

Development Proposals

Following the North Herts District Council's Public Consultation reported in the last Newsletter came that of Stevenage Borough Council which earmarked three main areas for future housing development in the town, one of which was, of course, in Forster Country, south of North Road. Your committee spent more time in framing a specific response to this. Friends were urged to submit their individual responses and we are grateful to those who did.

In the consultation document the Council put forward 3 options proposing the building of a) 2,800 b) 5,300 and c) 6,600 homes. Their preferred option is b) and areas to the north, south and west of the town have been identified to accommodate these.

We believe that Stevenage is being developed in a way contrary to its original conception as a planned town for 60,000 inhabitants with access to green space for all. FOFC wants to see the retention of a rural environment for Stevenage in accordance with that original New Town vision.

We are also concerned that NHDC proposes to deal with its own housing requirements by building up to the edge of Stevenage, thereby maintaining its

own rural environment to the detriment of Stevenage residents. Hertfordshire is now the second most densely populated shire county. The growth should not be allowed to continue.

Forster Country is the only remaining farmland in Stevenage and is historically important as the last vestige of land surrounding the original Saxon village of Stigenace. It is bounded on the south by the

St Nicholas' Church and Rectory Lane Conservation Area. It contains the only two Grade 1 listed buildings in Stevenage, the church and Rooks

Nest House. The preservation of Forster Country is integral to the enjoyment of walkers on the Stevenage Outer Orbital Path and the Hertfordshire Way. It is a wildlife corridor between open space in Stevenage and North Herts, separating two built-up areas.

Most of the green space in the town is south of Fairlands Way and the north of the town deserves similar open spaces. Already, the north and east of the town have taken on the massive development of Great Ashby – the size of a small

town in itself. We are concerned that building up Stevenage's

northern border matched by similar action by NHDC would be severe coalescence.

A fourth option was proposed by

Stephen Pollock-Hill for consideration by the town's planners. This has been reported in the local press. This option would permit some 4,200 dwellings which would house 10,500 people based on an average occupation of 2.5 per home. This option would require developing the infill and brownfield sites recognized by SBC together with some other sites already earmarked but leaving free the northern area and the green belt in which Forster Country is situated.

We feel that what cultural heritage Stevenage has should be promoted. Forster Country is a heritage site not only locally but of national and international significance and should not be built upon.

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AGM



The Annual General Meeting held at Springfield House on Saturday, June 15th was well attended. The one notable absence was our Chairman who had just undergone surgery from which we are glad to say he has recovered very well. Our Vice Chairman, Stephen Pollock-Hill, ably deputised and business matters were swiftly completed as planned, since the focus of the afternoon was to be the unveiling of the first Forster Walk signpost.

On cue, the rain started as we prepared to cross the road to the site at the bottom of The Avenue but, luckily, many had come prepared with umbrellas given the unreliability of June's weather this year. Only a few days before we had heard that Ken Follett was unable to attend but his place was most appropriately taken by our former MP and supporter, his wife, Barbara, thanks to whose donation the erection of signs for the walk was made possible. A number of finger posts and circular discs have been strategically placed by Anne Conchie and Don Courtman – to whom many thanks are due - so everyone walking the paths will be aware

it is Forster Country. Fliers outlining the different options for the Forster Country Walk have been placed in various venues.

Barbara made a short speech as did Kevin Fitzgerald, Honorary Director of CPRE. Unfortunately, the weather dampened the enthusiasm of those who had come equipped to actually do the walk and most attendees retreated to the Garden Room to enjoy tea, homemade cakes and chat. Special thanks go to Councillors Sherma Batson and Michelle Gardner who stayed throughout the proceedings and even helped the committee clear up the room when everyone else had gone home.



Photos Michelle Gardner

A token of friendship for Elizabeth Poston

A copy of *The Life of Goethe*, kindly passed to me by the Benslow Music Centre as surplus to their requirements is of interest since it is inscribed, in pencil, 'For Elizabeth Poston, affectionately, Arthur Bliss, Sept 28th 1942'. That year, Bliss had been appointed Director of Music at the BBC and had engaged Elizabeth as Director of Music for the European Service in connection with the Polish Education Department. It was a demanding job for her, especially having to transmit secret messages as music to the Resistance Movement in Europe, and could well have been at least partly responsible for the failure of her health during the preceding August that year. Perhaps the book was a 'welcome back to work' token.

Elizabeth admired Bliss, particularly his setting of words to music, a craft exceedingly close to her heart. She extolled his *Seven American Poems* that she had performed in 1943 with the tenor, René Soames, and she wrote complainingly of Edmund Rubbra for showing his dislike of the work during its first performance.

Later, such was her fair-mindedness, that she was able to form a good working relation with him and could appreciate his good qualities. Again, in deciding on music to be broadcast, she would include the work of a new composer despite disliking it herself. Her principles were strong and when her friends in the up and coming London Belgian Piano Quartet sought to have their performances broadcast she advised that they should write to



Bliss themselves rather than getting her to do it. She wanted to maintain her impartiality and simply remain a power behind the scene adding, as she said, 'weight to throw into the balance' if required. The Quartet did subsequently broadcast.

Her friendship with Bliss and his wife, Trudy, continued long after he had left the BBC in 1944 and two years later she had been commissioned for the inception of the Third Programme of quality radio. Bliss served on the Music Committee of the British Council and Elizabeth recounts how, at one official reception, he gallantly rescued her from a female composer 'who exuded cigarette ash, stale beer and (worst of all) atonalism'! In 1951, for Trudy

Bliss, she dedicated the song *When You are Old*, the words of a poem by W B Yeats, which was one of eight in the collection *A Garden of Laurel – In Praise of Women* that had been commissioned for the 1951 Festival of Music by the Society of Women Musicians. And in 1966 Bliss, in turn, dedicated to Elizabeth three songs by the Welsh poet, W H Davies – *Thunderstorms*, *This Night and Leisure*.

'Did she read the book?', you ask. I think she did, long-winded as it was, for, towards the end, on page 531, there is, in her unmistakable manuscript, a neat correction of 'Hadyn' to 'Haydn'! And did she read Goethe? Probably.

John S. Alabaster

JOHN HEPWORTH MEMORIAL LECTURE

The John Hepworth Memorial Lecture will be held at 2pm on Saturday, 23rd November 2013 in the Council Chamber of Daneshill House. The speaker will be Zoe Hendon, Head of Museum Collections at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture. She will speak on aspects of the work of Archibald Knox.

June Pitcher writes: John was an enthusiast for the work of Archibald Knox, (1864-1933), a foremost designer of British Art Nouveau, recognised worldwide for his influence on the decorative arts.

While working as a teacher of Art and Design, Knox contributed hundreds of designs for jewellery, textiles

and domestic silverware to Liberty and Co, in its influential classic period, and was also an illustrator of books.

Art Nouveau is inspired by the flowing lines found in nature, with interlacing swirls as in Celtic artwork. Knox spent much of his working life on the Isle of Man, his birthplace, where he is honoured as a major contributor to the island's cultural identity.

Tickets cost £3 and may be obtained from Angela Hepworth, Dominic Cottage, Rectory Lane, Stevenage SG1 4DA Telephone 01438 351462 E-mail angelahepworth@btopenworld.com

Richard Ball

It is with regret that we announce the death of Friend of the Forster Country Richard Ball.

Richard was passionately committed to conservation of the environment locally and nationally and was Chairman of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust for 14 years.

His energy and determination preserved green areas for the enjoyment of succeeding generations. He will be missed by those who knew him but the effects of his life's work remain.

graffiti thanks

Many thanks to stalwart supporters, Rick and Marion Ohlendorf, who bleached their fingers and grazed their knuckles in the attempt to remove unpleasant graffiti from the Only Connect monument recently. The culprit also defaced the church wall and has been caught on CCTV.

Photographic Display

The photographic competition entries were displayed in the bar area of the Gordon Craig Theatre during June as part of the Stevenage Festival and attracted favourable comments and interest.



Patrons of the Friends of the Forster Country

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