

Current state of play

Much has happened since our last Newsletter. Unfortunately, I think that we are fighting a rearguard action in our efforts to save Forster Country. As you no doubt know, the Stevenage Local Plan was passed by the Inspector in the Autumn of 2017. Stephen McPartland, Stevenage MP requested the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (the Communities Secretary) to have the Plan put on hold, pending the possibility of having it called in.

We are now communicating with both Stevenage Borough Council and North Herts District Council. We have held meetings with Stephen McPartland and Stevenage Borough Council (Zayd al Jawad, Head of Planning & Engineering and John Gardner, Deputy Council Leader & Leader for Housing). I believe that our two main hopes now lie with our contention that the local plan examinations are not being conducted correctly and the possibility that the whole Stevenage Plan is called in. As many of you know, we have also objected to the outline planning application by Bellway / Miller to build on Forster Country and have asked local people to do the same in a leaflet distributed to around 1,000 homes.

Our meeting with Stephen McPartland in early January shed light on the situation. He said that he has already done considerable work to prevent the Stevenage Local Plan going forward. He has put it on hold by a request to the Communities Secretary. This is quite unusual and it cannot be on hold indefinitely but will be released depending on communications between the Secretary of State and the MP. Being

on hold is in a sense better than being called in as nothing can happen in respect of the Plan whilst it is on hold. When it is released from being on hold there is still the possibility of asking for it to be called in which would cause the whole process of devising a plan to start again. He said that any objections to the current planning application should be based on the current Green Belt situation and **not** as if the Local Plan has been adopted. Petitions are of minimal value as they are treated as one objection, so petitioners are best to act individually.

Our meeting with Stevenage Borough Council we believe was intended by them to discuss with us the plans for Forster Country on the basis that the development will proceed. SBC said that the housing is needed for the people of England but that it cannot proceed while the Local Plan is on hold. We said that we regard the Inspector's report as unsafe, unsound and unfair. We raised the question of the permanence of Green Belt as stated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We also said that the Icon building possibility had not been properly addressed and that traffic congestion, coalescence, rights of way and certain infrastructure issues had not been assessed correctly.

We have now attended a number of the NHDC Local Plan Examination Hearings and have spoken forcefully, particularly on Green Belt and Transport. Following this we have written a strong letter to the NHDC Inspector, saying that we are not happy with the minimal allowance for us to put forward our case on the permanence of Green Belt. We feel that more can be done by CPRE, who

have large funds at their disposal, to defend the Green Belt and we are in touch with them. We would like them to use Stevenage as a test case to challenge the intention of releasing land from the Green Belt against the NPPF. We will also be writing to the Ombudsman about the unfair process and to the Secretary of State asking for the Local Plan to be called in.

A significant problem with our stance is that Green Belt is being taken for housing all over the UK. We feel that discussions are taking place behind closed doors with the intention of ensuring that the Green Belt permanence paragraph in the NPPF is ignored.

On a brighter note, the Stevenage Local Plan is still on hold and it does at least retain a small area of green space extending just under half a kilometer to the north of Rooks Nest House.

We remain hopeful that our arguments have had some effect and that Forster Country can still be saved.

John Spiers

Membership Renewal

In view of the uncertainty surrounding Forster Country we shall not be collecting subscriptions for 2018-2019.

You remain on our mailing list and will be kept informed of developments.

Elizabeth Poston in the news

At a time when the destruction of virtually all the Green Belt Forster Country seems almost inevitable, it is good to realise that its cultural heritage is bound to live on and, in the case of its heritage of music, to be aware of several happenings this year that prove the point.

The first is an exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Music Museum, *Hitting the Right Note*, to highlight the achievements of around twenty five of its amazing female alumnae from its earliest years through to today which will, of course, include Elizabeth Poston. Featured will be a biography and photographs of Elizabeth, facsimiles of her handwritten scores and, hopefully, items to do with the musical codes she used in wartime BBC broadcasts which are being sought from the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust.

It opens on 29 June and will continue until 18 April 2019; opening times of the Museum in Marylebone Road are 11.30 am – 5.50pm Monday to Friday and 12 – 4 pm on Saturday but closed on Sundays and Bank holidays and the whole month of December.

Then, in the Autumn, some of her many songs are to be performed at two concerts. The first arises from Elizabeth's friendship with the cellist/composer William Busch which started in 1942 when she was at the BBC and he had thanked her for her performance, with singer René Soames, of one of his songs, *Rest*, a song whose fine quality she very much appreciated. Musically they were on the same wavelength and kept up a vigorous correspondence until his untimely death in 1945, at one point agreeing

to each set the poem *Snowdrops in the Wind*.

The concert celebrating *William Busch's Life* and Times will take place on Saturday 20 October at 2.00 pm at The Hinde Street Church in Marylebone and the singer will be the mezzo-soprano, Diana Moore, well known as a leading exponent of English music.

Diana is also known for shining the spotlight on female composers, in which role she proposes another programme in November featuring Elizabeth as one of five or six chosen. As well as singing her songs, she will focus on 'Elizabeth's life and achievements in the field of music, her support of composers, and her impact on women in music going forward.' It is likely that we will hear both versions of her *Sweet Suffolk Owl*.

The other development, now that Elizabeth Poston's archives of private papers and music have been made available and safely deposited at the Hertfordshire Public Records Office and the British Library, respectively, has been the production of a catalogue of her compositions, including, particularly, unpublished material which might otherwise be unknown or forgotten. Many people have heard of her *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree* without realising that she wrote or arranged nearly 1000 works! The catalogue runs to over 57,000 words about half of which deal in detail with her connections with both the music and her many musician friends associated with it. It will be available in a few weeks time when details will be posted in on my website, johnsalabaster.com.

John Alabaster



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