

The Cookham Society

Registered Charity No. 257224 | messages@cookhamsociety.org.uk Autumn 2026 Newsletter

GAPING EXCAVATIONS AT ASTORIA PARK *By Dick Scarff*

Building on the Bellway development, named as Astoria Park, on Cannondown Road is now proceeding at pace and several members have asked us why large excavations have appeared either side of the site entrance, one member even believing that it was a moat!

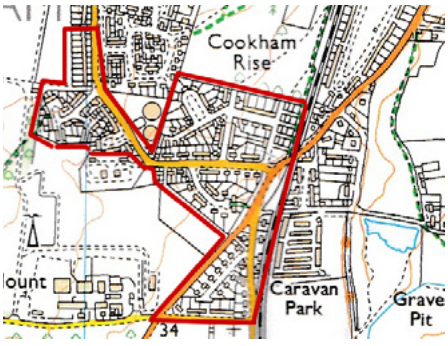
In fact, the two large holes are 'attenuation ponds'. As the ground in this area is too impermeable for soakaways to function, these ponds are designed to temporarily hold surface rainwater until it can be released into the foul sewer. There will be two further, normal soakaways on other parts of the site.

During preparation of the site master plan document four of these areas were described by the developer as open, green recreation areas. We were appalled when this full planning application was submitted in August 2023 to find that they all had been turned into steep sided, flat-bottomed ponds. They are not only lost amenity spaces, but are ugly, potentially dangerous for children and may serve as breeding grounds for mosquitos.

However, we did meet with some successes in our discussions with RBWM planners, councillors and the developer's professional team on how the site should be developed. We asked that instead of the housing being built close to Cannondown Road, as the developer had originally proposed, that there should be a good 'set back' from the road so that it would match the existing 'set back' along Maidenhead Road and Cannondown Road. We were pleased that this was adopted.







ARE YOU BEING FLEECED BY THAMES WATER?

By Dick Scarff

Recently, whilst investigating the sewer requirements for Astoria Park, the Society looked at the existing sewer arrangements to the south of the railway bridge on Cannondown Road. Thames Water told us that, in the area outlined in red on the map (approximately 140 households) they charge a fee for discharging surface water into the foul sewer. One of our members challenged the charge and had it cancelled because his surface water was actually draining into a soakaway. We suspect that there may be other residents who are being overcharged. You might want to check. If you do get your charges reduced, we would love to hear from you.

DATA CENTRE THREAT

An early-stage proposal to build a massive 'cloud data centre' at Lower Mount Farm has been launched by a developer known as Greystoke Land. It would be equivalent to five storeys high, have a massive footprint, and would loom over the new Astoria Park houses and the surrounding rural area. Greystoke have sought pre-application advice and say that they hope to file a formal application before Christmas.

We will argue very strongly from the outset, that it would destroy the separation between Cookham and Maidenhead and contravene all the protections afforded by the Cookham Neighbourhood Plan and the Borough's own rules.



The nearly completed data centre in Slough
Photo by Mark Greenland

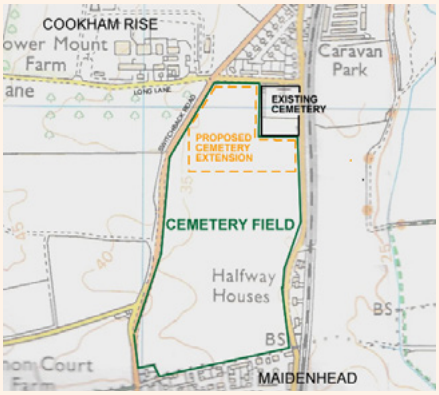
CHURCH COMMISSIONERS AGREE TO DISCUSS EXTENDING THE CEMETERY

By Bill Perry

The Parish Council has long wished to extend the cemetery and to refurbish the dated chapel, and this objective was incorporated into the Neighbourhood Plan. The field that



the PC would like to extend into, is owned by the Church Commissioners who have informed the PC that they want to build 220 houses on the wider field. This would end the treasured separation between Cookham and Maidenhead and is firmly opposed by the Cookham Society and the PC. Until now, the CC have refused to discuss the possibility of releasing land until the PC withdraw their objection to their housing plans. The deadlock was highlighted in a recent *Maidenhead*



Advertiser article where the CC claimed that the PC was refusing talks. After a push back by the Parish, the CC have backed down and have now agreed to talks without preconditions.

QUIET LANES TO MAKE AN APPEARANCE IN COOKHAM

By Bill Perry

Cookham has been selected by the Borough as the site for a new pilot scheme which will see some of our lovely, single track country lanes designated as 'Quiet Lanes'. This new category of roads is designed to ensure that particular care is paid to the needs of walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and other vulnerable road users. Cars won't be banned



from Quiet Lanes but there will be lower speed limits and road signs to alert all motorists. Regretfully, the Borough did not consult with either the Society or the Parish about suitable roads so we will wait to see which routes are chosen.



ABANDONED BOATS ON THE TOWPATH

By Mark Chapman

An unsightly jumble of rusting, half-submerged and sunken boats has been abandoned along the Salters Steamers jetty at Bell Rope Meadow, making an eyesore of one of Cookham's most attractive riverfronts. The Cookham Society approached the Parish Council at a meeting on the 7th July to see what could be done about the problem. The PC agreed to apply pressure to the Environment Agency, Salters Steamers and if necessary, will ask our local MP, Joshua Reyolds, for his support to get rid of the derelict boats.

CREMATORIUM APPLICATION THROWN OUT BY RBWM *By Andy Harle*

The Cookham Society is pleased to report that the Crematorium planning application was refused by the Borough at the July Panel meeting.

The Society submitted three objection letters, highlighting the inappropriateness of the site, the flawed design and layout, and the unsatisfactory highway access. We also argued that there was no immediate need for a crematorium, and that should a future need be identified, the right process for selecting the location would be via the Borough Local Plan consultation.

The planning officer recommended refusal on 13 policy grounds, five of which relate to the Cookham Neighbourhood Plan. Amongst these are the policies to prevent visual coalescence between Cookham Rise and Maidenhead, and respecting the important views and openness depicted by Sir Stanley Spencer.



RIVERSIDE NURSING HOME


View through the current site to Winter Hill and beyond

An application to develop this sensitive site was made in February 2025. It initially sought to replace the original, open, low-build nursing home with three, densely spaced, overbearing, executive houses and a block of five flats. Some 19 months later, the application in respect of this spot in the centre of the Cookham Conservation Area and the Setting of the Thames, remains undecided. This is the largest development in Cookham Village for over 50 years, and three amended schemes have been accepted by RBWM even though no pre-application advice was sought from the Local Planning Authority. We understand that the current planning officer remains in discussions with the developers.

Comprehensive objections have been submitted to both the original and the amended schemes, not only by the Cookham Society but also by Cookham Parish Council, the Berries Road Association, Friends of Cookham Abbey and by a significant number of concerned local residents. The Society also commissioned professional advice from Henry Russell OBE, an acknowledged expert on both Planning and Heritage matters for his insight into the importance of retaining the character of this significant plot.

The bulk, size and height of the proposed development will completely change the character and public amenity provided by Bell Rope Meadow - one of the most treasured green spaces within the Cookham Village Conservation area. The historic views from Winter Hill and beyond will be extinguished and it will forever affect the openness of the Meadow and the views of the Thames. See header photo.


View of Bell Rope Meadow showing the nursing home site

BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN, WHERE ON EARTH CAN ALL THE HOUSES GO?

By Tom Denniford

As those of you who received our recent News Alerts will know, we are faced with a new Borough Local Plan. The current plan is only four and a half years old, but the Royal Borough is having to replace it because, like many local authorities, it is being faced with a government requirement to increase the amount of land identified for new housing. For Windsor and Maidenhead this means finding land for double the number of dwellings provided for in the current plan, to a figure of more than 1,400 a year until 2045.

This has serious implications for our villages. The Borough's approach to the existing plan showed that the Green Belt is no longer sacrosanct and the government's Grey Belt concept seems to be a recipe for its irrelevance. We shall have to fight with great tenacity if we are to preserve the distinctiveness of our communities while the new plan goes through its various stages in the next two years.






Photo by Mark Chapman

LANDMARK WILLOW CRASHES INTO THE THAMES

A willow tree on the towpath close to Cookham Bridge crashed into the river on the 16th September. The Society had warned the Environment Agency for many months that the tree was in danger. Unfortunately, our warnings were ignored.

HOW DID COOKHAM'S WILDLIFE FARE IN THE EXTREME HEAT THIS SUMMER? *By Brian Clews*

Just how did our local natural history wonders fare in yet another hot and stifling summer? The good news is that many Cookhamites were able to see insects normally found in North Africa or the Mediterranean, Clouded yellow butterflies were spotted on Hardings Green, Pinkneys Green and Burchetts Green and brilliant migrant moths such as Jersey Tiger were plentiful, with no fewer than 53 at one time in one Broomhill garden.



Clouded yellow butterfly
Photo courtesy of David Pinneger

Usually scarce Hummingbird hawk-moths were reported from gardens in Lower Road, Westwood Green, and Widbrook Cottages. The Shire Horse seed-gathering project on Cookham Moor did confirm the presence of some good insect species such as the Common blue and Brown Argus butterflies, Common Grass-veneer moths, umpteen ladybirds and some sizeable diadem spiders.

However, grasshoppers, hoverflies and beetles were hard to find on the Harris Woodbridge nature reserve as dried-up flowers provided no nectar or cover for them and the desiccated pond deprived dragonflies of their usual breeding opportunities.

Common Cookham birds struggled to raise broods, but one bird doing well this year is the uncommon Cetti's warbler, which has established itself on Battlemead, Widbrook, the two Marsh Meadow ponds and the small fishing pool at the side of Cock-marsh. Unfortunately, the nationally threatened Brown Galingale, only found on Cockmarsh in our region, was not seen this year.



Cetti's warbler
Photo by Mick Vogel

APPLE ERMINE MOTH MAKES AN UNWELCOME APPEARANCE IN COOKHAM

A new and unwanted visitor has been attacking fruit trees all over Cookham. Local orchard owners, Richard and Pam Campin describe the damage to their apple trees.

Reddings Orchard, in the heart of Cookham and which we own with three other families, has faced a devastating Apple Ermine moth infestation among its 43 heritage apple trees. The caterpillars, first noticed here in 2024, have spread much more widely, stripping leaves, halting photosynthesis and smothering trees in large, brown webs. Our crop was poor and the advice from the RHS was not encouraging. We don't know what the long-term effect might be.



Photo courtesy of Richard Campin



Meeting to discuss 'boy racers' in Cookham

BOY RACERS IN COOKHAM

By Geneviève Usher

Following widespread concern about noisy and late-night racing around the roads in Cookham, a public meeting was held on the 10th September with parish and borough councillors, the police and concerned residents present. Extra police patrols have been promised.

RECRUITMENT *By Shez Courtenay-Smith*

Our Membership Working Party has been working hard, and we are delighted to report that membership has increased by 24%. There is no sign that the pressure of applications for unwanted development in Cookham is going to reduce any time soon and we need as much support as possible to resist it. Please pass on this newsletter to any friends or neighbours who are not members, to encourage them to join the Society.

WEEKLY PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Don't forget that you can track all the weekly planning applications in Cookham by looking at our website: **www.cookhamsociety.org.uk**

KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH THE SOCIETY

You can keep abreast of key issues facing Cookham by staying in touch with the Society in any number of ways:

- Join the Society, see QR code
- Read our website **www.cookhamsociety.org.uk**
- Follow us on Facebook: **www.facebook.com/groups/thecookhamsociety**
- Read the Poster Drum on Cookham station concourse

All photos by Barry Weare unless stated otherwise