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Chislehurst Report

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Bromley Council reveals its thinking on conservation and design

PLAN FOR 2000+ Boost for Conservation Area

Changing the Plan

When developers hear that some planning scheme they favour (such as turning a retail shop into a restaurant or building in the Green Belt) is being resisted because it is "contrary to the Plan" they have sometimes been heard to say bitterly that the Plan ought to be changed. Society Members have sometimes said the same, though probably with very different objectives in mind. So from various points of view there should be a warm welcome for Bromley Council's intention to revise its present Unitary Development Plan (UDP) by the year 2000.

The Public's Views

Between now and then there will be excellent opportunities for the public to express its views. Ultimately of course the Council has to make the final decisions, subject to law and government policies, but past experience has shown that Bromley organizes UDP consultations in a thorough and democratic fashion. It is up to every interested party to make any representations it believes necessary. The Society takes a full part in the consultation process in the interests of Chislehurst and the Borough generally.

Conservation Area Document

Already, in preparing for the formal consultation about possible changes to the UDP, the Council has made public a number of preliminary documents covering different sections of the Plan. One such document of particular interest to an amenity society such as ours which can rejoice in having a large Conservation Area, and much else worth preserving, within its area, is UDP Review Paper 14 on the topic "Conservation, Design and the Built Environment"

Some brief quotations from its opening pages establish the enlightened and progressive flavour of the whole:

"There is a need to adapt existing UDP policies to reflect the raised importance of urban design and sustainable development".

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Mrs Margaret Corderoy

We greatly regret to report the unexpected death at the end of July of Margaret Corderoy, late of Claverley Cottage, Lubbock Road. For very many years a strong supporter of the ideals of the Society and its parent the Chislehurst Residents' Association, she had, some years ago, presented the Society with a munificent gift of property, Claverley Cottage, her home for many years, from which the income will now make very substantial contributions to the Society's future activities as a charity. For as long as the Society exists she will be remembered with profound gratitude.

Town Centre Manager for Chislehurst

A welcome appointment

The need to maintain Chislehurst as an attractive shopping centre providing retail services for local needs has been recognized by Bromley Council's appointment of Mr Kevin Morris as Town Centre Manager. He has already taken up his duties and begun discussions. The Society has warmly welcomed his appointment. He knows Chislehurst very well and has been a vital source of practical advice and "hands-on" assistance whenever we have had Heritage Days and similar occasions. With his wide experience as a professional planner he is exceptionally well qualified for the tasks of fostering commercial prosperity and environmental attractiveness in what is largely a conservation area. We wish him every success.

The Recreation Ground

Members, and in particular, families with young children will be pleased to learn that upgrading of the childrens' play area, including play equipment, will take place (we are informed) in the near future. This will be very welcome.

The High Street

We are hopeful that, after strong representation by the Society, BT Telephone kiosks beside the Prickend Pond and Post Office Boxes outside the Old Post Office will be re-sited more appropriately.

(continued from page 1)

"New government policy advice places a greater emphasis on design and heritage issues than hitherto". (It should be said that "government" here does not refer to any particular administration: the new policy advice has been developing over the last few years and represents the more enlightened national consensus on the importance of heritage and design that has largely replaced earlier indifference).

"How can the Council and its partners best enhance the street environment?" (After all the efforts of the Society over the last eleven years in the interests of the street environment this invitation is very welcome. "Partners" has a wide spread. Besides the long-established and highly respected Advisory Panel on Conservation Areas, which brings together professional advisors and representatives of local associations, the Council has set up the Architectural Panel for Bromley, which focuses professional views on major development proposals, and the innovative Historic Buildings Owners Group, which now fosters dialogue between the Council and the owners of the many listed buildings in the borough. In addition *"the Council will continue to work in partnership with private landowners and residents' groups to carry out environmental improvements that have a clear public benefit"*).

"A specific shop front design policy could be incorporated into the UDP".

"It may be appropriate to introduce a policy on lighting and illumination". (The last time there was a major replacement of street-lighting in the Conservation Area the Society strongly, but vainly, criticized the change as causing excessive and unnecessary light pollution, so it is good to see this type of problem now recognized).

Streetscape and Local Character

In a document so full of good things it is difficult to single out items to highlight. But since the importance of streetscape and local character have been so much emphasised by the Society in the past we conclude this report with a few quotations on those aspects:

"... using limited budgets to support local distinctiveness and sense of place ..."

"... requiring the highest standard of design from third parties responsible for the installation of any street furniture or floorscape ..."

"... a "cared for place" in which streets are clean, tidy and well cared for, inviting to pedestrians and deterrent to criminals ..."

(continued - Col 2)

Cash Help from Bromley

Members will welcome the announcement from our Local Council that we print below:

"Sustainable Development - What YOU can do

"Local Agenda 21 stems from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit where world leaders agreed an action plan for the environment and development into the 21st century.

"The LA21 process has raised expectations about the involvement of the local community in action for sustainable development. But many groups do not have the resources to undertake action for themselves. A small grants scheme, therefore, has been set up by Bromley Council to help local people generate and implement their own proposals for sustainable development.

"If you have a project you think contributes towards sustainable development, then we may be able to help you. Grants of up to £500 are available for individuals, residents' associations, schools, or other groups able to contribute to the actions set out in Bromley's Local Agenda 21 Blueprint (which is available from local reference libraries).

"If you would like details of how to apply for a grant for an LA21 project, please contact Mike Ibbott or Lisa Buddin at the Civic Centre for full details (Tel: 0181 313 4520)."

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"The introduction of appropriate paving types ..."

"Work has commenced on the production of "Streetscape Manuals" for town centres and conservation areas that will begin to put these issues into practice".

Further Information

Copies of UDP documents can be obtained at the Civic Centre (Planning Reception) and are available for inspection at Chislehurst and other Libraries.

Criticism of High Street Shelter

For many years Bromley Council has pursued the civilized policy of banning advertising on bus shelters in conservation areas. Posters that would never be allowed on walls, was the view, should not be allowed to sneak into the conservation area scene by masquerading as decorations for bus shelters. Time-tables and travel information, yes, but advertising, no. The Conservation Area had to be protected from advertising hoardings whether large or small.

Priority for adverts

So it was quite a shock when a Department of the Environment Inspector over-ruled the Council on this

(contined on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

issue in an appeal decision in February. A result of this ruling is that the newly-erected bus shelter outside Sainsburys sports two very prominent advertising posters. This marring of the street scene, a blatant departure from normal Conservation Area standards and a dangerous precedent, is particularly annoying because anyone can see that this shelter in this position is not meant as a genuine passenger-facility that happens to have posters on it. Rather, it is primarily an obtrusive pavement-level advertisement display area but with shelter features attached. The whole design has been shaped not so as to provide the best arrangements for waiting passengers and passing pedestrians but with the over-riding purpose of ensuring that the advertising posters are given the best possible chances of catching the eyes of passing motorists. The requirements of the advertising industry have been put first, the convenience of people a long way behind, and the requirements of the Conservation Area nowhere.

Practical drawbacks

This is not to say that the shelter might not be perfectly acceptable on some very different sort of site. But a shelter properly designed for a position on a comparatively narrow pavement outside a busy shop on a busy road needs four features that are missing from this one (but which can be observed in the simple shelter near the post office on the other side of the High Street). It should take up minimum pavement space, it should locate the queue along the road side of the pavement so as to minimize the obstruction for passing pedestrians, it should provide protection for people in or alongside the seats by a barrier between them and the traffic, and it should allow any extension of the queue outside the shelter to tail back in a straight line, so as not to get in the way of the main pedestrian flow and to keep the integrity of the queue. The designers of this new structure have been allowed to flout these standard requirements. The shelter takes up the same amount of pavement space whether in use or not, it houses its users in the middle of the pavement, it gives users no protection from the traffic (people using the seats in rainy weather are liable to be splashed), and the overflow from the shelter is channelled not back in a straight line but at a right angle into the route of passing pedestrians. As an addition to Chislehurst High Street this shelter earns a minus mark. It should not be seen as a precedent to be followed, but as a mistake not to be repeated. We will report further on the matter in our next issue.

The Old Post Office

The Old Post Office premises are back in business, but this time as a Cafe Rouge Restaurant. The future of this locally listed building had been in doubt ever since the Post Office vacated it. The Society had taken every action open to it to save the older parts of the building, including a formal approach to English Heritage, but without success, and by the beginning of this year the

results of long neglect were only too evident on the fine facade. No retail investor, it was said, was willing to face what was claimed to be the large bill for restoration and this summer the Department of the Environment granted planning permission for a change of use.

The plans originally submitted by Café Rouge had been inappropriate for the Conservation Area but after negotiation by Bromley Council they were suitably modified. The result is that attractive features of the original facade, including the fine portico and wooden doors, have been largely preserved and the effect on neighbouring residents has been minimized. Whilst many in Chislehurst will continue to regret that the building no longer serves the purpose for which it was built there will be satisfaction that this part of our heritage of good building will continue to grace the High Street and is once more in use. It must be said however, that the restoration work carried out on the exterior was not wholly of the quality we would have hoped for and seems unlikely to have cost more than a fraction of the total cost of conversion to a restaurant.

Since the building ceased to be a post office two post boxes have been placed awkwardly on the pavement outside. The Society has requested the Post Office to remove them to a better site. At the time of going to press, our suggestion that a site meeting should take place has been adopted, hopefully to agree on a more satisfactory position for the post boxes.

TRAFFIC MATTERS

Traffic Calming in Chislehurst

Many members of the Society will remember that a large petition was submitted to the Council a few years ago by parents of children in Coopers and St Nicholas, Chislehurst C of E School, expressing concern about speeding and road safety in this area.

We are pleased to report that the LBB's Environmental Seminar (Operations) Sub-Committee has now approved, for public consultation, a plan for traffic calming measures in the Manor Park Road/Watts Lane area, the first of four areas in Chislehurst to be considered for traffic calming.

Members will wish to know more of the plan; as part of the consultation process, an exhibition is likely to be on display in St Nicholas Church for a week or two during February or March. It is likely to be staffed at some times, giving an opportunity for questions to be raised with a Council Officer. Information will be made available by the Council nearer the date when Mr D Chilver may be contacted on 0181 313 4543.

Speed Cameras

Earlier this year seven speed camera sites were installed in the Borough. These sites were selected on the basis of the number of accidents and the speed of the traffic. When the effectiveness of these sites has been evaluated

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

it may be decided to install further sites as appropriate. Again, these sites would be selected, Borough-wide, from a priority list of roads with accident and speeding problems. Given those criteria it is unlikely that any roads in Chislehurst would come far up the list.

National Trust Bird Walks

Once again in 1998, Ken Palmer, Chairman of the Petts Wood and Hawkwood Committee, will be leading two Spring Bird Walks through the property - on Saturday 25 April and Saturday 9 May 1998. The route of about 4½ miles includes most of Petts Wood and Hawkwood and lasts about five hours.

The walks are particularly suitable for beginners in bird identification. There is no charge but places are limited. For further details and reservations please telephone Ken Palmer on 01689 822646.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS RETURN TO THE HIGH STREET

The by now Traditional Christmas Lights reappeared in the High Street on 27 November. Chislehurst Chamber of Commerce, who pay for the lights, announced that the Lights would be up for approximately six weeks, but the cost is high, estimated at around £3,000. Funds

raised from the Summer Fair and Grand Summer Draw were a major contribution towards this cost, but there is still a potential short-fall.

Members of the Chamber devoted much time and effort to raise funds. Melac Services of Bromley Lane made a generous gift of half of the lamps for the lights. On behalf of the Chamber, Tony Wells has canvassed the larger multiples, such as Banks, Building Societies, Supermarkets and Restaurant chains who have premises or interests in Chislehurst, with the aim of raising further funds, but any contribution towards the cost would be much appreciated. Anyone who would like to make a donation is asked to contact either Tony Wells on 0181 467 0232 or Angela Hanson on 0181 295 0755. Donations may also be sent to the Chamber at Scribes Lodge, 39b High Street, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5AE.

Alun and Joy Jones Environmental Studies Awards

These awards are made annually to children and students for a wide variety of studies based on Chislehurst. Entries may be through schools, colleges or individually. For details of individual entry please send a SAE to The Chislehurst Society, PO Box 82, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5TT. Details of the awards are also available at Chislehurst Library.

The Society Social Evening

Some one hundred members gathered at the Bull's Head Hotel on Thursday 13 November 1997 for an excellent Fork Supper, followed by two inter-related presentations on the National Trust's ten-year programme for the management of Petts Wood and Hawkwood Estate.

David Calver, a member of the Society's Executive Committee, and also a member of the Petts Wood and Hawkwood National Trust Committee, introduced the speakers; Gary Churchill National Trust Managing Agent for the Hawkwood and Petts Wood Estates, and Dr Nicola Bannister, who recently completed a landscape and archaeological survey of the area.

First, using an overhead projector, Gary Churchill outlined the principles and aims of the ten-year programme, which is the outcome of Dr Bannister's survey.

Next Dr Bannister gave a clear, concise summary of her survey, tracing the history of the Hawkwood landscape over several centuries, making use of many early and more recent maps of the area used during site visits involving visual analysis of the landscape today.

The third part of the presentation consisted of a review by Gary Churchill of progress made during

the final year of the programme. Slides were shown of hedge planting and fencing, the latter necessary within the scheme to re-introduce livestock farming in place of arable farming. The co-operation of Alan Sawyer, the tenant farmer at Tongs Farm was emphasised and much welcomed, as were the efforts of David Clarke, the Warden locally responsible for the estate.

Following some questions and discussion there were reports that Dr Bannister might re-visit and perhaps lead a walk, or direct a study day. Mr Roy Hopper, Librarian and Chairman of the Local Studies Group of the Society, proposed a vote of thanks.

This was an extremely pleasant and stimulating evening. Thanks are due to the visiting speakers, to David and Brenda Calver and in particular to Shirley and Eddie Cox for organising this event.

Coffee and Talk for Road Stewards

The informal gathering of Road Stewards at the Pop-In Parlour next to Sainsburys in 1997 was so popular that it has been decided to hold the next one at the same place. It will be at 10.30am on Saturday 7 February 1998 and the Committee look forward to welcoming all Stewards who can attend.

Chislehurst Report is a publication of the Chislehurst Society (Registered Charity No. 298413)
The Society has over 5000 Members and actively seeks more. Please address enquiries about the Society to:
The Chislehurst Society, PO Box 82, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5TT