

Future housing development

Since our September issue there have been no significant formal announcements by either Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) or North Herts District Council (NHDC) relating to future housing development. The only minor statements were from NHDC who have identified additional land options available, which could be to our benefit.

There has also been a request for planning permission for an area east of Luton and a notice that the land west of Stevenage is available for development, following the withdrawal of Taylor Woodrow's original application.

However, Margaret Ashby, Stephen Pollock-Hill and I met Viv Evans and Richard Javes, who are the senior planning officers for SBC, on 12th November and several facts came to light.

Proposals for Forster Country

The first and most important is that there appears to be an intention to build on a large part of Forster Country



within the Stevenage boundary as part of the development plan to be implemented between now and 2031.

This is a roughly triangular area bounded on the west by North Road, the north by the Stevenage boundary and on the south east by the path that runs north west from The Brambles almost to the southern tip of 10 acre plantation.

If this goes ahead NHDC will almost certainly build north of this to meet Church Lane Graveley close to the Lodge of Chesfield Park. When

combined with the proposals for the extension of Great Ashby, Forster Country will become a very small area virtually enclosed by housing with only a narrow corridor to open countryside close to Manor Farm (see inset thumbnail covering all of this with black outline for Forster Country and horizontal hatching being SBC and vertical hatching being NHDC). Views to the Chilterns will be eliminated.

This represents the most serious threat to Forster Country to date. All of this has to be seen in the light of Stevenage being one of the few local authorities which actually **wants to expand**.

The only silver lining at present is the timing and the possibilities of resisting all of this. To date the Government Inspector has said that the Stevenage arguments for development have little weight.

Readers of this Newsletter may like to talk this over with friends and neighbours who do not currently subscribe to FoFC but who may be alarmed by these proposals.

John Spiers

Hetty Bower

We are sad to announce the death, aged 108, of Hetty Bower, mother of long-serving Committee Member, Margaret Dolan.

Hetty had become quite a celebrity since turning 100, appearing in various TV programmes and films, though to those who knew her personally she

always had been a very special person.

She had walked the Forster Country with us on several occasions, the last time being New Year's Day 2008, and she features in a number of Newsletter photographs in editions of the earlier 2000s.

Birthday Walk

The annual walk to commemorate E M Forster's birthday on January 1st will take place as usual, starting at 2 pm at the lych-gate of St Nicholas' Church, Rectory Lane, Stevenage SG1 4DA. Adults, children and dogs are all welcome to join us. The walk is about two miles long and not arduous, though often muddy, and it is not obligatory to complete the whole circuit. Tea and biscuits await in the Parish Room of the church at the end.

John Hepworth Memorial Lecture

The second John Hepworth Memorial Lecture was held at 2pm on Saturday, 23rd November, in the Council Chamber of Daneshill House.

The speaker, Zoe Hendon, Head of Museum Collections at the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, University of Middlesex, spoke on aspects of the work of the designer Archibald Knox (1864-1933). Knox's designs, like those of his contemporary, Charles Rennie Macintosh, saw a revival in popularity in the late 20th century and are now much copied, particularly in jewellery.

Zoe placed Knox in the context of the expanding spending power of the middle classes, the emergence of department stores and industrialisation



making possible the mass production of fine objects. The world-famous department store, Liberty, championed Art Nouveau and bought work from designers such as Knox. His art could

be said to be democratic rather than aristocratic, inspired as it was by the Celtic artifacts he saw in the Isle of Man, where he lived for most of his life.

We were treated to an introduction from Dr Robin Poston, a distant cousin of Elizabeth Poston, whose mother, now aged 96, was taught by Knox in Douglas, Isle of Man, and still remembers him well - as an eccentric and not too competent teacher.

The Ingleheim Room was buzzing with conversation as people greeted each other over refreshments after the lecture. We are grateful to Cllr Simon Speller for sponsoring the event and to Cllr Sherma Batson, Mayor Elect, for making tea in pots for us despite having one arm in a sling.

Safeguarding the Elizabeth Poston papers

As most members know, Elizabeth Poston was a prolific correspondent and kept many of her own drafts (or copies) as well as replies she received. She left all these, as well as her music, to Simon Campion, her literary executor and copyright-holder, in the expectation that he would give them to a suitable trust.

Now, I am happy to report that he



has deposited all the written material (contained in nearly 100 box files) at The Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), Hertfordshire County Council, County Hall, Hertford. Here, once catalogued and professionally conserved, it will be available for public inspection and research.

Simon made the handover to Gary Moyle and Diane Hodgson representing HALS on 7th October and, to facilitate future access, the material (Accession Number 5495) was accompanied by lists and extracts of the contents both as hard and electronic copy (Accession Number 5494).

This material, as well as Elizabeth's Pocket Diaries, passed on by Margaret Ashby, and additional letters, has already been partially used in producing the five booklets about her



Photos Margaret Ashby

published by Friends of the Forster Country (four of which have now been updated for downloading on www.johnsalabaster.com, with a link to the FoFC website) but there is much more that could be written about her from what remains unused and now easily accessible to interested parties; indeed a full biography could and should perhaps now be written about this remarkable woman.

John S Alabaster

Patrons of the Friends of the Forster Country

Margaret Ashby. Nicola Beauman. Andrew Motion. John Pilgrim. Richard Whitmore

Officers

Chairman - John Spiers, 25 Whitney Drive, Stevenage SG1 4BE. 01438 350217
Vice Chairman - Stephen Pollock-Hill, Homewood, Knebworth SG3 6PP. 01438 812105
Secretary - Marion Ohlendorf, 4 Chestnut Walk, Stevenage, SG1 4DD. 01438 361470

Newsletter

Editor - Angela Hepworth 01438 351462. Design - Peter Kingsnorth 01438 869557
web - www.forstercountry.org.uk