



Another chance?

Since our last Newsletter of winter 2019 much has happened.

Perhaps I should start by saying that we do not have a formal newsletter editor at present and that committee members are doing their best to produce something about every six months.

Of course we have been thrown onto the back foot by the pandemic. Our last committee meeting before lockdown was 19th February 2020 and we subsequently held an open-air meeting with six present on 6th July to discuss the way forward. Some of what follows has already been made public on our website and on Facebook.

Turning to the direct issues facing us there have been two main developments with accompanying actions.

The Bellway-Miller (BM) revised Outline Planning Application number 17/00862/OPM to build on Forster Country was considered by Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) at a Planning Meeting held on 4th February. I was allowed to speak for only six minutes at this meeting, but I think that we made some good points. Despite this the Application was passed by seven votes to five with the split coincidentally being entirely along political party lines.

The passing of this application was deeply disappointing and led us to think that our only remaining hope would be to challenge the application at the detailed stage. However, a technical hitch was discovered because the application, when submitted referred to the developer's responsibilities under 'Section 106'

requirements. As we understand it in January 2020 SBC decided to adopt Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) instead of Section 106. This approach could be better for all local councils as we believe it makes it more difficult for developers to wriggle out of their

commitments. This has meant that the Application has to be reconsidered by the SBC Planning Committee and gives us a chance to fight again at the important outline stage. The meeting is currently scheduled for 4 November.

We are trying to talk to the Planning Councillors and can now see four aspects which we feel they should consider carefully:-

1. Government housing requirements. The Stevenage Local Plan was based on Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures from the year 2014. The 2014 figures gave a starting point of around 7,500 new dwellings being required between the years 2011 and 2031 and after adjustment the finally agreed figure was 7,600. Since that time the ONS have revised their figures and the new starting point is 3,500 new dwellings for Stevenage, this obviously being less than half of the 2014 figure.

2. Officer report for the meeting of 4th February. In my opinion this report did not address adequately the representations on many issues made by FoFC and numerous other bodies and individuals

3. Value of Forster Country to health and well-being evinced particularly during the lockdown period. We have been measuring numbers and it is clear that around 200 people per day walk, ride or run in Forster Country

4. SBC vision for 2030. The vision of SBC is for a carbon neutral Stevenage by the year 2030. The dwellings proposed for Forster Country make no real attempt to address this. The standards proposed are in line with normal building regulations. There has been zero effort to provide sustainable heat sources such as heat pumps or

solar panels; indeed the latter have been described as expensive and unsightly. In fact they could form a decent architectural feature built in economically at the

outset and in the slightly longer run saving expense for the residents, whilst at the same time contributing to saving our planet.

John Spiers

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NHDC Local Plan examination

The Covid pandemic led to the postponement of the public NHDC Local Plan examination hearing sessions the day before they were due to start on 16 March 2020. They have now been re-scheduled to commence on Monday, 28 September 2020.

Our small band of objectors are often depicted as David against Goliath or Robin Hood and his merry men, armed with bows and arrows against the strength and brutality of NHDC Planners, the aggressive developers, their skilful barristers and legal and technical experts. We are glad the Planning Inspector is safe and well, as are we. Safe and going back to what is undoubtedly a bear pit, full of traps and obfuscation.

We have found Simon Berkeley to be a man keen to encourage the ordinary public to talk to him, engage with him in discussion and he was always happy to explain further any difficult concepts of planning to a layman during discussion in the formal hearing sessions. Thus it was often an all round learning experience for those not already working in a professional planning capacity.

The six hearing sessions specifically chosen by Simon Berkeley for further discussion are the following:

Matter 21 - the objective assessment of housing need

Matter 22 - the five-year housing land supply

Matter 23 – the Green Belt Review work and the site selection process

Matter 24 – the proposed 'East of Luton' sites

Matter 25 – new land proposed for allocation (Site GA2, Site BA2 and Site BK3) + (the proposed Gypsy and Traveller site at Danesbury Park Road)

Matter 26 – villages for growth

It is interesting to note the developers who are due to take part in the Examination hearings. These include Croudace Homes who propose the 900 houses in the site named NS1, which adjoins the planning application from Bellway-Miller in Forster Country for 800 houses, Taylor Wimpey, Bloor Homes and The Crown Estate (Savills). Developers and the Councils are often represented by planning consultancies.

Objectors include several local Parish Councils, Transition Town Letchworth, Save our Green Belt, Save Rural Codicote, plus of course the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and many members of the public.

The latest and most important news is that Mr Berkeley, in conjunction with the two Planning Inspectors for the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan requested on July 8 2020 that NHDC and Central Bedfordshire Council provide by 31 July 2020 an assessment of the objectively assessed need for housing based on the most up-to-date household projections. This is in the light of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) publication on 29 June 2020 of data relating to 2018-based household projections.

This request is document ED (Examination Document) 190 which can be found, along with all the submissions and many other documents, including responses to Main Modifications to the Local Plan suggested by the Planning Inspector in the NHDC Local Plan Examination website, as indicated in the link below: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-policy/local-plan>

A fundamental part of the strategy in the Central Bedfordshire and North Hertfordshire Local Plans is to remove land from the Green Belt in order to contribute towards meeting the unmet housing needs from Luton. Amongst other things, these two Councils are asked to advise what implications the latest household projections have on

housing needs in Luton. Specifically, are there any implications from the 2018-based projections on the need to release land from the Green Belt around Luton? Do the exceptional circumstances, as required by paragraphs 79-86 of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework, exist to justify the proposed revisions to Green Belt boundaries?

At the time when the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan was first introduced and voted upon by Councillors there was much disquiet and many reservations about it, voiced by Councillors and the public. Speeches were made by objectors at the time, on the very same issues which the Inspectors are now bringing to the fore.

Bim Afolami MP and Sir Oliver Heald MP have both strongly objected to the Plan. Bim Afolami MP attended one of the hearings, directly addressing HM Inspector on specific environmental concerns.

Below is an extract from Bim's statement (ED46) which can be found on the Examination website:

Overall Housing Target Number and Infrastructure

"Various community groups in my constituency have done a lot of research into the overall housing target number and have published and submitted their findings to this inquiry. I urge the Planning Inspectors to look at their findings in detail and to consider them fully. In general terms, there is a lot of concern from local residents that the overall housing target number for North Hertfordshire is excessive and will be extremely difficult to meet.

I understand the need for cooperation under the Duty to Cooperate, but many homes we will need to build are to meet Luton Borough Council's excess housing need, and it would be good to have reassurance from the Planning Inspector on that point.

North Hertfordshire is a very rural area with small lanes and limited public

transport, with many Areas ONB. The increase in housing, proposed in this Local Plan, will overwhelm the current road infrastructure, not to mention GPs,

schools and other local services. I strongly urge the Planning Inspector to bear the rural nature of North Hertfordshire in mind when analysing

the infrastructure proposals contained within the local plan and any recommendations he wishes to make.”

Cheryl Peers

A welcome find

The music of *Campion Carillon, an Invention for Two to play on one Piano*, by Elizabeth Poston, long known only from a single page, has at last come to light.

It was composed in three sections in 1986 (the year before she died) 'in honour of the Three Friends saluted herein': 1, *Simon's Celebration* [of his 50th birthday]; 2, *Daphne –Song*

without Words with no apology to Sir William Walton; and 3, *The Master's Music*.

She had not long met Simon Campion and Malcolm Williamson (Master of the Queen's Music) at a concert in Royston and they had become good friends. Daphne, something of a mystery, may be the person known to have often fallen asleep at the Saddlery at

Standon, Simon's *poste restante*; that would account for the markings, *Blues and Cantabile* for her in the second part of the work, in contrast to *Festive and Busy* for Simon in the first and *Fast and Fun* for Malcolm in the last.

The music has now been dispatched to the British Library to join the rest of Elizabeth's extant music there.

John Alabaster

Walk in Forster Country

Despite rather chilly weather a large number of people (and dogs) convened at St Nicholas Church, on Sunday 30th August for an informal stroll through Forster Country.

Our Chairman, John spoke briefly to remind walkers of the need for social distancing and also referred to the fact that the building of housing on Forster Country is now of very dubious value as the Government forward projection for housing to be built between 2011 and 2031 is less than half the number used

to support the Stevenage Local Plan.

For several reasons, Covid being one, this was not the usual FoFC-led walk and people set off in small groups, map in hand, to make their own way around the countryside. We were delighted that at least 130 walkers joined in, with more turning up after formal counting had finished.

Many expressed their sadness at the potential loss of our countryside and said what a welcome escape this open space had been to them in recent

months.

Participants ranged in age and ability and most covered the whole of the Forster Country walk, saying how much they enjoyed being in the open countryside with fresh air and glorious views.

For those of us more used to the mud and bare trees of our annual January walk, it was a delight to have firm ground underfoot and greenery all around us for a change.



Simon Walker

The Poston/Warlock friendship

It has been said of the musician, Peter Warlock (non de plume for Philip Heseltine) that he could not be understood if the girls in his life were 'indicated only in the most shadowy way'¹. By the same token, we cannot fully understand Elizabeth without knowing more of her relationship with her friends, including the men in her life, particularly Phil, as she called him, around whom there had long been an atmosphere of mystery which Elizabeth herself had helped to maintain, consistently refusing, when asked, to talk about it in any detail.

At the time of her death, no correspondence between them was forthcoming and it was assumed that any such had been included in the material destroyed, at her instruction, by her nephew Jim Poston.

Nothing between them was included within the collected letters of Peter Warlock published in 2005 (see reference No. 1 below), although a short portion of one from Elizabeth to Warlock's mother, written in February 1931 following his suicide the previous December showed that she had known him very well and that he was 'fine & generous & great-hearted & all love & admiration for him only grow greater'.

The more informative complete letter indicates the depth of her feeling for Warlock, telling how they first met through musical associations and friends in common when she was still studying and on the threshold of her own career, saying also that her friendship was different from those of many other of his friends.

More recently, a packet dated 19 February 1932 came to light containing half a dozen letters written by Phil to Elizabeth in the winter of 1930, almost a year before his suicide, having been stowed away high up in a cupboard



Philip Heseltine c1915
(Courtesy of the Peter Warlock Society)

near the kitchen in Rooks Nest House; he addressed her as '*Dearest Chopcherry*' (the name of one of three songs in the first set of *Peterisms* of 1922), expressed his love for her, talked of walking together in the countryside and suggested her living with him in London²,

Another letter, written by her when convalescing in Austria in June 1931³ gives the flavour of her grief, 'The times & all that Philip took with him from the world will never come into it again. It is something to have known them. Beyond that, there is nothing to be said.'

Theirs was a unique friendship in which they shared so much: appreciation of the countryside; love of music, particularly song and the small-scale, feeling for the music of words – not only in English but in other languages, especially French; attraction to 16th & 17th century literature; and interest in good scholarship.

There is no doubt that 'the gentle lover', as she once described him, had a profound effect on her life and she was



Elizabeth Poston c1937
(© Gamay)

determined to do all she could, particularly in her broadcasts, to correct any misrepresentation of his character as she understood it, once famously castigating it as 'at second hand from the second rate', aimed, no doubt at Cecil Gray!

Further details of their friendship and her championing of his talent have been given elsewhere⁴.

¹Quoted by Smith, Barry (2005) *The Collected Letters of Peter Warlock*. Vols. I-IV. Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge Surrey. Vol. 1, p. 1.

²Alabaster, John S. (2018) *Discovery of Warlock/Poston Letters*. Newsletter No. 103, Peter Warlock Society. Autumn, 2018, pp. 14-15

³Mitchell, John (2019) *A letter from Elizabeth Poston to Bruce Blunt*. Newsletter No. 105, Peter Warlock Society. Autumn, 2019, pp. 35-37

⁴Alabaster, John S. (2018) *Elizabeth Poston: Catalogue of Works with Biographical Content*. Lulu.Com. 186 pp.

John Alabaster

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