

THE COCKPIT

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHISLEHURST RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The Cockpit, on Chislehurst Common, has been the traditional meeting place for Chislehurst people on all great occasions from time immemorial.

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CHISLEHURST, KENT

No. 16

March, 1974

The puzzling case of Woodclyffe Drive

IN THE past year the Association has lodged many objections to planning applications, some of which were considered to have an adverse effect on Chislehurst or a particular neighbourhood, and others because of a feared reduction of amenity for nearby residents. In a number of cases we claim a measure of success; but our failure in one unusual case, which was fraught with contradictions and shifting ground (both literally and metaphorically), has caused much disquiet. Some of the points arising will be put by the Association to the Dobry review of the development control system.

Briefly, the case centred around a proposed eight-storey block above Chislehurst Caves at Woodclyffe Drive, Summer Hill. Local residents and the Association objected on amenity grounds to such a tall building, and drew attention to the unstable ground in relation to its size/weight, together with the possible effects of the redistribution of stresses and/or water-flows in this one-time mining area. Furthermore, there might be side-effects from the methods of construction (e.g. pile-driving).

The Association's vigorous representations over a long period have ensured, we believe, that considerable attention will be paid to all these factors. But it appears that, legally, the Council has no ultimate responsibility, consequent upon giving planning permission, if damage should occur to existing properties. Residents' only recourse would be an action against the builder-developer (if still in business). Many insurance policies specifically exclude subsidence damage. The Association considers this is a matter which should be reviewed by central government.

The other disturbing aspect was that the case proved it possible to revive and pass a planning application previously rejected (on grounds of general appearance and reduced amenity for surrounding residents) because it was later found the plan had met a guideline devised after the initial rejection. This guideline, on further examination, proved to be one which in a sense set a standard for general aesthetic appearance but ignored the amenity of residents.

The Borough Council, furthermore, was not under any legal obligation to re-advertise the application, and did not do so. Objectors were thus deprived of the opportunity to criticise the new guideline.

The Association appreciated a recent opportunity afforded by the Council to discuss the matter with the chairman of the Development Control Committee (Alderman Mrs. Gunn), together with councillors and officials. Unfortunately it did little to dispel the Association's grave concern at the likely trend in planning matters, away from reasonable consideration for the individuals affected and towards a vaguely defined "public interest" which takes account of outward appearance but maintains that, if high density cannot be reconciled with both individual amenity and appearance, it should be the amenity and not density which goes to the wall.

We recognise that the Council is itself under pressure from both the GLC and the Department of the Environment to maximise density everywhere (regardless of local services and resources, it seems). The Association nevertheless will continue to try to uphold the position of residents against unreasonable planning incursions.

THE AGM

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the 28th annual general meeting of Chislehurst Residents' Association will be held at Chislehurst Public Library, Red Hill, on Wednesday, April 24, 1974, at 8 p.m. Please note; only members may vote or take part in the proceedings.

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 27th annual meeting.
2. Matters arising.
3. Committee report for the year 1973.
4. Accounts for the year 1973.
5. Election of President and officers.
6. Election of committee.
7. Appointment of auditor.
8. Any other business.

COMMITTEE'S REPORT

All 12 committee meetings held during the year were well attended. Mr. Easden resigned but Mr.

Young was co-opted in his place. Mr. Leonard was appointed editor of "The Cockpit" and has been successful in giving it a new impetus. No minutes secretary has been forthcoming, so our Vice-Chairman Mr. Jones has volunteered to do the work until a permanent replacement can be found. In accordance with rules, the following committee members retire: Mrs. Jarrett, Messrs. Brown, Drage, Kinsella, Mack, Vivian and Young. All are eligible for re-election.

Subscriptions. It would be appreciated if members unable to be contacted by our road stewards would send their 1973 subscriptions immediately. If not paid up by the end of April they may be deemed to have lapsed membership. 1974 subs are also now due, please.

Summer Hill crossing. The G.L.C. has now agreed to provide a footbridge between the Goss Hill and Station Approach corners. Mrs. Wykes, our G.L.C. councillor, says she has been assured that it will not be unsightly and that landscaping at ground level will improve appearances. Your committee has asked for ramped access to the bridge, rather than steps, to encourage greater use.

Perry Street. The Borough Council refused to support the request for a pedestrian crossing at Beaverwood junction on the grounds that, except at school leaving and entry times, when a patrol is present, the traffic does not justify it. However, the council is asking the G.L.C. to consider a central island at this point.

St. Nicholas School. The Borough's Chief Education Officer replied to our last A.G.M. resolution asking for feasibility study or alternative sites for the school. The reply was not considered satisfactory, however, and the question is still being pursued.

Road stewards social. This was held on December 7 last and proved an outstanding success. Most stewards attended and contributed much exchange of information, as well as enjoying the social aspects of the function. The officers, in thanking the stewards, without whose work our association could not exist, emphasised the need to collect all outstanding subscriptions as early as possible. Your committee decided that the social should be made an annual event.

Association's social. In view of unsettled conditions and continued industrial action your committee reluctantly decided to postpone our main social until a more favourable time, and then to revert to Graham Chieseman House as a more satisfactory venue.

High Street development. The three-storey type of development being proposed for this important site, between Willow Grove and the International Stores, has been strongly opposed by your committee, who feel there should be a Civic Trust style of scheme, blending in with the present shopping area and village atmosphere. We are pleased to record that the Borough Planning Committee was apparently in agreement, having rejected plans submitted so far. These included a petrol station and car sales showroom, a supermarket, extensive car parks and traffic

access into the narrow and crowded Willow Grive. Concern has also been expressed at the rubbish-dump way the site has been left open, with its danger to children. The Borough Council has been asked to insist that the site be made safe, with hoarding all around.

Meeting with Borough Councillors. By invitation from Councillors Mrs. Bryant, Parkinson and Reeves, your President and Chairman met them with representatives from other bodies for a general interchange of views on local problems. We are glad to record that the councillors share our views on the proposed High Street development and to hear from Coun. Parkson, chairman of the Highways Committee, that Bromley Council has no proposals for "improvement" of the A208. This is now under the control of the G.L.C.

Bromley Residents' Federation, to which we are affiliated, continues its work on major issues affecting the Borough such as transport, the Green Belt etc. They have now asked the Council to restore full school swimming instruction as early as possible, and that a cervical cancer screening unit, presented by women racing drivers, be made available in various parts of the Borough.

Appreciation. We feel we should record thanks to our former M.P., Dame Patricia Hornsby-Smith, for much assistance over many years. We thank our three councillors for assistance given on many occasions, and also our charming Kentish Times reporter for attending meetings and reporting our activities.

From our hon. treasurer, Mr. R. W. Oblath:

IN ORDER to release more room for news and articles, it has been decided to omit the annual accounts from this issue of The Cockpit. Full details of our finances will be made available to all present at the Annual General Meeting at Chislehurst Library on April 24, however.

I am delighted to report that, during 1973, our membership went up from 1,398 to 1,831, an increase of 31%. With momentum of this kind, a membership roll of 2,000 is within our sights.

The sum we received in subscriptions and donations increased to £241, and 96% of this was collected by our Road Stewards, to whom we are very grateful.

1973 was a year of progress in that we published two editions of The Cockpit, both larger than before (14 pages as against 4 pages in 1972) and reprinted the rules of the Association so that every member has a copy. We were also pleased to entertain our Road Stewards for the first time and discuss with them subjects of mutual interest. All these items cost money (our printing bill alone came to £213) and in fact our expenditure exceeded income by £109. Nevertheless, we start 1974 with confidence and a credit balance of £65.

The Heritage Fund stands at £535 and the Water Tower Commemorative Seat Fund at £242.

NOW THAT WE OWN AN AIRFIELD . . .

From our chairman, Mr. H. T. A. Sharpe:

MANY MEMBERS may not yet realise that, as ratepayers of the London Borough of Bromley, they now own not just an airfield, but also the 440 acres flying area, known as South Camp, of the world-famous R.A.F. Biggin Hill Fighter Command Station. The remainder, the North Camp, comprising the administrative buildings, the beautiful memorial chapel with its Spitfire and Hurricane outside, and the residential quarters, remain a permanent R.A.F. ground station.

It was in 1917 that a reluctant Air Ministry was persuaded by far-seeing personnel to acquire pasture land on the high ground in the open country near Biggin Hill, for experimental work on wireless control of aircraft which was destined to play a decisive part in the Battle of Britain. The land, which originally belonged to Oddo, Bishop of Bayeaux, to whom it was given by William the Conqueror, was in an isolated position in the midst of an extensive agricultural area. It lay roughly between an undistinguished collection of cottages and bungalows which then formed the village of Biggin Hill, and the more picturesque villages of Hayes, Farnborough and Orpington, whose residents then could be counted in hundreds.

By 1939 the experimental work had moved elsewhere, and Biggin Hill developed into a major Fighter Command station to defend London. Residents of that time need no reminder of its activities during the Battle of Britain; even now, the occasional machine-gun bullet-case dug up in the garden bears witness.

After the war, the station was slowly run down, and in 1959 all R.A.F. flying ceased, the runways being too short for modern jet fighter planes. The North Camp was retained as a permanent ground station, but the flying area was transferred to the civil authorities who arranged for its use by flying clubs and air taxi services, pending disposal. Eventually, Bromley Borough Council was given first option of purchase, which it exercised in April, 1973, for £450,000, to protect the environment and the interests of local residents by preventing commercial exploitation. The purchase was, however, subject to the following restrictions:

1. That the land continue as an airfield for at least 21 years;
2. That the Ministry retain the right of pre-emption if the council decides within 21 years to give up the use of the land as an airport (by airport is meant any aerodrome which has Customs clearance facilities).

It is clear, therefore, that the Government intends the area to continue as an airport which has to be licensed by the aviation authorities and is required to meet certain standards regarding safety, fire, and rescue, as well as Customs, passport control etc. The Borough Council is thus in the difficult position of having to secure a balance between those whose environmental concern is such that they would

reduce or stop all flying and those who would develop a full commercial airport.

The Borough Council has set up an Airport Management Committee responsible to the council, and appointed an airport director. They have now issued a draft brochure for discussion and a statement of policy indicating their ideas for the development of the airport. It is intended to include "private, business, executive and club aircraft, aircraft engaged in local pleasure flights, agricultural work, aircraft sales, aerial surveys, flying training, and air taxi operators". But it excludes "that performed by commercial airline operators engaged in the conveyance of passengers or freight—in aircraft of 12,500 lb. all-up weight or more".

A new control tower, general aviation terminal building, passenger reception centre, airfield restaurant/bar, hotel, together with general recreational facilities are all contained in the outline proposals. Noise restrictions and operating limitations are to be enforced. Quite obviously, a lot of money would need to be spent but the council hopes to meet much of this by attracting investments from those who use the airport. The council clearly intends to exercise tight control and hopes to recoup its expenditure by the services, for which it will charge.

The outline proposals have been considered by your committee, who consider the council should be commended for its purchase of the airfield, and that the proposals, of which only a brief summary is given here, represent a reasonable approach to the matter. We are particularly concerned that the airport should be made viable and not become a white elephant and a charge on the rates. This might encourage a future council to rid itself of a burden with the ministry exercising its right of pre-emption and disposal elsewhere.

From our Planning Sub-committee:

WE CONTINUE to scrutinise the planning applications available weekly in the Library. The usual visits are made to Beckenham Town Hall to examine those of consequence which affect Chislehurst and your executive committee lodges objections when appropriate.

Applications for single and two-storey extensions to sides and rear of existing small dwellings do not normally provoke objections, unless near neighbours reasonably object and request the Association to support their objection. Members are again reminded that they would be wise to examine the weekly lists in the Library.

The views expressed in signed contributions to The Cockpit are not necessarily those of Chislehurst Residents' Association, but are included as matters of local interest.

'Little conserved, nothing improved'

A reply by Mr. C. M. Dunn, who is our representative on Bromley Council's Advisory Committee on Conservation Areas:

MANY READERS of the last Cockpit (November 1973) must have felt dismayed on reading Councillor Reeves' article on conservation, in which he pointed out how limited he considered the powers conferred under the Civic Amenities Act. We all know that, since Conservation Year 1970, little in Chislehurst has been conserved and nothing has been improved.

When Duncan Sandys and his colleagues saw the destruction and deterioration of so many districts, caused by inappropriate and excessive development, they decided something just had to be done. Accordingly, the Civic Trust was founded in 1957 and Duncan Sandys as its president was instrumental in passing into law its ideas for conserving and improving the appearance of town and countryside under the title of the Civic Amenities Act 1967.

That the wording of the Act is somewhat vague cannot be disputed. Indeed, as with so many things, it means what you intend it to mean. The Minister himself said in Parliament that there was "no standard specification for a conservation area". Our local council apparently intend it to mean very little.

Councillor Reeves maintains a conservation area is designated to reserve some interesting buildings and to control more strictly the development within the immediate vicinity. Contrast this with the wording of the Act—"Every local planning authority shall determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and shall designate such areas Conservation Areas."

Even if Chislehurst residents consider the present conservation area inadequate, and even if critics may say Chislehurst is not of special architectural or historic interest, our local planning authority must have thought differently. Otherwise Chislehurst would not, with Chelsfield, have been the first con-

servation area in the Borough to be so designated.

Very few people will accept that it was designated to preserve some interesting buildings. Surely it must have been designated because of its pleasant rural aspect, its pleasing mixture of open and wooded land and, until recently, its fairly low density housing. The conservation area includes the common, the golf course and numerous playing fields. If Councillor Reeves is correct about the accent on buildings, why is "Foxbury" the finest house in Chislehurst, excluded from the area?

Before its good intentions evaporated, the Council formulated a policy—which has not been carried out, perhaps because of "commercial pressure and established interests". The policy was to make clear to the public that special care is needed not just to prevent loss of character but also to enhance the quality of the area.

Performance has fallen very far short of these splendid intentions. What has happened to the Civic Trust type improvement scheme for West Chislehurst High Street? Why cannot the council initiate its own comprehensive redevelopment scheme for the Willow Grove/High Street area? What has been done to deal with undesirable traffic intrusion?

No area can be conserved if, time and time again, whenever a large house is demolished, it is replaced by a large block of flats or 20 or more houses with the resultant increase in numbers of people, cars, and need for yet more buildings for schools, hospitals etc.

Councillor Reeves should remember that developers are in no way as interested as local residents in the well-being and future of Chislehurst. If, in their efforts to swamp Chislehurst, the developers have the backing of Bromley Borough Council, the G.L.C. and even the Minister for (or is it against?) the Environment, the councillor should tell us so in no uncertain terms.

A NEW and fully illustrated history of Chislehurst is being completed by our President, Mr. Tom Bushell, with the proposed title of "Imperial Chislehurst". At first it will be a subscription issue (£4) with names and addresses of all subscribers at the back of the book. Later, to non-subscribers, it will cost £5. Inquiries to E. C. Waters and Son, 8 Royal Parade. The list closes in May.

CHISLEHURST RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

To..... (member of the committee/road steward)

OR

To the Manager, Barclays Bank Ltd., 7, High Street, Chislehurst

Please receive subscriptions to the above Association (household 30p, individual member 15p, O.A.P. 5p.)

Name..... If new member please tick:.....

Address.....

Subscriptions may also be sent direct to the Hon. Treasurer at 36, Lower Camden, Chislehurst