

Stevenage Borough Council Local Plan

The SBC Local Plan was published on 18th June and the deadline for responses was five weeks later – 27th July. The Committee had to work hard and fast to prepare a submission from the Friends of the Forster Country. When it was completed – it ran to 33 points - our determined and assiduous Chairman sent the document by registered post, e-mail and online, so anxious was he to ensure it was received. He even telephoned to confirm its arrival.

We recognise the huge pressure on the Council to provide additional housing though we are sceptical about the necessity. A full quantitative analysis of need had not been undertaken. However, we appreciate the thought and work that had been put into the production of the consultation document but remain totally opposed to the loss of Green Belt and Forster Country in particular.

Our arguments have been used many times before but do bear repeating here.

The original plan for Stevenage was a population of 60,000 with plenty of space and a rural atmosphere. The town now has nearly 50% more inhabitants, is more congested, subject to much infill building and continually losing its rural aspect.

We believe that the town has already taken its fair share of housing development – most notably the conurbation of Great Ashby to the north-east of the town - and that

'exceptional circumstances' do not exist for the removal of its Green Belt. Once developed, greenbelt land is gone forever.

It is becoming clear that to regenerate the Town Centre people should live there. There has been discussion of this in recent editions of the local newspapers. It is estimated that up to 3,500 dwellings could replace the empty office blocks and shops and soulless car parks. The development of such brownfield sites – and the use of empty homes within the borough – should be considered first of all but no reference to either appears in the SBC document.

We suspect that no current resident wants more housing development in the town. The houses to be built are most likely to be bought by commuters. Stevenage was not meant to be a dormitory town. There is insufficient provision for social housing to satisfy the real need of local people. In fact, there is no benefit to current residents in any of the development proposals. Stevenage people, particularly those in the north, would see their way of life significantly and adversely affected.

Graveley village would simply become part of Greater Stevenage and GASP (Graveley Against SNAP Proposals) is no happier about the prospect than is FOFC. According to

the Green Belt Review, the area to the north of Stevenage 'makes a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes'. Its removal would destroy a valuable green lung and the impact on

Graveley and the surrounding farmland would be disastrous.

In the Open Space Strategy it was stated 'to the north of Stevenage we

will seek to protect the openness of the countryside closest to St. Nicholas' Church and within the Rectory Lane Conservation Area. The protection will recognise the literary connection of the land to E. M. Forster and Rooks Nest House.' How can the openness of the countryside be protected if the north-west is blocked in by housing?

In 1992 a decision was made following a public inquiry to redraw the greenbelt boundary to include all of Forster Country 'to protect it for all time'. Our 'Only Connect' sculpture was commissioned and placed to celebrate this. It was largely paid for by SBC and HCC.

It is ironic that building on this land is now being seriously considered by those two authorities.

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Memorial Lecture

The John Hepworth Memorial Lecture will be held on Saturday, November 28th at 2.30 p.m. in the Council Chamber of Daneshill House. The speaker will be Carole Smithies BA MBE and the title of her talk is "Mountains, Marilyn's and Munros – A Lifetime's Passion". Carole was the first woman member of the Manchester-based Rucksack Club to which John Hepworth belonged for over seventy years.

There is no increase in the ticket price which remains £3. Tickets may be obtained from Angela Hepworth,
1 Gloucester Close, Stevenage, SG1 3RQ
telephone 01438 351462
e-mail angelahepworth@btopenworld.com
or from any committee member or purchased at the door on the day

AGM Reminder

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.

A short recital on the newly refurbished organ given by Peter Saunders will precede the business meeting after which there will be a talk by Committee Member June Pitcher, who wrote the current guide book to the church, entitled 'St Nicholas' Church – the focus of the Forster Country'.

Tea and cake in the Parish Room will follow. We do hope to see many of you there. Parking is available outside the church and further along the road to the south.

E-Mail address list



A plea from our Secretary (Marion Ohlendorf - rmohlendorf@gmail.com.) for those who have not provided their e-mail addresses to consider doing so.

It is the fastest and surest way of communicating with you to remind you about our events and to notify you of the latest plans from both North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council.

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

Membership Renewals

Thanks to all who renewed their membership so promptly this year and a gentle nudge to the few who didn't to do so now. The renewal forms were sent out with the last Newsletter but, if your details have not changed, all you need to do is send a cheque (£7 Individual £10 Family) to the Treasurer Angela Hepworth, whose address appears above.

We need support more than ever since Forster Country is again under threat of major development.

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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