

The Beaconsfield Society

NEWSLETTER April 2015

Dates for your Diary

Celebrating the Past – a Society Talk

Tuesday 21st April 2015 at 7.30 pm

The Secret History of Wilton Park

St Teresa's Parish Centre, Warwick Road, Beaconsfield

Tickets £10. Refreshments included. *Wait-list only – see below!*

Beaconsfield Now! 2015

Saturday 13th June 2015 10am – 1 pm

• Council Green, Station Road, Beaconsfield

The Beaconsfield Society Heritage visit

Wednesday 22nd July 2015 2 pm

Dorneywood House

Other Community Events

Fighting Doorstep Crime (Bucks CC Workshop)

Monday 20th April 2015 6.30 to 8.30 pm

St Michael and All Angels Church, Warwick Road

General Election Question Time

Thursday 23rd April 2015 8.00 pm

Beaconsfield School, Wattleton Road

Chairman's letter

Mike Elliott

There is a lot going on in our Town and you will be pleased to know that your Society continues to play its part. The Society has a number of events planned for the year and I do hope to meet many of you. Guests and potential new members are welcome.

After months of uncertainty, recent approvals mean that the Wilton Park development can proceed to detailed planning submission stage and a relief road seems increasingly likely. The Society leads Wilton Park Watch and there is a project update below. I am pleased that we can recognise the history of the site and have arranged a talk entitled "The Secret History of Wilton Park in WW2", details below.

The Society is well represented and engaged in the Vision for Beaconsfield initiative, a long overdue exercise to produce a Town Plan. This should inform an incoming Town Council, District and County Councils together with statutory bodies, what do local residents think is important for our Town. Residents should remain optimistic that recommendations expressed in the Town plan are clearly transferred into policies and actions by those organisations.

The Society has been closely monitoring the issues of flooding experienced in recent months - notably in Hedgerley Lane twice and Gregories Road, supporting representations to Thames Water, Town and District Councils. Despite remedial actions, promises of plant upgrading and overhaul, we remain very concerned as to the capacities and resilience of our water infrastructure struggling to cope with further infilling and development.

At a more practical level, we continue to take pride in our Town and working parties have been organised to remove illegal signage in April and litter picking with the Scouts on 7th June. Do contact us if you have a couple of hours to spare and would like to join us. Once again we are organising the showcase for local voluntary groups, Beaconsfield Now! on 13th June on the Town Hall Green.

We will be promoting Beaconsfield Now! using the four new lamppost banners around the Town replacing the defunct banner site in the New Town. Importantly, these banner positions may be used by other voluntary groups for their events. In addition, the Society is erecting two community notice boards, one on each side of the station bridge, thanks to the generous support of The Shanly Foundation. For details of how all these locations can be used by local voluntary organisations, please see the Society's website www.beaconsfieldsociety.org.uk under 'Community Notice Boards'.

Finally, let me thank you for your ongoing support through membership, donations, participation in events or just interest in our aims to keep Beaconsfield a great place to live. Do get in touch if you would like to help or why not join our heritage visit to Dorneywood House in July, details below.

Vision for Beaconsfield

I am Deputy Chair of the Steering Committee that has representation from groups around the Town. Engagement levels have far exceeded expectations, which is encouraging, as clearly residents do care about their Town. So far, more than 500 have responded to our questionnaire. We conducted multiple drop-in and awareness sessions at the Station, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, in Holtspur and at the Town Hall to arrive at our agenda of issues. We have divided these issues into four areas and we convened working parties for each together with a "Blue skies" group to look more broadly at ideas. An update on the project was given at the Town Meeting on 9th April at the Town Hall starting at 7.00 pm. Final recommendations should be available in July. To find out more about Vision for Beaconsfield take a look at <https://visionforbeaconsfield.wordpress.com/>. There is a newsfeed you can sign up to receive emails updates, also Facebook details.

Wilton Park Watch

Mike Elliott

Following the out of court settlement between rival developers, Inland Homes and Jansens in October, things have moved forward. SBDC has completed its analysis of the consultation held in April last year and have made a number of amendments to the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD defines the framework within which Inland Homes can bring forward a detailed planning application. In general these changes are positive, particularly those reflecting approval for part of the relief road within the development and the factual updates confirming BCC money is available to link with the existing A355, taking through traffic away from Park Lane and the London End roundabout.

The revised SPD was recommended by sub-committee on 17th March and was finally approved by the SBDC Cabinet on 31st March so the project can move forward, removing months of uncertainty. Clarification of ownership of the on-site treatment works and the implication that it can address infrastructure concerns is reassuring. Green Belt obligations and the historic nature of the site are rightly reinforced. The obligation that the developer discuss health provision with NHS England is interesting; with cooperation from our local medics, could a fully functional surgery, outpatients and minor injuries unit be feasible on the site? The potential of the site to relieve parking challenges in the town is flagged up and again the developer has to investigate. The revised SPD can be found at <http://www.sbdc-spider.southbucks.gov.uk/documents/s18206/Wilton%20Park%20SPD%20SDPAG%20170315.pdf>.

The SPD leaves the specifics of a community hub for sports, leisure or arts use in the air but rightly says it should add to the Town. There is plenty of detail still to be defined and WPW look forward to talking to Inland Homes on the community hub and site plans in the months ahead; the development remains a great opportunity for the Town. Several members of the WPW committee are involved with the Vision for Beaconsfield initiative and insight from this will be useful to inform our contribution.

The Secret History of Wilton Park in WW2

A talk by Sarah Paterson, Senior Librarian at the Imperial War Museum

Tuesday 21st April 2015 at 7.30 pm (refreshments included)

at St. Teresa's Parish Centre, Warwick Road, Beaconsfield HP9 2PL

A few Tickets £10 may still available by calling 01494 675923.



The White House in Wilton Park and a mosaic of it from the Officers' Mess.

(Photos Dr Helen Fry)



Josias Du Pre, a former Governor of Madras in India, built a grand house on the Wilton Park Estate outside Beaconsfield in 1779. It was known as the 'White House' because of its plastered exterior. It remained in the Du Pre family, largely unchanged, for over 160 years.

WW2 changed Wilton Park's history forever. Leased to the War Office in 1939, it became a top secret interrogation centre for Nazi prisoners of war and the most important POW site in the country. The activities that took place there were hidden at the time and are still little known today.

During the war, enemy prisoners of war were interrogated at Wilton Park before being sent on to their permanent camps. By bugging their cells, the British obtained valuable information from their monitored conversations. They also gathered intelligence from British POWs in Axis hands and sent help to enable them to escape.

After the war, the site was used as a re-education centre for German POWs. The Foreign Office ran 'de-nazification' programmes to encourage independent thought and promote a democratic way of life, with the aim of re-establishing democracy in Germany.

In 1951, the Beaconsfield site was occupied by the Army Defence School of Languages and the courses for democracy were moved to Wiston House, near Steyning in Sussex, where they retain the Wilton Park name.

The house itself was demolished in 1968 and the Army left in 2014. The 100-acre site was sold by the Ministry of Defence to developers Inland Homes, who will submit plans to build up 350 new houses there.

The Beaconsfield Society believes it is important to raise awareness of Wilton Park's secret history and to find ways of commemorating it, before this part of our town's heritage is lost to view. We hope you will join us for what will be a fascinating talk on 21st April to begin this process. Demand for tickets has been very heavy; if you have not already purchased tickets please phone Kari Dome on 01494 675923 immediately. It is tentatively planned to have a further talk to continue the wartime interrogation theme of the uses of Wilton Park and other Buckinghamshire houses later in the year.

SBDC Local Plan (2014-2036) Initial Consultation

South Bucks District Council has just begun an exercise to update the Local Plan – the framework document that defines planning policy for the district. The first step in the process involves a call for sites that could be allocated to development. Your committee debated this at its last meeting and we welcome members' thoughts on the subject. The Society has long been opposed to significant erosion of Green Belt land around the Town. The pressure for housing and other development throughout the Country is increasing and in the South East in particular. Can a case be made for sites when there is little or no amenity or agricultural value in them, or their location is blighted? The thin edge of the wedge perhaps or is it better to have rational development than opportunistic in-filling?

Just to let you know some scope of SBDC's intentions, the consultation document seeks (*inter alia* and not *verbatim*) to:

- identify areas that can be removed from the Green Belt
- identify built-on areas of the Green Belt where additional development could be permitted
- analyse areas not in Green Belt but otherwise constrained (e.g. Chilterns AONB and Burnham Beches)
- explore urban extensions to Beaconsfield, Gerrards Cross and Burnham
- make more efficient use of land in existing built-up areas such as increasing building density and heights, relocating open spaces elsewhere to create new development opportunities

.....to maximise development potential in South Bucks. We can all picture what could result.

You can read the consultation document <http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/article/4814/Emerging-Local-Plan> and responses can be returned before the deadline of 24 April 2015.

In the September 2014 Newsletter, Food for Thought raised the question of Public Consultations, their process, the level of interest from the public and the risk that general apathy and inaction will somehow allow the statutory consultation to generate evidence of public support or at least of no objection, even to the most sinister and far-reaching of plans. The Green Belt issue is about as far-reaching as you can get in this lovely part of Buckinghamshire and I would urge members and friends actively to express their views in this consultation process.

Food for thought (2): Public Planning Comments *Tony Bristow*

Public comments to South Bucks District Council Planning Department

Members will know that many individual objections to Planning Applications, from different sources, need to be submitted for maximum effect on the ruling. If more than ten are received, the decision has to be referred to SBDC's Planning Committee who will also receive an SBDC Planning Officer's report and recommendation. The Society's submission counts as one. The Town Council's views are always noted.

The recent application for redevelopment behind 36-56 London End, including office accommodation with 128 desks, drew huge objections. SBDC received 236 objections from separate sources including a petition of hundreds of signatures from patients of the Millbarn Medical Centre which would be adversely affected. The Town Council strongly objected, having arranged for a public presentation at a committee meeting. The Case Officer at SBDC seems to have recommended approval since he perceived no strict planning grounds to do otherwise. However, Transport for Buckinghamshire eventually cited four reasons why it should not be allowed, for excessive traffic movements and inadequate access onto the A40 London End.

The application was then withdrawn from the Committee meeting at the last minute. Even without the traffic and access analysis by TfB, it could surely be foreseen that, especially in a local election year, there was no way that the Committee could possibly have gone against the weight and number of local objections.

Your voice does count, and on this occasion there were 236 impassioned voices. This sets the standard!

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On June 13th between 10am and 1pm on the Town Council Green come and join us for entertainment, information and fun. Beaconsfield Now!, the Beaconsfield Society's showcase event, will be taking place.

Local schools will entertain us and a **bouncy slide** and **craft stalls** as well as a **treasure hunt** will keep many members of the family busy. There will be delicious **barbeque food, mouth-watering cakes and refreshments** to enjoy. We hope that our elected MP will be in attendance as will the Mayor, our Town Crier and our Citizen of the year Richard Jones.

What do you want to know about Beaconsfield? Whether you are new to the town or a long-standing resident, we are sure something will inspire and inform you among our many not-for-profit organisations. Have a browse and find out what is on offer. **Churches Together** and **Hope Church** are in the heart of our community and offer many activities from play groups to study groups. Beaconsfield's rich history is being revealed and made available to everyone so why not help on the **Beaconsfield Archive Project**? Interested in wildlife: come and discuss **Butterfly Conservation** or **Holtspur Bank Nature** reserve. Then the **Model Railway Club** or **Bekonscot** should fascinate train fanatics as it did last year. To be more informed there are many organisations offering talks and outings e.g. **WI, WEA, NADFAS and U3A**. Members of the **Beaconsfield Town Council** will be on hand to discuss and help if a local issue is worrying you; perhaps you require a book from the **Library** so why not find their stall? **Alfriston School** has a beautiful new swimming pool, one of the Beaconsfield Society's buildings of the year, and they are attending to inform on their planned community sessions. These are but a few of the organisations represented. *Join us that day.*

The Society Heritage Visit – 22nd July 2015**John Burton**

DORNEYWOOD HOUSE

This year our Heritage Visit will be to Dorneywood House on Wednesday 22nd July from 2pm until 4pm. Please park by 1.45pm and then meet in the House reception to meet our guides.

Dorneywood is an 18th century Georgian house with Victorian later additions, rebuilt after a fire in 1910. Near Burnham, it was given to the National Trust in 1947 by Lord Courtauld-Thomson as a country home for a senior member of the Government, usually a Secretary of State or a senior Minister of the Crown. The Dorneywood Trust has the objective of maintaining the mansion house and gardens of Dorneywood.

The interior of the house contains some decorations by Rex Whistler, as well as paintings and furniture belonging to the Government Art Collection. There is also furniture belonging to the National Trust. The estate consists of the house and 215 acres of parkland. The grounds are noted for their cottage and kitchen garden as well as their herbaceous borders and rose displays. Photography is not permitted, but teas are available. Members of the National Trust should carry their membership card with them.

For Dorneywood House (postcode SL1 8PY), take the A355 southwards from J2 on the M40 for ½ mile and turn right onto Burnham Road. Continue onto Woodland Hill (after a slight left turn Woodland Hill becomes Ship Hill). Turn right into Boveney Wood Lane and continue to junction turning left into Dorney Wood Road. Dorneywood House is on the left via a restricted usage road. Parking is in the field adjacent to the house.

Please indicate on the slip below whether you can offer transport to other members. Anyone requiring transport should contact John Burton (Tel: 01494 538206, E-mail: jgb_burton @ hotmail.com).

DORNEYWOOD HOUSE VISIT - 22nd JULY 2015

I/We wish to book ___ places for the Dorneywood House visit and be accompanied by ___ guests for whom a donation of £10 per person is requested. (Cheques should be made payable to The Beaconsfield Society)

I/We are/are not able to offer transport to other members.

Name.....Address.....Tel.No.....

Please return to John Burton, 11 Gibson Road, High Wycombe, HP12 4QW (01494 538206) *by Wed 8th July.*

We could not have had a more beautiful autumn day on 1st October for this memorable visit. About forty members and their guests divided into two groups so that viewing the interior of the house would be more personal and supported and then would be free to explore the gardens and grounds at one's own pace.

Taplow Court is a beautiful mid-19th century mansion set high above the Thames near Maidenhead. At the turn of the 19th/20th centuries, the great sportsman, William Henry Grenfell and his wife, Ettie hosted gatherings of the elite, aristocratic social group, 'the Souls'. It was a centre of Edwardian high society.

In fact one of the reasons that Taplow Court was chosen as a visit was to follow up an earlier WW1 commemorative event by the Society in April 2014 called "Behind The Lines", the programme for which was of WW1 poetry and prose, and featured amongst others, the soldier poet Julian Grenfell. Julian and his brother Billy (Gerald William Grenfell) of the Taplow family were cousins of Beaconsfield's war heroes, the Grenfell twins. Capt Francis Grenfell was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1914. Tragically, both he and his twin brother, Riversdale, were killed in action in Flanders as were Julian and his brother, Billy.

In the tranquil gardens and grounds at Taplow Court, everything was so beautifully cared for without being overpowering. Highlights have to include a magnificent wild flower meadow about the size of a football field – a giant Persian carpet effect of the most beautiful colours and textures – and a water feature with a quietly flowing fall, elegantly moving exotic fish and lovely water lilies. On the edge of the drop down to the Thames Valley is a row of vast cedars, sadly depleted by the 1987 hurricane, but still sufficient to act as a frame for the wooded slopes below whilst allowing glimpses of the valley floor and countryside beyond. Inside the great house, we learned that a girls' school was evacuated to it during WW2 with stories of the high jinks that lively girls are capable of. After the war the property was used by Plessey which installed partitions in the beautiful large rooms in order to create office and other spaces.

Since the 1980's the property has been owned by Soka Gakkai International (GKI) – a Buddhist society for the creation of value through peace, education and culture. GKI have wonderfully restored the interior to its original splendour. The impressive large open space in the centre of the building, and reaching up to its full height, was created in the later years of the 1800's to let in more daylight. The Library now has an impressive collection of Buddhist literature. Elsewhere there is a large scale installation to illustrate what was found in the Saxon burial mound in the grounds. One stands on a step and looks down as if into the burial chamber to see a model of the Saxon King in full regalia, surrounded by treasured possessions as recorded by the archaeologists. The huge sitting room overlooking the terrace had on display a most interesting exhibition entitled, "A Family Goes to War", with a large number of artist preparatory sketches of young men of the family and friends facing the challenge of war - they were never completed.

The Society

<http://www.beaconsfieldsociety.org.uk>

The current Committee is as follows:

Chairman: Mike Elliott
Secretary: Laurence Smaje
Treasurer: Graeme Richards
Committee: Tony Bristow, John Burton, Kari Dorme, Nanu Hodson, Debbie Marsden, Colin Mitchell.
Newsletter Editor: Tony Bristow

Our President is Les Davies and our Vice-President is John Page.

The Society's Website www.beaconsfieldsociety.org.uk

Any contributions, suggestions or criticisms from members will be gratefully received by the Secretary; please contact him via the website or directly by phone, 01494 681165, or by email to laurence@smaje.co.uk.

We hope you found the Newsletter interesting and informative. Feel free to pass this on to interested neighbours and friends and do encourage them to come along to our events and become members.