

# The Friends of the Forster Country

# Newsletter

Issue No 44. December 2016

## The heat is on!

The local papers have recently contained several articles and letters objecting to local authority plans to build so many houses in our area and to encroach on Green Belt land to do so. Petitions have been signed and notices displayed. The arguments are of national interest, too, but the South East is where most development is planned.

As you know, when it comes to Forster Country we are dealing with the plans of two authorities: North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council. November 30th was the deadline for submitting comments on the amended North Hertfordshire Local Plan and the Committee's comments were submitted. The Examination in Public for that plan is expected to be in August 2017.

The Examination for the Stevenage Local Plan is due to start on Tuesday, 17th January, 2017. Our comments were submitted as required and we expect some of our Committee Members will be allowed to make representations at the hearings.

The closing session is booked for Friday 31st March, so there should be



*Aerial view of Forster Country (courtesy Google Earth)*

time for a fair hearing.

The Inspector for the Examination, appointed by the Secretary of State, is Louise Crosby MA, a Senior Planning Inspector for the Planning Inspectorate. From her observations

published so far, it seems that she will be very thorough. We are encouraged by the fact that she has noted 'significant' objections from the public to building on land 'referred to locally as Forster Country'.



I don't know how many friends saw this production but I hope many. If you did, I am sure you will agree that it was superbly acted with pleasing sets and costumes. Admirably close to the original, it was a delight for any fan of Forster's novels.

An adaptation by Simon Reade, it starred Felicity Kendal as Charlotte Bartlett and Abigail McKern as Mrs Honeychurch, both experienced and accomplished (and well known) actresses. Imogen Sage played a lovely Lucy. I think my favourite character, however, was the ghastly Cecil Vyse, wonderfully portrayed by Charlie Anson.

# Developers' proposals

Developers Bellway and Miller Homes mounted a display of their plans to build 800 homes and associated community infrastructure on Forster Country, land stretching east from North Road and north of Granby Road, on which they have long held an option to buy. Local residents were invited to view this and to ask questions. In their words, the western section of the site is to be sensitively developed with the eastern section set aside and restored to the pattern of fields that historical maps show to have existed in the nineteenth century, which includes an orchard

In answer to the question as to what benefit this development would be to current residents, I was told that St Nicholas Meadows, the area of publicly accessible natural open space (the eastern section) would be an asset to North Stevenage. This reduction of Forster Country is to compensate for the loss of land to housing and the increase in traffic and pressure on our services which would result, despite the

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## Literary landscapes

At last, thanks to the persistence of our Vice Chairman, Stephen Pollock-Hill, Forster Country was mentioned in the latest CPRE magazine, on a par with more established areas such as Hardy Country and Bronte Country and compared to T S Eliot's Little Gidding. The article stated that it was important to protect these special places where possible, not just as a memorial to the writer but to preserve our common heritage.

promise of a school and GP surgery.

So confident are they of success that an archaeological survey is already taking place and will continue throughout December. This is standard pre-planning and trenches will be dug across the proposed site. The aim is to dig thirty-eight trenches which a geophysical survey highlighted as being of interest. Iron-age pottery has been discovered but this will not be important enough to prevent the scheme.

A glimmer of hope from further south in the county: according to Times' journalist, Martina Lees, the St. Albans Local Plan fell due to its proposed use of Green Belt land.

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## Birthday walk

Join us for the E M Forster Birthday Walk on Sunday, 1st January, 2017. We start from the lychgate of St. Nicholas' Church at 2pm for the walk across Forster Country and aim to be back before dark for refreshments in the Parish Room of the church. Maybe we will benefit from the recently resurfaced path on part of the route which should make it less muddy!

Friends, friends and relatives of Friends, associated children and dogs are all very welcome.

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## Overseas members

Postage costs are now so high and so many people are happy to receive publications electronically that we no longer mail to our overseas members. However, Anne Conchie will email them a pdf of the Newsletter on a regular basis if this would be helpful.

# Memorial Lecture

The John Hepworth Memorial Lecture was held on Saturday, November 12th, a little earlier in the month than usual to fit in with the year-long programme arranged to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the conception of Stevenage New Town.

Whilst considering the importance of Stevenage as the first of the post-war new town satellites of London, our co-founder and patron, Margaret Ashby, also reminded us of the town's history and heritage predating that.

A goodly number attended and stayed to socialise after the lecture.

We are grateful to the Council for allowing us once again to use the comfortable Council Chamber and Ingleheim Room and special thanks go to Councillor Sherma Batson for staying on to see the last attendees off the premises and to tidy up after us - not the first time she has done this for us.

Managing the technology is a skilled task and this is the second year that Committee Member, Jim Callaghan, has performed it. Prior to 2015, it was the task of our overburdened Chairman, John Spiers. The success of these presentations has been due in great part to their admirable competence.

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### 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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