

Hobson's Choice

We have said much about the plans for our countryside as envisaged by the local authorities. This rightly has focussed mainly on Forster Country itself along with a slightly wider but still limited area. We have talked about green belt, brown field sites, infrastructure, literary heritage, loss of our green lung, coalescence of towns and many other pertinent factors.

However, I would like to concentrate for a few paragraphs on the first item of our January response to the NHDC proposals. This commented on the proposed overall numbers of new dwellings and the purpose of the new dwellings. The overall plan for North Hertfordshire (NH) is for 14,200 new dwellings (say 43,000 people) and we believe that for Forster Country (NH plus Stevenage) the figure could be around 8,000 people.

The NH figure represents approximately a 2% per annum increase to the 2011 population of 127,100 over the next 15 years. This seems to be a staggering figure and is 3 times the national average over the last 10 years of around 0.7%. Of this 0.7% very roughly 0.35% is the natural growth of births exceeding deaths caused at least partially by increased longevity. The other 0.35%, again very roughly, is due to net inward migration. The 2% pa growth figure seems grossly unfair for Hertfordshire which already has a population density that is one of the highest for a shire county.

Councillor David Levett of North Herts did not deny in a TV interview that the number requirement has

effectively been imposed by Central Government. Thus talk of "local democracy" is almost meaningless. It seems that we have the Hobson's Choice of either meekly swallowing our medicine or alternatively having it injected via a less palatable route in the form of centrally imposed arrangements.

To me the \$64,000 question is "How have the overall numbers for our area been ascertained?" Are we being asked to absorb huge numbers of London commuters?

Why is Government not concentrating more on persuading businesses to operate using an electronic infrastructure to allow our workforce to operate more easily from anywhere in the country? Why is Government not doing more to regenerate northern cities, where the Office of National Statistics figures indicate that population has been in decline in many instances?

So what if anything can we do? This small article is really posing a question to FoFC members and to other local interested people. Are people in agreement with these sentiments?

One option is just to continue to defend Forster Country, accepting that we can do nothing about overall arrangements for North Herts (and in the longer run for Stevenage).

A possible alternative is to challenge our local MPs to a far greater extent on the questions of democracy, fairness and imaginative alternatives.

John Spiers

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Forster Country will take place this year at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, August 22nd in St. Nicholas Church, Rectory Lane, Stevenage SG1 4DA.

After the business meeting there will be a tour of the church, led by Committee Member June Pitcher, who wrote the current guide book, and, we hope, a short organ recital, followed by tea and cake in the Parish Room.

We hope to see many of you there. Parking is available outside the church and further along the road to the south.

Quotations on which to reflect

Hertfordshire: 'England at its quietest, with little emphasis of river and hill; it is England meditative.'

'Perhaps Hertfordshire is scarcely intended for motorists...'

E M Forster Howards End

'So desirable : a bit of hilly ground near a city, where fresh winds may blow and where wild flowers are still found, and where happy people can still walk within reach of their homes.'

*Octavia Hill
(co-founder of the National Trust)*



The committee decided to do some tidying up in Forster Country

Dr Sylvia Watkins

We were sad to hear of the recent death of Dr Sylvia Watkins. She was a much respected physician and when she first came to Stevenage to work at the Lister Hospital she lodged with Elizabeth Poston at Rooks Nest House. The two women became great friends and remained so until Elizabeth's death. Sylvia was gifted musically and played her violin at one of our early AGMs. She also participated in our celebrations marking the hundredth anniversary of Poston's birth in 2005 and contributed to the series of books produced by John Alabaster for the Friends of the Forster Country thereafter.



Photo Margaret Ashby

Email address list

From time to time we email Friends to remind you about our events. We also notify you of the latest plans from both North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council, which require a rapid response. If you don't currently receive

emails from us, but would like to be added to our emailing list, please send your email address to our secretary, Marion Ohlendorf rmohlendorf@gmail.com

We won't inundate you with messages and don't share your email address with any other Friends or organisations.



Petition

Nikki Hamilton has started a petition on change.org to save the Greenbelt north of Stevenage. This is a great opportunity to send a strong message to North Herts District and Stevenage Borough Councils, but we need hundreds, if not thousands of names. Please sign the petition and send it to family, friends and anyone else you think may be interested in saving our Greenbelt. To sign the petition, please go to: www.change.org/p/nhdc-save-our-greenbelt-north-of-stevenage

Membership Renewal

Annual subscriptions to the Friends of the Forster Country are now due. We enclose a form for your completion.

If we are to achieve our aim -

to preserve for all time the open green space in the north of Stevenage known as the Forster Country

- we need you all to continue supporting us and trying to recruit new members to our cause.

Subscriptions for 2015-2016 remain at £7 per individual and £10 per family.

Patrons of the Friends of the Forster Country

Margaret Ashby. Nicola Beauman. Barbara Follett. Sir Andrew Motion. John Pilgrim. Richard Whitmore

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