

The Friends of the Forster Country

Newsletter

Issue No 46. September 2017

Local plan

Stevenage Borough Council produced a revised Plan which was issued to the general public on 12th June and in our opinion included little significant change.

We sent in one representation relating to this within the six week consultation period and we believe that the Plan will by now have been re-issued to the Inspector. The Inspector will return the Plan to SBC as 'accepted', 'accepted with minor modifications required' or 'accepted with major modifications required' during October.

The SBC Executive will then formally accept or reject the Inspector's findings before seeking a full Council mandate for their decision towards the end of the year.

Following this we are assuming that formal planning permission will have to be sought for actual implementation and that there will be a further opportunity to defend Forster Country. We are currently looking into the process for the future.

We are also contesting the approach taken in the Local Plan in dealing with Previously Developed

Land (PDL, known colloquially as brownfield).

To this end we have written formally to the Inspector saying that the Icon Building at the junction of Lytton Way and Fairlands Way (formerly the Eagle Star office) with its possible potential for 540 dwellings was not properly considered and that this therefore could apply in other parts of Stevenage.

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

John Spiers

For Sale!

Rooks Nest House is for sale. The home of E M Forster from 1883-1893 and his inspiration for 'Howards End', he retained an affection for it throughout his long life. It has been a centre for our activities since the formation of FOFC in 1989.

We are grateful for the generosity of its owners since then in hosting us on many occasions and will obviously be taking a keen interest in the progress and outcome of the sale.



Green Belt promise

In their Manifesto this year the Conservative Party promised the British public that they would give 'strong protection' to the Green Belt. The Conservative Party won that election so Forster country should have nothing to fear. Of course, there is an obvious snag to this argument - which is that the Government might renege on its promise. Political parties do not like to break their promises. It is bad publicity for them and it weakens the strength of future promises designed to entice the public to vote for them.

It is a question of balance between opposing political pressures. Is the pressure from those who wish to build on the Green Belt bigger or less than the pressure from those who will be upset by that building?

CPRE claims that there is sufficient brownfield land available to build 1.5 million houses. Local councils want to build 425,000 houses on Green Belt

land so those can be accommodated totally on brownfield sites. Building on brownfield rather than on greenfield sites lowers the profits of the developers so they press hard but what of the political pressure on the other side from the British public?

Simply, we must make it as strong as we possibly can, for we must prevail in this matter.

We should apply pressure on our MPs as they have direct contact with the relevant Ministers, and indeed the Prime Minister, and we should refuse to vote for the Conservative party in the next election if they renege on this promise..

Holding the Government to its promise on the Green Belt is a countrywide project so each Green Belt group needs to do its bit. FoFC can play its part in that campaign.

R F Norgan

AGM

Our Annual General Meeting took place in the Stevenage Borough Council Chamber at Daneshill House on Saturday 12th August. It was attended by a score of our core supporters and we were pleased to welcome Councillors John Gardner and Simon Speller and thank them for the use of the rooms.

Our chairman gave his report and was rather gloomy about the prospects for Forster Country but Councillor Simon Speller, from the floor, told him not to be too sombre. He said that planning and conservation go hand in hand and that FOFC does a good job in reminding us of this. He said that the Council's ideas should be challenged and that Sherma Batson, whose demise was much regretted by those present, was a strong advocate for people contesting decisions. His approval and optimism were cheering.

The election of the committee and officers saw little change in personnel. Our Vice-Chairman, Stephen Pollock

Hill, has decided to retire from this post although he will stay on the Committee for the time being. Stephen has been untiring in his efforts over many years and thanks are due to him.

Michael Catty has also retired from the Committee. We are most grateful for all his work, particularly his recent contribution to our representations relating to the Local Plan.

Reg Norgan who lives in Graveley on the edge of Forster Country has agreed to join the Committee. Reg has been very active both locally and further afield in trying to protect Green Belt and will be an invaluable Committee Member.

Business concluded, we heard a detailed account of the history of the Hertfordshire branch of CPRE and the work of the whole organisation from Michael Nidd.

The talk was followed by refreshments and conviviality in the Ingleheim Room.

50 years

This year marks 50 years since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in this country and the anniversary has been celebrated widely in the media and in the gay community. We cannot let this pass without wondering what difference this would have made to E M Forster's life and work.

Forced to conceal his sexuality in his conventional, middle-class family and judgmental society, his literary expression may also have been repressed. 'Maurice', his only attempt to write about same sex love, was written in 1914 but only published posthumously, in 1971. Apparently this was his wish.

Said to be modest and retiring by nature, he would not have wanted to upset or even outrage; he evidently lacked the audacity of the Bloomsbury circle with whom he was friendly or maybe was more philosophical about his situation.

His last novel 'A Passage to India' was published in 1924, when he was 45, and for the rest of his life - he died aged 92 in 1970 - he produced non-fiction and made broadcasts. He maintained a high reputation, was nicknamed the 'holy man of letters', but despite this was not awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature. Perhaps he would have been had his imagination not been fettered by the law of the land. What did he think when it was reformed three years before he died? Did he even care?

Birthday Walk



The annual walk across Forster Country to celebrate the author's birthday will take place on Monday, 1st January, 2018.

All welcome. Meet at the lych-gate of St. Nicholas' Church, Rectory Lane, Stevenage SG1 4DA at 2pm.

Refreshments in the shelter of the Parish Room in the church afterwards.

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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Newsletter

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