

Haddenham Village Society – over 50 years of effective village support

The formation of the Haddenham Village Society was proposed at a meeting of some thirty villagers held at 6:15 pm on 15 May 1965. The proposal, which led to the foundation of the society on 9 July 1965, had been precipitated by changes to Stockwell and the felling of trees to make way for a development.

The Society was affiliated to the Civic Trust and its aims were to care for the historical aspects of the village, comment on planning proposals affecting the village and assist the Parish Council.

By October 1965, membership had reached 120 with a focus on preservation and improvement. By that time Society members were involved in discussions about a proposal to develop a Community Centre in Banks Park. The Village Hall, which was housed in an old RAF building, required improving and extending and the addition of a library, doctor's surgery and youth centre were proposed.

Across the road, Banks Pond, in splendid isolation, needed care and maintenance. So over two Saturdays, Society members had cleared the pond of weeds and rubbish. The Area Planning Officer met with members of the Society to explain planning procedures and the Parish Council asked the Society to make recommendations as to how Banks Pond could be best included in the development of the shopping parade and 46 houses.

There was already light industry on the airfield and on the site on the corner of Wykeham Way and Thame Road. Haddenham was increasing in size more than expected and this was giving rise to growing concerns about traffic and parking. There was a feeling that the village was growing too fast. A population of 2,000 by 1974 had been envisaged. This had been exceeded by 1961 and was approximately 3,700 by the time the County Council published a village plan for Haddenham in November 1970. At that stage, several locations including Stokes Croft, Quakers Mede, Woodlands, Slave Hill, White Cross Road and Sheerstock were still undeveloped or under construction.

As well as assisting the Parish Council in responding to planning proposals, the Society arranged evening talks for the general public. The first of these, "Old Haddenham on the Screen", was given by Diana Alderson. It was held on 22 October 1965 and was attended by nearly 100 people. The Society consulted members on issues such as traffic and parking and even sought the views of school children on good and bad features of the village.

On the more practical side, as well helping to maintain the ponds, a tree survey was conducted, and preservation orders were requested as deemed necessary. In 1969-1970, a group of Society members, led by Diana Alderson, planted trees in various parts of the village on unoccupied land.

Inadequate street lighting and parking were also becoming issues. The influence of the Society in the early 1970s resulted in the edges of Church End Green being raised to keep vehicles off the grass. In 1971, about a dozen Society members carried out a day long survey of traffic in the village. As a result of this, the County Council installed road signs on the A418 at Hartwell and Scotsgrove to discourage through traffic.

As part of its "community bonding" role the Society staged communal firework displays in the goods yard of the old station (now the playground beside Sheerstock) in November from 1969 until about 1976. It was also involved, in the early 1970s, with the Haddenham Holiday Club set up to entertain children.

In 1980, the Society paid for the publication of Reflections of Life in Haddenham by Walter Rose as edited by Elsie M Rose and Peter Gulland. By that time, with a progressively growing village, communication became more of an issue and the Society had taken responsibility for publishing Haddenham News and Views.

Seventeen editions were published from early 1980 to late January 1987. Its scope was considerably larger than the newsletters, which the Society first published in October 1965. It included not only Village Society news but also Parish Council news and views of residents. The publication also contained a variety of articles on topics of local interest, such as the history of Tythrop House, bell ringing, the FISH scheme, ceilidhs and Alexander Engineering. A diary of events, not just for the Village Society but also for other organisations in the village, was also included.

The aims of the Society were to keep the village in its present boundaries, promote a good village community and support small scale industry and workshops. It was therefore, as it is now, very active on the planning side.

The excellent early work by Diana Alderson has been continued in large measure on behalf of the Society by Richard Hirst, together with John Brandis and Ros Owens. Examples over the years include:

- A public meeting called by the Society on 4th August 1980 to oppose a proposal by a local company to build a road from the A418 to the industrial site on the airfield funded by building 240 houses on the airfield. Over 200 people attended the meeting and the Society's

opposition to the proposal was overwhelmingly approved. This was backed up by a further 50 signatures from those unable to attend. The planning application was not approved, and the company chose not to challenge the decision.

- A strong challenge, in coordination with the Parish and District Councils, to some proposed changes to the County Council Plan that would have made Haddenham more vulnerable to development. As a result, it was agreed that Haddenham would be regarded as a large village where only modest growth should be expected. Such development would normally be within the existing village boundaries, exceptions being granted for only unforeseen local demands. However, there was still some apprehension about future pressures for more development.

By 1997, the society was organising excursions as well as local events. Monthly meetings were typically attended by 60-70 people. The need for a local plan was recognised and a planning sub-committee was formed in addition to the events sub-committee. The Safe Walking & Cycling Group (SW&CG), interest in which had been fostered by annual walks organised by the Society, formed as a sub-group of the Society. As time passed, the group became independent but is now, once again, a sub-committee of the Society.

In the year 2000, the Society published "Our Haddenham", an excellent millennium booklet covering 1500 years of village history. This community project included significant contributions by local children between the ages of four to eleven.

In parallel with its on-going background activity of scrutinising and commenting on the many planning proposals directed at Haddenham, the Society has organised regular programmes of events including talks, visits and a popular series of jazz picnics held in Manor Farm tithe barn.

A St George's Day dinner has been held annually since 23 April 2009, the first one being held in Harding's Restaurant at Aylesbury College. In 2017 and 2018, a Society team led by Mike Mingos organised two very successful Community Fairs in the Village Hall in which over 50 local groups show-cased their activities. A third very successful one, organised by a team led by Jim Robins, was held on 29 February 2020. The Society also regularly supports Witchert Chorale concerts.

From early 2013 to mid-2015, the Society assisted the Parish Council's working group in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan. This went to a local referendum in July 2015 and was subsequently adopted by AVDC, although the housing

chapter was subsequently quashed after a judicial review challenge. In July 2016 the Parish Council and the Society jointly held a public meeting attended by 300 residents to raise awareness of the draft Aylesbury Vale Local Plan (VALP) in which Haddenham was designated a ***strategic settlement*** for about 1000 new homes. (Formal adoption of VALP was achieved in 2022.)

Over its 54-year history, the Society has successfully supported the village. It supported a project to re-line the pond at Church End and install a mains water supply. It joined in opposition to a proposal for an airport in the vicinity of Wing near Leighton Buzzard. It continues to assist with the review of planning applications and fights for the retention of the village ethos. It has arranged a wide variety of successful events and has adapted to changing circumstances.

The Village Society has contributed to start-up funds for Junior Football and the Haddenham Cricket Club and made donations to a variety of other local organisations. And, it continues to monitor and provide Aylesbury ducks for the pond at Church End! It now has over 300 family members and is continuing to take forward the old with the new.

Graham Track
22nd March 2020