximum standards should only be used in limited circumstances and when any standards were set, local councils should take local car ownership levels into account. Although the Framework has been with us for 8 years, the Borough has not chosen to update its Strategy.

We have objected to two current applications where we believe the proposed parking provision is inadequate:

### STATION COURT, HIGH ROAD

The proposal for this site is for 13 apartments, three with one bedroom and 10 with two, but only 14 car spaces are to be provided. Both the developer's and the council's highway consultants claim the site has 'good accessibility', ignoring both the VDS requirement and poor train service. Even if each flat only needed one space, there would be just one parking bay for visitors.

We say either more spaces should be provided, or the number of flats reduced.



Station Court (Photo by Tom Denniford)



London House (Photo by Tom Denniford)

### LONDON HOUSE, LOWER ROAD

The latest application is for offices and two flats and the developers have proposed the provision of 8 parking bays: six for the offices and two for the flats. The council's highway consultants claim the site has 'good accessibility' and suggest the number of spaces should be reduced to five.

Bizarrely, only six months ago on an earlier application, the same consultants said it was 'inaccessible'. Confused?

**The Society says the council should update its parking policies in line with government guidance, recognise the requirements of the VDS and ensure that adequate spaces are provided in future projects.**

## PLANNING

### STUDIO HOUSE, SCHOOL LANE



Studio House (Photo by Barry Weare)

This single storey, flat roofed, brick-built house tucked behind a hedge is a unique building in Cookham and perhaps not one that you would expect to find in a Conservation Area. It was featured as “ultra modern” in a 1930s Ideal Home Exhibition and is therefore of some historic interest. An application has been submitted to extend and remodel it. The Society considers the proposed modifications to the front elevation of the building, the hard landscaping, new wall at the front and large two storey, flat-roofed rear extension, are not appropriate in a rural village like Cookham. The Society is concerned that the proposals follow extensive pre-application advice from the council. We have submitted an objection and hope the application in such a sensitive setting will be refused.

### STATION COURT

The conversion of disused railway buildings at the bottom of High Road into low rise business units some years ago, was a good use of redundant buildings. Last year a local developer obtained a change of use by utilising their Permitted Development rights, to convert them to small residential units.

Whilst we raised no objections then, this same developer is now seeking permission to clear the site completely and redevelop it. The new application includes the old station platform on that side of the railway and wraps it into a massive, three storey block of 13 flats. The block would be totally out of scale with the other buildings in the area.



Station Court (Photo by Barry Weare)

Additionally, it would dominate the approach to the village by rail, changing it from a small, charming rural village stop, to overbearing, characterless suburbia. The effect on parking has already been discussed on page two. Along with many local residents, the Society has lodged a very strongly worded objection.

### LIVERY IN COOKHAM

When White Place Farm was put up for sale last year, the local horse-riding community was dismayed to learn that their livery was to be closed. It was deeply exasperating for some owners, who had been forced to move there following the earlier closure of Woodlands Farm.

So, owners were very pleased to note that the farm is now off the market; that self-service livery has been secured and there has been new investment put in, which raises the standard of fencing and grazing.

The Society is delighted to note that there are currently vacancies for 10-12 horses.

Fiona Beaumont

### COOKHAM BRIDLEWAYS

Safe bridleways open to riders in Cookham have become further restricted as the route from White Place Farm to Strande Water has now been closed to horses. Riders now have to go through the village to get to the bridleways on Cookham Dean commons and woods.



Horses on the Moor (Photo by Barry Weare)

# BRANCH LINE IMPROVEMENTS?

Dick Scarff

The main line through Maidenhead has now been electrified, Transport for London has taken over the stopping service, some longer trains have been introduced and most train journeys to town are now faster.

However, although the Society fought hard back in 2016, for the morning and evening through services between Cookham and Paddington to be retained, the battle was lost because the branch line wasn't electrified. Cookham, and other branch line platforms, were too short to take the longer trains.

As a gesture of compensation, a two train per hour service throughout the day on the branch line was proposed. It has still not arrived. GWR wants to combine the introduction of this all-day

service, with track improvements at Bourne End. This would allow three coach trains to pass in the station, ending the need for passengers to change at Bourne End.



Cookham station (Photo by Barry Weare)

Unfortunately, so much land has been sold off by Network Rail (or its predecessor) that a satisfactory, safe, track layout, agreeable to the authorities is

proving difficult to devise and new safety issues have been raised.

Whether this delay is due to genuine pressure of work or lack of interest on behalf of GWR or Network Rail we cannot say. However, it has now taken so long that previously promised funding from outside bodies appears to be lost.

The Society continues to argue that the present two-train per hour service at peak times, which operates with one train running between Marlow and Bourne End and a second one between Bourne End and Maidenhead, should

be extended to run all through the day. It could be easily achieved with no capital expenditure on trackwork and could be put in place very quickly.

# SHORT SIGHTED LAND SALES?

The past sale of so much land at Bourne End has come back to haunt Network Rail as they try to make minor improvements. In Cookham, the station yard on the Dean side of the railway was sold off some years ago and it has recently come to light that even the old platform on the same side was off-loaded. Any chance of re-opening two platforms at the station has been lost.



Platform (Photo by Barry Weare)



Bourne End Station

# BOURNE END TO WYCOMBE LINE

We understand that Wycombe District Council (before it was abolished in March this year and incorporated into the new Buckinghamshire Council) commissioned a consultant's report on the feasibility of re-opening the Bourne End to Wycombe section of the branch line. The report does not appear to have been published. Parts of the old route have been lost to development and the potential problems of re-opening level crossings in Bourne End and elsewhere suggest it is unlikely that re-opening is a realistic possibility.