

Future housing development

Once again there have been no significant formal announcements since our last issue by either Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) or North Herts District Council (NHDC) relating to future housing development.

However, your Committee believes that once the next consultation stage is presented to the public there will be very limited time to respond. Bearing this in mind we are taking steps to prepare what we can in advance. To this end we have established a small working party which is gathering information from our own archive material. This includes many factors which we believe can be presented in support of maintaining the status quo for Forster Country. In addition we are reviewing the history and current general status of the Green Belt of which Forster Country forms part and which is potentially threatened.

At our most recent meeting we

decided to rejuvenate our contacts with the planning departments of both NHDC and SBC. One item of particular concern has been the apparent sighting of surveying equipment on land behind Granby Road and this will be raised with SBC. We feel that our contact with NHDC should entail a joint approach with Graveley Against SNAP Proposals (GASP) and that will be put in hand over the coming few weeks.

As an ongoing activity we are trying to raise awareness with the general public as well as amongst our members and are seeking ideas to help with this. We feel that some people who walk in Forster Country may not be fully aware of the threat and in particular we are intending to draw the attention of dog walkers to their potential loss of facility.

We are also intending to display at least one more Forster Notice Board in

a prominent position.

Contributions from members to augment any of this would be welcomed. There is a real and present danger that Forster Country could be lost in the foreseeable future.

John Spiers

New patron



We are delighted that Barbara Follett has agreed to become a patron of The Friends of the Forster Country.

She took a keen interest in our cause throughout her time as our constituency MP (1997-2010), meeting with our Founders on several occasions and attending our events.

She is a paid-up Friend and only last year opened our waymarked footpath. (See Newsletter September 2013) Her support now will be invaluable.

Thank you, Barbara.

The fight that is never done

Who originated this phrase, heartfelt by the Friends of the Forster Country?

It is much used by Liberty, which this year celebrates the 80th anniversary of its foundation. The words are those of E M Forster. A short film entitled 'The fight that is never done' was made for the 75th anniversary, and is available under that title on You Tube.

On February 22nd 1934, a group of prominent authors, journalists, lawyers and politicians met at St Martins-in-the-Fields and formed the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL). They were concerned that the government of the day was putting difficulties in the way of the citizen's right to assemble for peaceful protest, citing some outbreaks of violence as an excuse for repressive measures. Their purpose was to act as responsible and legal observers at the 1934 Hunger March -which indeed passed off peacefully. However, it was agreed that the NCCL should continue to exist in

order to "defend the whole spirit of British freedom". This year it is celebrating its 80 years of doing just that - holding the powerful to account, and striving for justice, freedom and equality.

E M Forster was not only one of NCCL's fewer- than-fifty founder members, but became its first president, an author whose writings and broadcasts demonstrated his wisdom and compassion for the human condition.

A plaque on the wall of Liberty's offices close to Westminster - a step up from 1934's one room in a bedsit in a mews off Shaftesbury Avenue - has a quotation from E M Forster's tribute to NCCL's first General Secretary - Ronald Kidd:

"Passionate in his hatred of injustice, wise in judgment, fearless in action, he championed the liberties of the people **in the fight that is never done.**"

June Pitcher

A gothic New Year's Day



Photo Margaet Ashby

The wind howled, the rain lashed down, the mud was deep enough and wet enough to drown in. Altogether it was one of the most enjoyable New Year's Day walks we have had.

Some twenty-eight intrepid souls crowded under St Nicholas' church lychgate for the obligatory photograph, then set off in high good humour. Patch, the only canine member, dropped out fairly quickly on the grounds that her feet were cold, but most of the rest plodded and slid their way through the whole route. The regulars were very pleased to be joined by supporters from London, the USA and Switzerland and assured them that this sodden landscape really had been described by Forster as 'the loveliest in England.'

First back were the three children, Eleanor, Benjamin and Dominic, all looking remarkably fit and happy. Then the grown-ups straggled in, wiping their boots on the grass before entering the church to enjoy warmth, tea and biscuits. The American lady shivered as she listened to the gale and described the atmosphere as 'Gothic'. Those of us who like it defended the roaring of the wind as one of our favourite sounds; others began a discussion on the meaning of 'Gothic' and darkness fell before we were ready to go home. Let's hope next New Year's Day will be as good.

Margaret Ashby

AGM

The 2014 AGM will be held, by kind permission of Anne Newman, at Rooks Nest House on Saturday, June 28th, starting at 2:30pm. Cake and soft drinks will be served but members are welcome to bring any other refreshments they like. There will be musical entertainment and shelter from sun or rain in our Vice-Chairman's marquee. Some seating will be available but bring your own if you prefer. We do hope to see many of you there.

There is parking nearby in Weston Road Cemetery, SG1 3RP.

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 2014-2015 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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