



Heritage Trail—A Progress Report

As you may remember, one of the Society's actions in the Village Plan was conducting a consultation exercise about what should be included in a possible Heritage Trail around the village.

Things have really moved on since then. Various local organisations, including WDPS, Wheathampstead For Enterprising Business and the Parish Council, are represented on a Steering Committee which is taking this project forward.

The Committee has consulted local historians and other experts and has identified twelve sites which will form the core of the trail: St Helen's Church and Churchyard, the Maltings, the Crinkle-Crankle Wall, the Mill, the Bull, the Swan, the Station Platform (remains), the National School, the River Lea, the Elizabethan Arch Gate, Jessamine Cottage and Wheathampstead Place .

We have also discussed how these sites should be marked, including the design of plaques, precisely where they should be sited and what text should be included. We are now in the process of dealing with practical matters: consulting with the owners of the properties and with the District Council about planning matters.

We have had detailed discussions about the most effective ways of publicising the Trail. These may include leaflets (which will be available on web sites, in local shops and the St Albans Tourist Office), maps and even MP3 downloads!

None of this will be cheap, and it is particularly important that the plaques are well made and attractive as well as containing accurate information. Some funding has been obtained already, part of it from the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation, and more sources are under investigation.

This is an exciting and fascinating project. We have already discovered a lot about the history of the village and the famous personalities associated with it. There is sure to be more to come!

LOCAL LANDOWNER DESTROYS WOODLAND AREA

Members may have noticed that the woodland area just south of the Cory Wright Way bypass, near its junction with Codicote Road, was suddenly cleared a few weeks ago.

The site was previously used for storage by Murphy's Chemicals, but has reverted to woodland/grassland over the past 20 – 25 years. It is part of the Green Belt that surrounds Wheathampstead and prevents it from expanding into the countryside.



A wildlife habitat destroyed: all that remains of the site by Cory Wright Way

Council decides site is unsuitable for housing

The land is owned by local resident Stuart Lewis and two associates forming Wheathampstead Land Company Ltd. Last year Mr Lewis informed local District and Parish councillors of the firm's intention to submit a planning application for housing on the site. No application was forthcoming. Instead, Wheathampstead Land tried to persuade St Albans District Council to accept the site as a potential housing site in its Strategic Housing Land Availability Survey (SHLAA) - see article on page 3. *Continued on page 2*

New email address

WDPS has a new email address:

info@wheathampsteadpreservation.org.uk

You can email us if you are aware of an issue that you believe we should take an interest in, or if you would like to comment on any current issues.

Annual General Meeting: Friday, 26th February 2010

8 pm, Memorial Hall, Marford Road, Wheathampstead
All are welcome. Further details will follow in the New Year

Local Landowner destroys woodland area

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The Council rejected the site as being unsuitable for housing, partly because of its location in the Green Belt and partly due to its amenity value and wildlife interest. The Council's report said:

"The key constraint to development on this site is the presence of a significant number of trees, which provide a natural visual barrier to existing residential development on the former Murphys Chemicals site from Cory Wright Way and the open countryside to the east. The trees/vegetation also constitutes a wildlife habitat and green space. A site of wildlife interest spans the south eastern corner of the site."



The site of what WDPS Chairman Rick Sanderson has described as "vandalism on a massive scale".

The draft SHLAA was published in September for public consultation. In October, Wheathampstead Land sent in the bulldozers and cleared the trees and shrubs, and with them any wildlife, from the site. Having got rid of one of the reasons for not allowing housing on the site, Wheathampstead Land are now asking the council to reconsider including it in the SHLAA.

It is believed that there was at least one badger sett on the site. Badgers are a protected species, and it is a criminal offence to damage or interfere with a badger sett. The Police are now investigating the matter, and the Herts and Middlesex Badger Group have been invited to provide evidence of the existence of badgers.

The Forestry Commission are also looking into the matter. The felling of more than a very small area of trees requires a licence, which Mr Lewis and his associates do not have. The Forestry Commission could prosecute or require the land to be re-stocked with trees.

Articles about this appeared in the *St Albans Review* on 4 November (page 12) and the *Herts Advertiser* on 5 November (page 23), and our Chairman, Rick Sanderson had a letter printed in both papers on 18/19 November.

Aircraft noise threat temporarily delayed

The proposals to change the air routes over Wheathampstead have been temporarily put on hold – although sadly the plans are likely to be revisited in the next few years.

In previous newsletters we reported on the proposals by National Air Traffic Services (NATS) to alter airspace movements north of the Thames. These include moving one of the flight paths for departures from Luton Airport away from Harpenden and directly over parts of Wheathampstead.

In a letter to WDPS, NATS has confirmed that it will not proceed with the necessary consultation process on revised air routes until September 2010 at the earliest.

The long-term risk of increased aircraft noise over parts of Wheathampstead remains, however. The delay is merely a response to the general downturn in air traffic levels and NATS remains intent on making changes to air routes in the longer term.

Riverbank Stables: gypsy family loses latest appeal for planning permission

But will they now leave the site?

The long-running saga of the Riverbank Stables site on Lower Luton Road near the Wheathampstead – Batford border continues.

A gypsy family has been living on the site since the end of 2004. The site is in the Green Belt, and there is no planning permission for residential use there. St Albans District Council eventually took enforcement action in 2007 to get the family to leave the site. The Council had discovered that the family already owned two houses in Luton.

The occupier, Mr Bob Smith appealed against the enforcement notice. The appeal was dismissed in December 2007, but the Planning Inspector gave the family until July 2008 to leave the site. When that period expired and the Council moved to take enforcement action again, Mr Smith submitted an application (5/2008/2510) for retrospective permission for residential use. We submitted written objections to that application. The Council refused the application on the grounds that the land is Green Belt, and residential use is against national and local planning policy. Again, Mr Smith appealed to the Secretary of State. He claimed that he, his wife, eight children and one grandchild were Romany gypsies and needed to live on the site in order to run their small livery and horse breeding business.

The matter was heard on 29 September, and the Inspector has now dismissed the appeal. It is now up to the Council to take enforcement action again. We will be keeping a close watch to ensure that they do. But the saga may not end there. Mr Smith could appeal again against a new enforcement notice, and so it goes on. The problem is that under the planning legislation set up by successive governments, it seems that unscrupulous people can 'play the system' indefinitely.

Local Planning Policy Update

As part of the ongoing development planning process, St Albans District Council have carried out a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

The purpose of this is to identify sites across the District that might be suitable for development for housing, to help the Council to plan for meeting the housing targets imposed on them by the East of England Plan.

The idea is to identify how many residential units can be provided in the urban areas, so that the number to be provided outside the existing towns and villages, on 'greenfield' or green belt land, can be calculated.

Unfortunately, lots of landowners and developers try to jump on the bandwagon by getting their particular piece of land accepted in the SHLAA. This has been the case in and around Wheathampstead, where 17 sites were put forward for consideration, with the following results:

Site Ref	Name of site	Planning constraints (identified in SHLAA)	Promoted by
REJECTED SITES			
1	Marford Farm, Sheepcote Lane (field between bridleway and bypass)	Green belt; open countryside	Angela & Tim Lamb
2	York House, Place Farm	Employment site (offices)	Hammersmatch Properties Ltd
7	Land off Codicote Road/ Cory Wright Way	Green belt; green space; wildlife habitat	Stuart Lewis
9	Land at Wright's Meadow (between allotments, playing fields, R. Lea)	Green belt; open countryside, part flood plain	Warren Family
10	Land to rear of Rose Lane properties (west side)	Green belt; development pressure on adjoining open field to west	Various private householders
11	Folly Meadow, Lower Luton Road (adjacent to site 152 below)	Green belt; part flood plain	W A Simons Will Trust
111	Land rear of 15-17 Castle Rise	Green belt; development pressure on open fields to north, east + west	Stuart Lewis and Graeme Free
119	Glebe Allotments, Marford Road	Green belt; would alter character of Wheathampstead	Diocese of St Albans
152	Former Highway Chippings Depot, Lower Luton Road (off Kingfisher Close)	Green belt; part flood plain	Hertfordshire County Council
201	Land to rear of Cherry Trees Restaurant, Cherry Tree Lane	Green belt; countryside	Owners of Restaurant
SITES ACCEPTED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION			
3	Land south of Hillydike Road	Green belt; agricultural land; would be visible in long-distance views from south	Dartland Ltd
4	Land to east of East Lane car park (off Meads Lane)	Green belt; green space; covenant against development other than extension to public car park	St Albans District Council
8	Land at Meads Lane ('Riverside') Redevelopment of existing house and garden	Green belt; part flood plain	Not known
23	West End Farm, Nomansland	Green belt; Re-use of existing buildings for residential may be acceptable	The W J/ H D Dickinson Trusts
92	Land to rear of 257 & 259 Lower Luton Rd (off Cherry Tree Lane)	Rear gardens. Green belt; difficult access	Jack Holdham
155	Southern part of Murphy's Chemicals site (reed beds)	Available once removal of contamination completed	Not known
170	Moat Cottage (to north of St Helen's church)	In Conservation Area; bounded by Grade II Listed wall; archaeological interest	Not known

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Village Day was once again a big success in July. It was a wonderful summer afternoon and many people visited our stall to buy raffle tickets for the hampers packed with local produce and to look at the displays showing our current projects and campaigns.

Our thanks go to everyone who supplied us with the local produce and purchases that filled our hampers.

Local Planning Policy Update

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Details of the SHLAA can be viewed on the District Council website at <http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/policy/draftstrategichousinglandavailabilityassessment.aspx>.

Acceptance in the SHLAA does not necessarily mean that sites will be allocated for development or that planning permission will be granted. The Council's recent Emerging Core Strategy 'Shaping Our Community', whose objectives included finding sites to meet the East of England Plan requirement for 7,200 dwellings to be built in the District by 2021, did not propose any housing sites in or around Wheathampstead. On the contrary, the Appendices document stated:

"Wheathampstead is surrounded by land of high quality landscape quality, so major growth would not be acceptable. Other important factors include the River Lea and its floodplain in the north and north east of the village, Devil's Dyke ancient monument to the east, the need to avoid development extending further over the skyline to the south east and the danger of coalescence with Amwell to the south west."

In spite of this, we need to remain vigilant, as recent events on the site off Cory Wright Way show.

The guide for both walks was Elizabeth Eastwood of the St Albans Museum Service. Elizabeth was an excellent guide - entertaining and knowledgeable—and the feedback from those who attended (including a wide age range) was very good indeed. We were very lucky with the weather on both days. It was sunny and warm but not too hot to walk comfortably. We were also lucky that St Helen's Church was open on both days and we were able to get the full benefit of Elizabeth's knowledge! On both occasions WDPS member David Godfrey-Evans, who owns the historic Bury Farm Cottage, very kindly let us all look around his splendid garden and was able to give us even more historical background. Elizabeth has agreed to investigate a walk a little further afield (possibly including Brewhouse Hill) for next summer. We will of course let members know as soon as details are available.

Project to tidy the river



Anyone looking downstream from Mill Quay in the centre of the village will have noticed recently that the view suddenly improved.

In conjunction with Countryside Management Services (CMS), and with the help of a willing band of volunteers, the Society organised an event to tidy the river at Mill Quay. The plan was to remove litter and prune back the laurel bushes on the bank.



And the good news is it was a great success, opening up views of the river and the banks that had long been hidden. Our thanks go to all those who took part.



On 23rd August and 27th September this year WDPS arranged two more of our popular guided walks around the village.