

**SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING  
OF  
THE CUCKFIELD SOCIETY**

Warden Park School,  
Broad Street, Cuckfield  
Monday, 19 November 2007

1. The Chairman for the evening, Marie Dormer, welcomed over 100 members to the Special General Meeting at which point she was interrupted by Stephen Holroyd on a point of order. He felt that it was inappropriate for Marie to chair the SGM because the members had called for the SGM therefore they wanted the chairman for the evening to be their choice – the Hon. President Mr Stephen Cockburn. He also requested that the meeting use the agenda prepared by the members. Bernadine Burnell, quoting from the constitution, explained that the Committee would apply best practice as there was no mention of this. Following a heated discussion Stephen Holroyd's suggestion was put to the members who voted in favour of Stephen Cockburn chairing the meeting and using the members' agenda.

2. Apologies for Absence (read out by Marie Dormer)

Richard Wiseman, Mr & Mrs Marshall, Shirley Willmouth, Pat Wilson, June Boothroyd, Margaret Wearing, Marjorie Chilton, Dr & Lady Polrock, Sir Richard Kleinwort, Mona Hopkins, David Vaughan, Robin Loder, John McKenzie, Andy Harrison, Terry & Nicole Buckland, Paul & Karen Goldfinch, Annie Rees, Simon & Jane Stodart, Sian Probert, Vivian Reed, Bridget Wallace, Janet & David Bushby, Clive Vinall, Howard & Lesley Duff, Bill Parkes, Peter Finnerty, Bob Hewitt, Denise & James Jordan, Martin Ingebretson, Helen Howard.

3. Stephen Cockburn read out the agenda written by the subscribers of the letter requesting the EGM:

1. In the light of the non-performance of the AGM resolution requesting the Committee to visit Ockenden Manor to discuss their proposed development, we ask the Committee to justify why this was not carried out and why formal explanation was never offered to Stephen Holroyd.
  - i. Reply from the main Committee
  - ii. Comment from Backers of Ockenden Manor (BOOM) supporters
  - iii. Comment from the floor
2. A discussion of the two proposals for the Ockenden Manor (1. awaiting Public Enquiry, and 2. the latest proposal with a consideration of their impact on the village as a whole in accordance with the founding principles of the Society. This should include an affirmation of the need for the Society to support enterprise within the village by way of sympathetic growth.
  - i. Reply from the main Committee
  - ii. Comment from BOOM supporters
  - iii. Comment from the floor

3. A resolution requiring the Committee to withdraw the Cuckfield Society immediately from the action group (known as the Cuckfield Communities Consortium) opposing the Ockenden manor development.
  - i. Reply from the main Committee
  - ii. Comment from BOOM supporters
  - iii. Comment from the floor

Stephen Cockburn asked Bernadine Burnell to address the members on the item 1. above.

To re-assure members that their views in supporting the hotel were fully represented, Bernadine Burnell read out a letter from the then Chairman of the Heritage Sub Committee, Andy Harrison which was sent to MSDC dated 2 June 2006:

**CU/06/00845/LBC Ockenden Manor – Extensions to and remodelling of existing hotel CU/06/00844/FUL**

With reference to the above planning applications I write to advise you that the Cuckfield Society wishes to object to these plans.

Whilst wishing to be supportive of some form of extension and remodelling of the hotel, we remain concerned that the current plans will greatly diminish the tranquillity of the historic centre of Cuckfield and will impact directly on the adjacent AONB.

This application differs from the previous application only in detailing the materials and finish of the external appearance of the extension. Our objections therefore remain unaltered and we consider that:-

- a) The proposed development would be 'overdevelopment' in that the new build would completely overwhelm the present listed building.
- b) A spa for 500 people and the traffic which this would generate would be too much for what is essentially a quiet and peaceful village. We would have no objection to health club facilities for the hotel residents.
- c) The omission of any accommodation for staff raises the question of where they are to be housed. Obviously additional staff would be required to cater for the increased numbers of guests and casual visitors to their proposed spa facilities.
- d) The proposal to introduce a one-way system in Ockenden Lane together with the increased traffic that the hotel is proposing to generate would have catastrophic effects on the residents of Ockenden Lane and the entire historic centre of the village. There is already a dearth of parking facilities and most of the residents in the village centre do not have access to off-street parking.
- e) The applicants make the point that the hotel must expand and improve on-site facilities in order to compete with similar establishments. They say that the alternative is the likelihood that the hotel will go out of business. This may be true but it is not relevant to the consideration of this application and should be disregarded by the Planning Committee.

As stated earlier, we would be supportive of some form of expansion of Ockenden Manor in a way which addresses the points above. We are aware that some traders in the village benefit from the patronage of hotel guests and we appreciate

the prestige that the presence of the hotel confers on our village and the surrounding area.

She went onto say that at our AGM in March 2007, during the Heritage Report update, a discussion was had regarding Ockenden Manor. Members felt that it would be a good idea for the Society to meet with the hotel to perhaps come to some sort of agreement on what might be acceptable as a development proposal.

Following the AGM the committee met on 16 April 2007 where the matter was discussed informally, it was concluded that the Committee would not visit the hotel, primarily due to the impending public inquiry, but also because it was not usual practice for the Society to approach would-be applicants in this way. In the past, when there have been significant development proposals within the village, the Society has been invited by interested parties to listen to their views (both supporters and opponents), as was the case in both the earlier Ockenden Manor proposals; the Baptist Church and more recently, the Dramatic Society plans for a theatre. We held an 'open' village meeting to discuss the sale of land at Laines Farm and what we as a village community might be able to do with regard to raising funds to launch a bid for Lot 1. This is typical of how the Society has successfully interacted in the past, and continues to do so.

However, the decision was not communicated to Mr Holroyd at the time, which was with hindsight a failing on the Committee's part, for which we unreservedly apologise.

Having identified this weakness in our administrative procedures, we have now reviewed our management processes to ensure such a situation does not arise again and, in future, where practicable, we will aim to respond to the AGM and other such queries within an appropriate timeframe (unless circumstances prevent or prohibit us from so doing.)

Stephen Cockburn thanked Bernadine Burnell for a gracious apology to the proposer of the AGM resolution and invited Nick Rowe to comment.

Nick Rowe, Chairman, Heritage Committee said that although he was not at the AGM he had advised the Committee not to approach Ockenden Manor until after the planning enquiry as it would have been inappropriate. He explained that the Society is not a planning authority and is anxious not to set a precedent but to react to planning applications and submit objections.

Stephen Cockburn said that it was not the Society's job to alter planning guidelines. He drew attention to the land previously called Bridger's Meadow and that originally 3 or 4 houses round a pond were proposed, the land was outside the built-up boundary, planning rules were abandoned and sites in the area had been subject to development. There are 3 or 4 sites coming up and are under threat. It is the Committee's view to abide by planning guidelines and not seek to change them. He invited comments from the floor.

Stephen Holroyd said that it was sad that this was the first SGM in 40 years. He felt that Nick Rowe's reason for not approaching Ockenden Manor was rather poor. He felt that

the Cuckfield Society was here for the people of Cuckfield and it was important for the village to grow and prosper.

He went on to say: a village consists of buildings and people each as important as the other. One breathes life into the other. The village is not built in aspic. Mark Holland, member of a very old Cuckfield family, wrote an article for me in the June 1982 newsletter that ended. "My plea is that as members of the Cuckfield Society we show an awareness of the future, as well as of the past; involve ourselves in local decision-taking, even write to this newsletter! Cuckfield is not so large that it can't be an opportunity for self-expression for all who become involved. And it is not so strong that we can afford to leave it alone and hope it won't change. It will." This is as true today as it was 25 years ago. A thriving village needs trade.

100 years ago Cuckfield was a coaching town where 20 teams of horses were changed each day. It thrived on the visitors who passed through, staying in the hotels and spending money in the shops.

Today the only hotel is Ockenden Manor that still attracts visitors. Although it is one of the top 200 in Britain it has to modernise and keep up to date with modern expectations. As houses used to have outside privies they now have en suite bathrooms and top hotels have to have spas to keep the rooms full. I should think all the houses in Ockenden Lane have been modernised with builders lorries blocking up the lane.

Last March at the AGM I asked the committee to meet with the owners of Ockenden Manor, as I put it, to wave an olive branch and seek a way forwards to help them. I wanted a positive approach and not a negative one.

I understand that sadly this has not happened and nor has the membership been consulted over such an important matter to Cuckfield.

When I was Chairman in the 80s we consulted with the members over the route of the proposed new bypass and came up with a new route that did not exit at the entrance to Cuckfield Park but also proved to be £0.5 mn cheaper. A further consultation over our attempt to keep Cuckfield hospital was not successful but events have proved it might have been the better option.

Bernadine – You and Brian have a conflict of interest leading separate protest groups and trying to represent this Society. I do not see how you can hold your position as Chairman whilst you are leading such an aggressive and personal campaign against Ockenden Manor. You had clear instructions at the AGM to talk with them about their plans to defuse the situation. This you have not done despite obvious unquiet amongst the membership but you still led a campaign purporting to represent the Society's views when members have not been consulted. Our group was formed because we wanted to talk with Ockenden Manor to see if there was a compromise to keep harmony within the village.

Jaw jaw is usually better than war war and I hope tonight will prove to be helpful to Cuckfield and OM.

Colin Sewell-Rutter: Appreciated Stephen Cockburn chairing the meeting despite arriving back from business abroad today. Although the Committee had failed to communicate its decision to Stephen Holroyd, the Chairman had apologised. Cuckfield was a village of great courtesy and in the light of the apology perhaps the matter could now be put to rest.

Stuart Ingram: It was kind of Bernadine Burnell to apologise but this could have been done at the beginning of September. The Parish Council had given account of itself but the Cuckfield Society had not done so. It was not satisfactory and the Cuckfield Society should also have apologised to other members.

Stephen Cockburn: said that the Chairman had apologised to those who voted at the AGM and did so on behalf of the entire committee which was meant graciously.

Roy Viccari: said that Ockenden Manor were hard hitting businessmen and tend to forget us – the people.

Chris Openshaw: He had limited knowledge of Ockenden Manor but they had shown a willingness to talk to local people. He thought MSDC and English Heritage supported the application and that the Committee should consult the membership and try to sit down with Ockenden Manor and sort it out.

Stephen Cockburn mentioned that if a business was failing it should be nothing to do with a planning application, as planning policy cannot be determined on the basis of financial need. He thought that the first two applications did seem rather silly with a new road to the south of Ockenden Manor and the size of the new build much too big but he thought that the newest application looked reasonable. He said that the sale of the enabling development, the residential block to be built in the walled garden with access from the lane to the back lane to the recreation ground, to provide funds to enable other work to be done was not acceptable planning gain.

Bernadine Burnell: On a point of order - although the planning department supported the design as did English Heritage the size was overwhelming.

Stephen Henderson: wanted to clear up the term, building line, which he said was an out of date incorrect planning term - settlement boundary is the new term. The site is outside the built-up boundary, as are a number of properties in Ockenden Lane and the recreation ground. Planning policy says that development can take place outside settlements if it is for recreational or tourism use and if it is of an appropriate scale or overwhelming reasons for a departure, ie a failing business, crumbling historic building, are demonstrated. Development outside the Settlement Policy Area is very restricted and limited unless special circumstances are proven to enable a departure from these restrictions. In our case the special circumstances are the decline of the hotel and its potential failure and loss to Cuckfield. Approval of a development such as Ockenden Manor outside of the SPA would not in any way influence or create precedence for another site, it would be totally site specific. The only housing that can be built outside the SPA is affordable housing. Housing association and then special circumstances have to be in place – for example it would have to be directly joining a developed part of the village, it would also have to meet a string of criteria, not the least being obtaining funding from the housing corporation.

Stephen Cockburn said that planning officers of MSDC still use the term built up boundary. Bernadine held up the map of Cuckfield which showed the building line.

David Thunder: invited the committee members with a conflict of interest to comment.

Bernadine Burnell explained that since becoming involved with the Society over the last 2 years she had worked very hard on wide ranging matters with the consent and agreement of all the committee. Contrary to what some members are saying she does not have power and influence to sway the committee on planning matters and does not attend the Heritage Sub-Committee.

Marie Dormer: said that when she joined the Committee 2½ years ago there were few members and that she had learnt a lot from Bernadine and all her other Committee colleagues. The Society is very busy with the village show, Christmas shopping evening and winter lectures.

Nick Rowe: said that he had been involved with planning matters for the Society since 1977 and had over the years written in the newsletter about planning and had recently written an article on planning guidelines to remind members the basis on which the heritage committee (and the planning committee before that) deal with heritage/planning matters. The Committee need guidelines on which to base their decisions.

Collette Collins: said she had been a member of the Heritage Committee for many years then received a letter thanking her for her services. She feels marginalised. She thought that the Committee used her for her knowledge of planning matters.

Robin Whyte: He has been the Hon. Treasurer of the Cuckfield Society for 10 years and for 5 years as chairman of the Heritage Sub-Committee. When the 1<sup>st</sup> application was lodged the Cuckfield Society was invited to a meeting in the White Harte after which he reported back to the Committee who discussed what should be done. At the meeting to discuss the 2<sup>nd</sup> application Andy Harrison could not attend as he was chairman of the Parish Council planning committee. The Heritage Sub-Committee was invited to the main Committee and all members were given the opportunity to air views and as a result looked at the MSDC letter (which Bernardine had previously read out to the meeting) and after a few amendments, agreed it was the views of all committee members. Although the letter opposed the development it conveyed to Ockenden Manor that the Cuckfield Society were objecting on certain bases but keen to see the hotel develop.

Guy Powell: said that after 1¼ hours nothing meaty had been discussed and we should move on.

Lindy Elphick: felt that Bernadine led 'her group' to oppose the development. If Ockenden Manor do not get the go ahead they will go, therefore no village and no shops.

David Mortimer: agreed with the last 2 speakers and the meeting needs to move forward. Plan 3 is a 'no brainer' – if we don't have Ockenden Manor and we won't if the development is opposed then we will lose the shops and there will be no economic presence in the village. Cuckfield needs a vibrant economy and Plan 3 is modest. Look at what happened at The Copse. From now until 2026 villages of Mid Sussex have to

build between 500 and 1,500 new dwellings which will double the population of villages. Plan 3 is simple, straightforward and unobtrusive; we need to look forward and think positively.

Rosemary Harding asked how much trade does Ockenden Manor bring to the village?

Replying Lindy Elphick said that they are the largest ratepayer in the village, employing 40 staff, of which 37 live in Cuckfield, Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. Only 3 live in Horsham. Lindy has spoken to many people and visited all the shops and 2 remain neutral (1 of which is Beauty Within).

Stephen Cockburn said that some shopkeepers get a good deal but the general view was that Ockenden Manor is an asset.

Tony Roberts: There is a lot of talk about how good the development will be but it will have a huge impact on the nearby residents. There will be no parking in Ockenden Lane while work is ongoing. The Manor should be waving an olive branch at the residents. A spa with membership for 500 will generate an enormous volume of traffic and the traffic is pretty awful now.

Brian Chasser: said that increased traffic is a concern. Of the 500 members only a relative few will use the facility. Traffic is likely to be minimal. A traffic survey showed 8 units an hour and Cuckfield members would be able to walk.

Bernadine Burnell – made reference to a traffic survey based on the Runnymede Hotel which was a more accurate representation of the likely traffic flows for Ockenden Manor once the Spa is built, rather than the traffic survey submitted for the current application, which was based on Bailiffscourt, given the geographic location of each facility.

Mike Robson: he does not live in Ockenden Lane and felt that there was a conflict of interest for the Chairman and perhaps she should stand down.

Sue Mayou: said she thought there were not a representative number of members at this meeting but Bill Morrison felt that this was a properly constituted meeting and therefore representative of the Society.

Lindy Elphick: said that the committee should support Plan 3.

Nick Rowe: The Cuckfield Society will soon have to make their opinion known. The only protection the village has is the built-up boundary line so we must oppose. We would need to rewrite our guidelines if we wanted to support the development but we need the built-up boundary line for future planning applications.

Barbara Ingram: said she was confused about the role of architects. Nick Rowe replied that he does his best for each applicant.

Stuart Ingram: said that he was on the Parish Council when 4 houses were turned down in the Copse and we got what we weren't happy with. MSDC are preparing to accept Plan 3. A lot of people might be happy but the Committee must talk to Ockenden Manor.

Ockenden Manor has done traffic management and he suggested that members of the Society speak to Ockenden Manor about traffic.

Stephen Cockburn: apologised on behalf of the Society for not meeting Ockenden Manor and 'waving an olive branch'. The planning authority could change their rules – there would be few objectors here tonight.

Roy Viccari: said that the business would expand and disregard people in the village. He questioned why Ockenden Manor needed to expand and suggested they increase their prices.

Andrew Symonds: said he had lived in the village for 37 years and felt compelled to come to the meeting because he had not been consulted about planning matters.

Stephen Holroyd: reiterated the conflict of interest and that Bernadine was conducting her own private email objection list and therefore cannot represent the 100+ members here tonight and should step down as Chairman – she should 'fall on her sword'.

Marie Dormer: said that both Bernadine and Bryan could leave the Committee meetings when Ockenden Manor is discussed.

Sarah Khan: felt that was a decision for the Committee and they could have a chairman who was against the development. She felt that Bernadine was being set up this evening and that the meeting had been called to ask her to step down.

Stephen Cockburn: hoped that we were not descending to personal vendettas. All planning applications were handled by the Committee and he referred to the excellent minutes of the Committee meeting of March 2006 which described each Committee member's individual view on the development. He went on to say that the chairman of any society has to be careful and referred to a particular incident concerning himself when he was chairman after he wrote his personal views in the newsletter when the primary school moved to Glebe Road some 15 years ago. Sir John Herbecq reminded him that not all members would agree and he must represent the views of members.

Penny Thornton: questioned the efficiency of the Committee - that the reason we were all here tonight was because there had been no consultation.

Rupert Sommers: he was new to the village and expressed surprise by what had taken place this evening. He was sure everyone wanted to see a successful hotel, he thought there was too much point scoring being done and suggested a working party meet Ockenden Manor. He pointed out that Lindfield is a thriving, bustling village without a hotel.

Anthony While: asked about the built-up boundary and if the guidelines aren't changed then the Society would object to all applications.

Nick Rowe replied that the current guidelines prohibit the Society from agreeing to any planning applications outside the build-up boundary. The Society always observes the guidelines otherwise we would not be representing the aims of the Society. If we didn't

then it would set a precedent for any further planning applications. The guidelines are not written in stone but a precedent would be set, a de facto decision.

Bernadine Burnell: referred to the Society's letter to MSDC dated June 2006 adding that we don't object to everything. The Committee has never been more contactable by email, through the village show, the summer show, lectures etc.

Jo Roche: said that there were only 15 Society members at the last AGM in March and encouraged people to come along, make their views heard and offer to stand and represent the members.

Stephen Cockburn: said that there were so many members here tonight and that the Committee would take away a wide variety of views.

Brian Wright: he is a member of the Cuckfield Rural Parish Council and said it was a requirement of the Council that they declare any conflict of interest.

Bernadine Burnell reiterated that she does not attend the Heritage Sub-Committee that looks specifically at planning matters. She said that the Committee needs to look at the new plans as soon as possible, which are available for anyone to look at in the Queens Hall. She said that the Cuckfield Society has asked the Parish Council to have the plans available for the public to view this week.

Philip Emerson enquired about existing planning guidelines and whether Ockenden Manor's application was within the built-up boundary.

Nick Rowe replied that in the latest proposal, whilst the building was an improvement in that the new location did not dominate the setting of the village in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, there were still two problems, ie

- 1 This latest proposal is outside the built up boundary. Even so, OM are free to build outside this boundary or apply to have the line moved – we just have to watch out for precedent that would be set elsewhere.
- 2 It is still a 500-member spa building with access only down Ockenden Lane. This will have a tremendous impact on this part of the central conservation area in which there are few houses, many of which are tenanted. Whilst most members would not be affected by the proposed development, we still have to look at the the impact this part of our existing built heritage even though few live there.

Rosemary Viccari mentioned that the traffic and Broad Street and the High Street will be dangerous.

David Mortimer: said the Hotel is a business and as such its aim is to increase profit but currently their profit is falling away. This is due to reduced visitors at the weekends so they must do their utmost to correct this dip. Traffic: their plan is to get parking inside and they have compiled statistics on traffic. We must open a dialogue with Ockenden Manor.

Stuart Ingram: wondered where we go from here. The Society needs to look Plan 3 and compile information and communicate with members. He urged everyone to go to the Queens Hall and view the plans and read the supporting documents and look at the MSDC website. Also the model would be on view at the hotel for a few days next week.

Stephen Cockburn: said that it was clear they are not making a profit.

Andrew Symonds said a change of policy in the planning guidelines needs to be put forward. The built-up boundary needs to be moved if necessary.

Stephen Cockburn: said that maybe planning guidelines need to be adjusted – looking back at the Copse and what happened there.

Brian Chasser: asked for the Cuckfield Society to withdraw from the Cuckfield Communities Consortium as proposed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> item of their agenda.

Nick Rowe: explained that it was too late to withdraw from this as it referred to the application under appeal.

Stephen Cockburn said there was very little support for that application and urged people to look at the new plans.

Rosemary Gooderham: felt that it was difficult for members to make their points of view known to the Committee and suggested that the Committee organise more meetings for this purpose, say, once a quarter.

Robin Whyte: The Committee are part time volunteers and can't hold meetings for all planning applications otherwise there wouldn't be a Society.

Jane Butler: in her experience of gyms although they may have a large number of members they never have many people attending at any one time.

Colin Sewell-Rutter: praised the Society for doing such a fantastic job in the past of retaining the character and beauty of the village and said that a precedent would be set if the built-up boundary was changed. He thought that double the floor space of the hotel was a worry.

Stephen Cockburn: Committee members have got the flavour of your views this evening and he urged society members to look at the new plans and make their views known.