

RVPS 25 YEAR REVIEW

1987 TO 2012

RAVENSBORNE VALLEY
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

RVPS 25 YEAR REVIEW



This Review will attempt to celebrate the story of the Ravensbourne Valley Preservation Society during its first 25 years—by telling how and why it was founded and to record its principal achievements and aims.

Any small group who form themselves into a voluntary organisation firstly will rely on the support of its members to survive; but to survive and increase their numbers over many years also requires a good cause and much sustained effort by a few leaders—it was ever so. As the years pass that hard core of active members will naturally fall by the wayside by simply getting older or perhaps by moving away.

On this Silver Jubilee we are proud to be able to say that the Society is still managing to fulfil its aims and to continue to enlist more members. The total is now just a handful fewer than 500 households. Speaking of handfuls, that is about the measure of founder members we have left with only two or three of them still able to be active.

We have been lucky in recent years to have several younger members volunteering to take on major tasks. It is only when this happens that societies such as ours can continue to survive and prosper. So we will always be grateful to see more young faces at our regular meetings; without them we shall have no hope of ever celebrating our Golden Jubilee!

It has been decided that this Review will serve as a celebration of our achievements so far. Each member will be given a copy and we will have a stock of extra copies for issue to future members when they join us.

The hope that our efforts will continue to ensure that our local environment will be protected from unsuitable developments in the future and that further positive environmental improvements will be supported.

Leslie Tucker, Editor, September 2012

TOPOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL NOTES

The areas of higher ground, separated by the river and its flood plain, have given this area its particular character. In turn, the character of these two valley sides have been determined by their respective histories. Originally they were covered by ancient woodland.

The major human influence on the west bank of the river must have been John Cator's purchase, in 1773, of what is now Beckenham Place Park. He built the Mansion and laid out the park before he died in 1806. The wider Cator estate was developed by his nephew after about 1825. The family also owned significant areas of Greenwich where they developed a separate estate. John Cator's activities there involved the demolition of a grand mansion called Wricklemarsh House from which he "rescued" the portico now framing the main entrance of Beckenham Place Park Mansion. Also the colonnades of "The Paragon" on Blackheath are said to have been recycled from Wricklemarsh by John Cator.

The portico was not the only thing he brought to Beckenham from Greenwich. It is believed that he may have based the design of his new house in Beckenham on the larger and more famous Queen's House at Greenwich. The central two storey hall with access gallery to first floor rooms with the stairs tucked out of sight is a device common to both houses. It worked rather better at Greenwich given the larger scale of that royal establishment. At Beckenham the stairs are bordering on being poky. He was a rich man but could not quite manage to match the work of Inigo Jones for Queen Anne of Denmark in 1616.

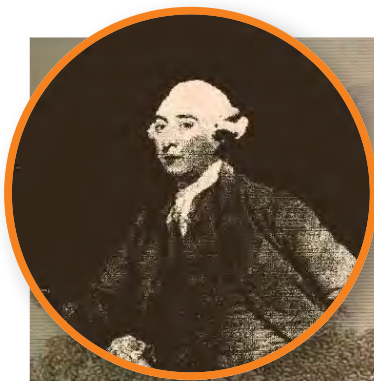
Having established the estate, the family lived elsewhere for most of the 19th century and leased it to others. They sold off some peripheral park land for development and had ambitious plans to build on more of the park itself but these were never carried out.

In 1927 the LCC bought the park and Mansion from the Cator family to preserve it for public use at a time when the Bellingham and Downham estates were being built. In 1965 the GLC took over from the LCC and in 1971 ownership of the park was transferred to Lewisham.

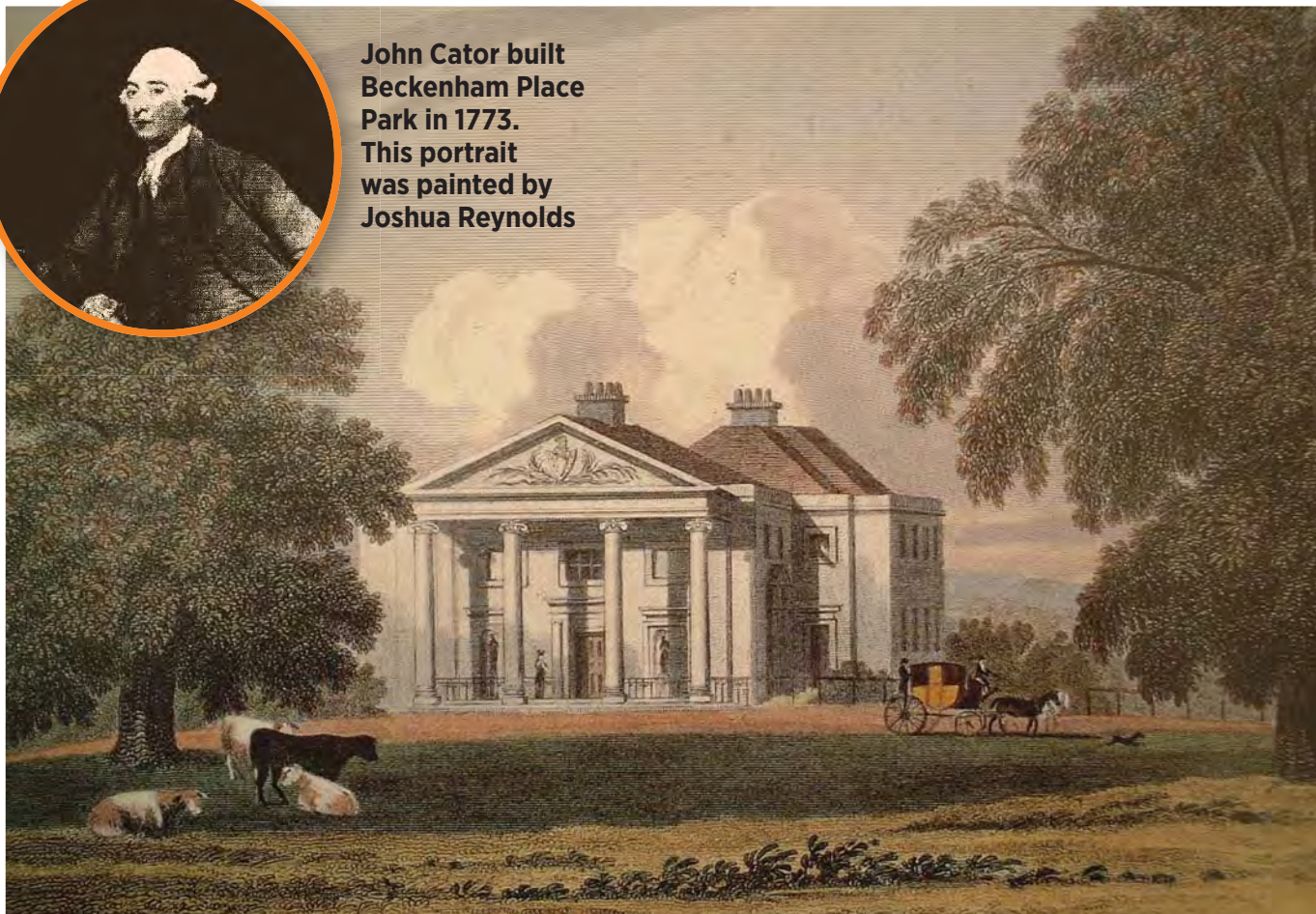
Meanwhile, on the other side of the valley, Bromley Hill Place, originally built in the 1760's, had been purchased by Charles Long in 1801. He proceeded to enlarge to his own taste. It stood at the top of the wooded ridge—it now forms the core of the Bromley Court Hotel. Its grounds extended northwards to the "Garden Gate" (The pub of that name is now a McDonalds) and to Beckenham Lane in the south. Its east and west boundaries were London Road and the river respectively. There were three entrances to the estate, each with a lodge—one at the "Garden Gate", one off London Road opposite London Lane and the last at the junction of Highland Road and Beckenham Lane.

Most of the land on the slopes and up to London Road were left as a woodland garden, with viewpoints, picturesque shelters and long winding paths. The gardens gained sufficient fame to be visited by George IV and later by William IV and Queen Adelaide as well as many of the Great and Good of the period. Charles Long had been created Baron Farnborough in 1826. He was a friend of William Pitt and a man of renowned artistic taste having had a hand in the establishment of the National Gallery. Lady Amelia was an accomplished watercolour artist but was also largely responsible for the gardens where she made use of the many natural springs to create water features. These became known to the townsfolk after being opened to the public for one day a week during the summer months. She has left a valuable collection of paintings which includes views of her famous garden.

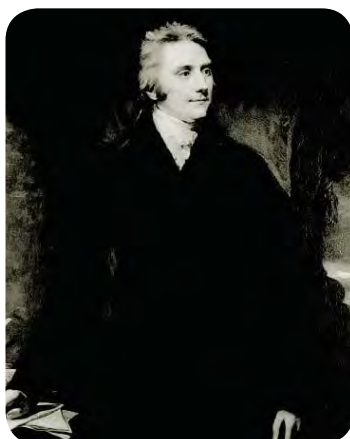
The coherence of the estate was lost after Samuel Cawston purchased it from Lord



John Cator built Beckenham Place Park in 1773. This portrait was painted by Joshua Reynolds



Above, Lady Amelia Farnborough with an example of one of her watercolours of Bromley Hill. Right, her husband Charles Long—later Lord Farnborough



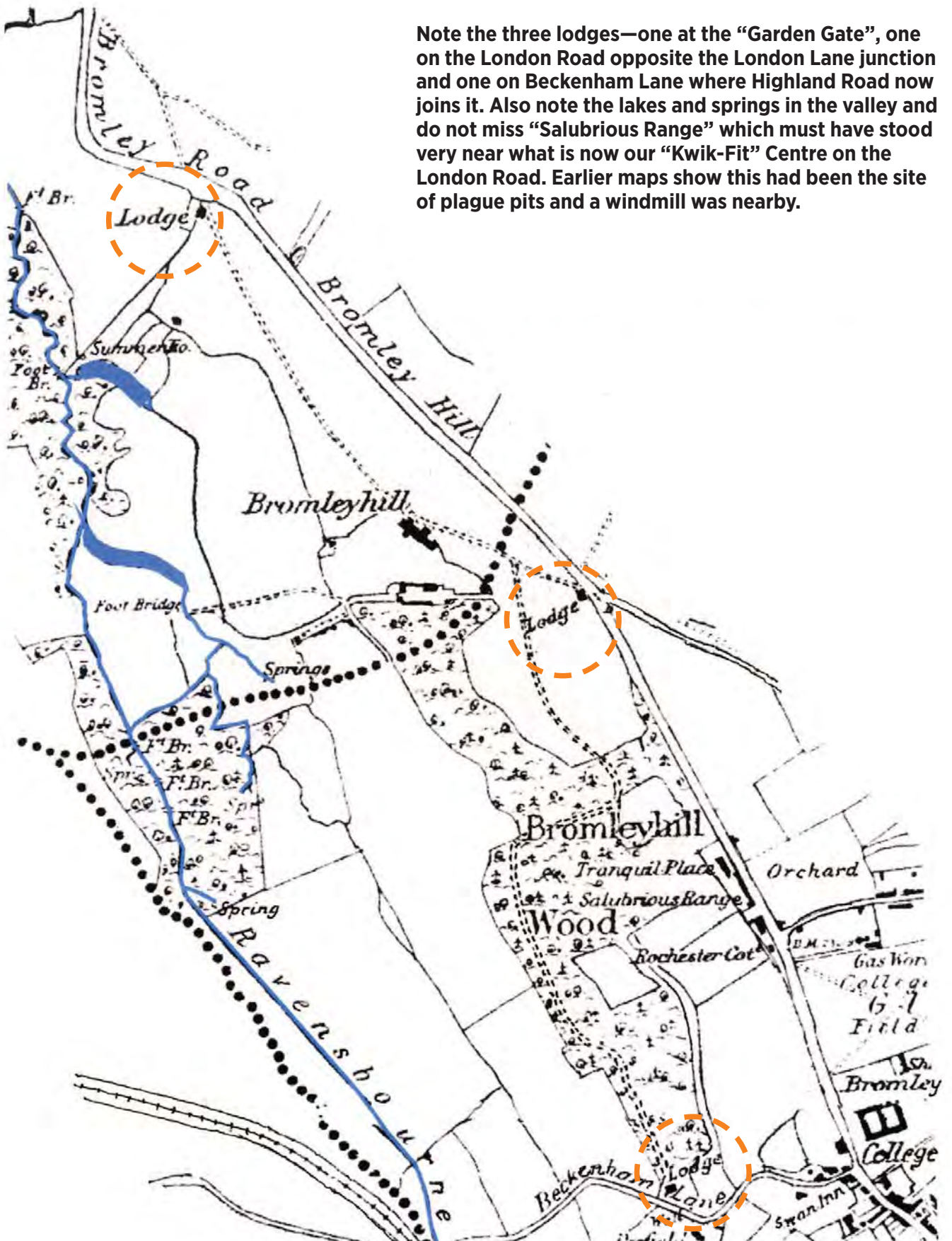
Samuel Cawston—bought the Bromley Hill Estate in 1881 (see also 1894 map on page5)

1865 MAP

Showing Bromley Hill Estate before it was sold to Samuel Cawston—still much the same as it was at the time of Lord Farnborough

The heavy dotted lines represent the boundaries between Bromley, Beckenham and Lewisham at the time.

Note the three lodges—one at the “Garden Gate”, one on the London Road opposite the London Lane junction and one on Beckenham Lane where Highland Road now joins it. Also note the lakes and springs in the valley and do not miss “Salubrious Range” which must have stood very near what is now our “Kwik-Fit” Centre on the London Road. Earlier maps show this had been the site of plague pits and a windmill was nearby.

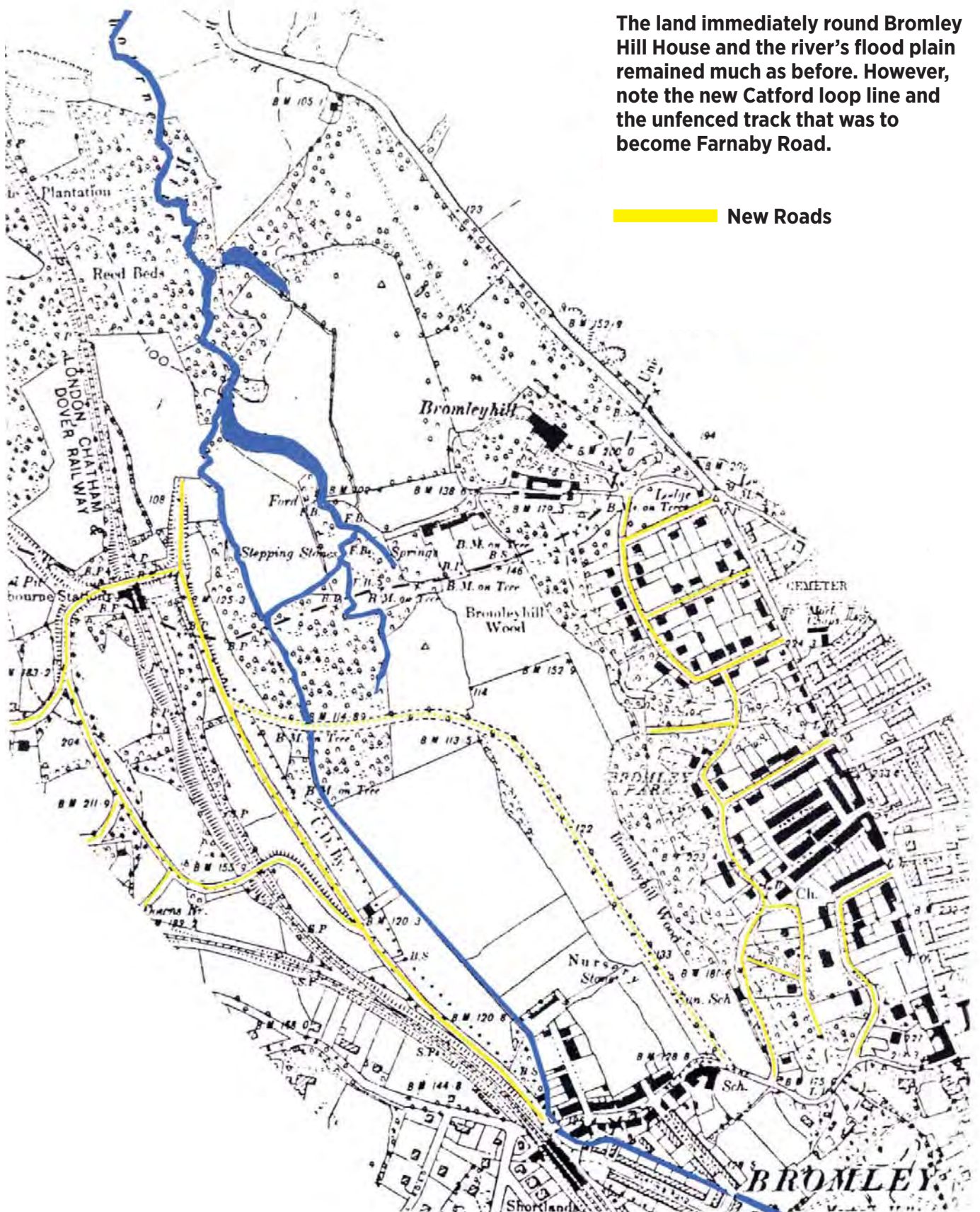


1894 MAP

In 1881, on the death of Samuel Long, Lord Farnborough's nephew, Samuel Cawston, purchased the estate. By the time this map was published he had transformed most of the park by laying out roads and selling plots for large houses.

The land immediately round Bromley Hill House and the river's flood plain remained much as before. However, note the new Catford loop line and the unfenced track that was to become Farnaby Road.

 New Roads

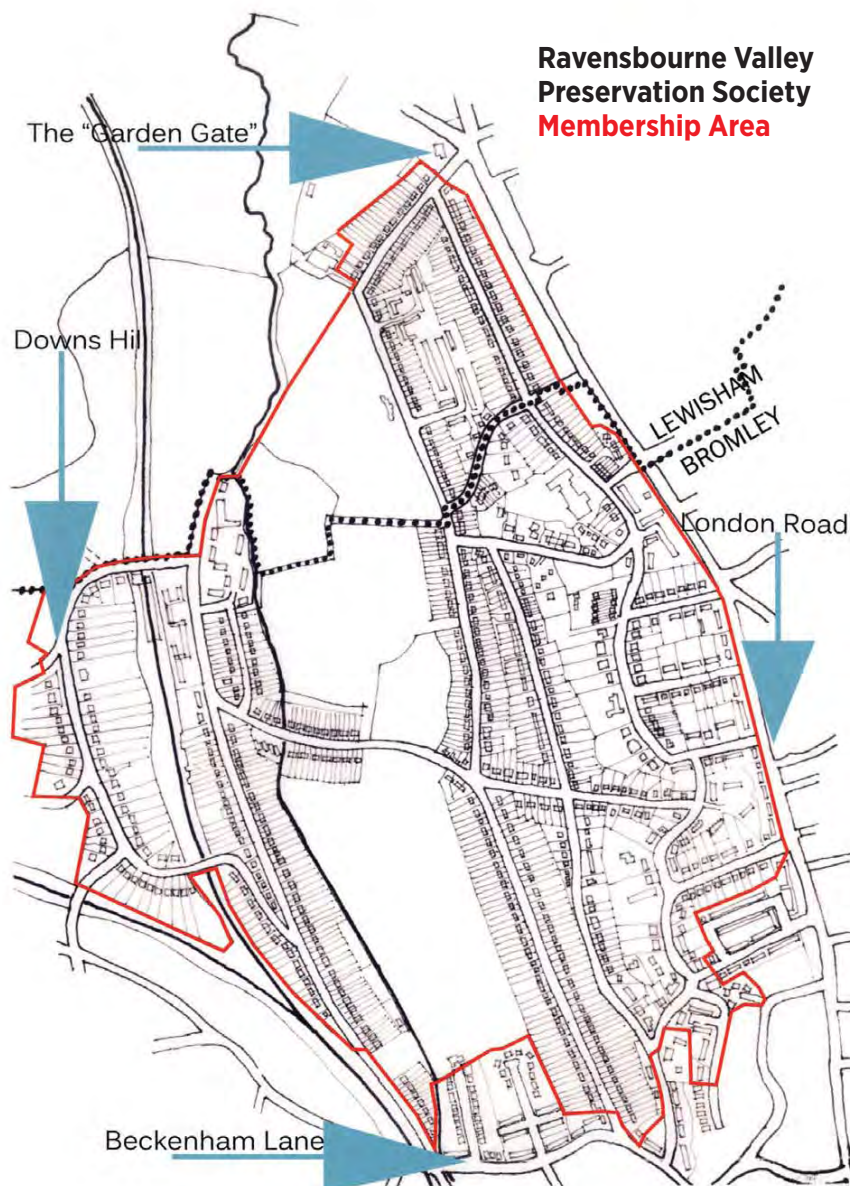


Farnborough's nephew in about 1881. He created the pattern of roads branching off London Road and sold off building plots for large Victorian villas. The coming of the railways, especially the addition of the Catford Loop Line, meant that there was a ready market for such houses in the area with their owners being able to commute to the City easily for the first time. He also built Christ Church in 1887 as a "Chapel of Ease" for his family and his estate workers. Although the estate has been broken up, the steepness of much of the west-facing slope has inhibited building and meant that a significant amount of woodland remains. The land in the valley bottom has largely escaped development being the river's natural flood plain. Right up to the 1930's, parts were still wetlands—and included water meadows, reed beds, watercress beds and small lakes. These were to finally disappear under rubble dumped from war-damaged London in the late 1940's.

FOUNDING THE SOCIETY

In the autumn of 1986 a planning application was made to Lewisham to redevelop the site of "Cedarhurst", an unoccupied detached house off Elstree Hill. Blocks of flats were proposed. The house could hardly be seen from beyond the boundaries of its garden but the site could be identified from across the valley by the fine cedar tree distinctively rising above the surrounding woodland. This was the tree which is pictured on page 8 and which still remains.

The residents who wished to object were advised by Lewisham's Planning



Officer that their case would be more effective if they formed themselves into an association and made a coherent case based on planning rules.

This was the impetus which, led by Paul Bennett and his near neighbour Paul Sharrock, resulted in the formation of the Ravensbourne Valley Preservation Society with a membership now stretching from Beckenham Lane to Ashgrove Road and from London Road to Downs Hill.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIETY

Membership grew across the valley as the development boom of the late 1980's brought a flood of new proposals for the area. At first, meetings took place in members' homes. As numbers grew,

meetings were held in Christ Church Hall until, in 1991, the owner of the Bromley Court Hotel generously offered to provide a room for our regular meetings there. Our move was necessary at that time as the Church were somewhat put out when we objected to their proposals for extending the church. (More on this later)

From the beginning the regular meetings were not restricted to formal committee members but were open to any member who wished to attend or had a particular interest in a current issue. As issues came and went, so those attending the meetings changed.

At its inception the Society agreed a constitution. This was revised in 1991 and in 1995. The Society's principal objectives, as set out in that latest constitution are:

"To preserve the best and improve the rest of the environment of the Ravensbourne Valley and its surroundings and to work for the benefit of the membership as a whole".

To do this we monitor planning applications made to both Bromley and Lewisham which affect our area and consider appropriate responses. These can be supportive as well as critical.

Our Newsletters keep members informed of our current activities. There are at least four each year and usually more. One issue each winter, reporting on the previous year, is distributed to all residents in the area, whether they are members or not.

We do not usually involve ourselves with applications for minor additions or alterations to individual properties unless they would be obviously detrimental to the general scene, they would adversely

affect their neighbours or unless they might create an undesirable precedent if approved. Law & order, transport and other relevant issues are also addressed.

Our first duty is to deal with our own area but if major development proposals are made elsewhere which might affect policy principles set down in the Unitary Development Plans of either of the two Boroughs, we are likely to react.

The officers of the Society are: Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Auditor. These are elected at our Annual General Meetings. We also have members who take on the tasks of monitoring planning applications made to either Lewisham or Bromley, who arrange meetings, edit the Newsletters, keep track of membership records or act as Society representatives for each of the roads in the area. From time to time other tasks require attention and help is always welcomed. When some larger issues arise we have sometimes formed small sub-committees to deal with them.

This Society does not, as its name may suggest, attempt to preserve the whole of the course of the River Ravensbourne from its source in Keston to its confluence with the Thames at Deptford. Whilst we are not indifferent to threats or enhancements proposed to the other reaches of the river, our principal interest is centred on the area

where we live and so is usually restricted to that part of the valley from Shortlands Village to the "Garden Gate" and includes Beckenham Place Park.

This is a reminder that some have felt that the name of the Society is a little long and a tad misleading.

In recognition of this view this cartoon was included in one of our earlier newsletters.





THE CEDARHURST SAGA

The Planning Applications for the redevelopment of the Cedarhurst site not only prompted the formation of the Society but also provided it with an effective training ground in which to learn some of the intricacies of planning procedure. This first training course lasted about eight years but we are still learning.

Above is pictured the unoccupied house on the site just before demolition with the cedar tree in the background.

1987 saw three schemes submitted—for 26 flats, then 22 flats and then 20 flats. They were each objected to by RVPS and rejected by Lewisham. Each scheme would have involved 4/5 storey buildings cutting into the skyline. The developer appealed against all three rejections in 1989. RVPS gave evidence against all the proposals and the appeals were dismissed by the Inspector.

Later in 1989 another plan, this time for 19 flats in a four storey block, was submitted to, and rejected by, Lewisham after more RVPS objections. 1990 saw apparent capitulation when the developer submitted a proposal for a modest 9 houses. This was unopposed and planning permission was granted but never again saw the light of day.

Instead, two more slices of the salami were produced—for 18, then 16 houses.

Again these were opposed by RVPS and rejected by Lewisham. Another appeal followed in May 1992 which confirmed the rejection.

The final compromise was reached in August 1992 when approval was given to a scheme for 14 houses by a Housing Association. Building was completed in 1994.

OUR OTHER EARLY PLANNING CASES

Before the Cedarhurst saga had ended we were already involved in other Planning cases within our area. Our biggest challenge, Beckenham Place Park, will be dealt with later. In the early 1990's there was considerable development activity in our area and at the same time we became heavily involved in the Consultation Periods on the emerging Unitary Development Plans of both Bromley and Lewisham. It was a busy time. Later in the decade pressures for new building reduced and both Bromley's and Lewisham's UDP's were adopted—life became a little simpler. At the turn of the century, the relative lull was over and applications began to increase again.

No attempt will be made to list all of the cases on which we have commented over the years. Most involve proposals to demolish houses and replace them with blocks of flats but three relate to three of the very few “public” buildings in our area—the Valley School, Christ Church and the Reform Synagogue.

Our reaction to each proposal was different and this illustrates our policy of treating each case on its merits.

The Valley School

When proposals were made to make significant additions to the school we considered them in some detail and agreed that we could find nothing that would outweigh the promised benefits to our children. We made no objections and the scheme was approved and built.

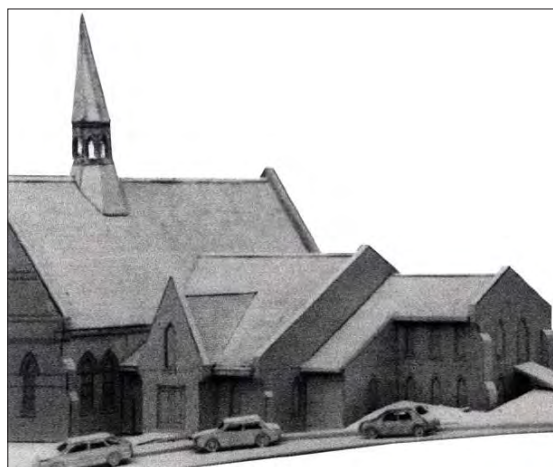
Christ Church

Christ Church was built in 1887 by Samuel Cawston at his own expense as a “Chapel of Ease”. It is a popular church and serves the local community well.

In 1989 there was a proposal to extend the Church; it was big and high. It would have dominated the view enjoyed by the nearest block of four flats in Karen Court. The occupants asked for the support of RVPS which we gave. This proposal did not obtain planning consent. (Picture below left.)

Then came two other smaller schemes. These were rejected by Bromley after objections by RVPS. The church appealed and an Inquiry was held in 1993. This resulted in the lower of the two being accepted. RVPS accepted the decision of the inspector but had pointed out the many unsatisfactory aspects of the design from the users’ point of view. The photograph below right is of one of the models that we made to explain our views at the Inquiry.

In 1995 the church turned from the local draughtsman employed to prepare the



previous schemes to a nationally known classical architect, Quinlan Terry. He produced a proposal of a much higher standard. It was given planning consent and built. We had accepted the proposals in principle but had the cheek to make a few detailed comments. At least one of these was followed in the final design.

Although our decision to object to the original schemes did cause some local friction at the time, it is hoped that the end result can be recognised as being much more satisfactory for all concerned than any of the earlier proposals.

Bromley Reform Synagogue

The building was originally built by Samuel Cawston as the Sunday School for Christ Church. Since being sold by the church it has served as flats and, in more recent years as a Synagogue.

In 1995 planning consent was given for an extension to the Synagogue. It would have increased the size of the existing building by about 50%. We did not object in principle but suggested some design

improvements. That scheme was shelved as failing to provide the facilities required.

Throughout 1999 other proposals were made for a completely new building to replace the existing. There were three revisions submitted, each reacting to comments by local residents and Bromley planners on the one previously submitted. RVPS did not object to any in principle but had agreed with nearby residents that the first proposal was too large and that the most important trees on the site could not have survived. The later proposals—for a modified extension, largely addressed these points and were given planning consent in March 2000.

The existing building was no longer suitable for its purpose and if the improvements had not been made the synagogue would probably have had to move elsewhere. Even those who were most concerned by the larger building agreed that the synagogue had been a good neighbour and had arranged for meaningful consultations with local residents. We consider that the final outcome has been satisfactory for all concerned.



UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Concurrently with most of the above important planning cases, plus the major Beckenham Place Park proposals, we were also heavily involved with detailed consultation issues resulting from changes in the planning laws. At no time, before or since, have we been busier. As our area lies astride the boundary between Bromley and Lewisham we were involved in the public consultations carried out by both London Boroughs when formulating their “UDP’s”. These ran roughly in parallel between 1990 and 1994.

The Unitary Development Plans were prepared by all Boroughs as a result of directions from Central Government to do so. They set down policies for determining local planning decisions and act as valuable guides for the Boroughs themselves as well as for developers and the public.

Bromley

Before the UDP, Bromley’s Planners worked within the Borough Plan which had been adopted in 1985. By the time the new UDP was adopted in 1994 the old plan had become outdated. RVPS took an active part in commenting on the Draft plans which formed the subject of the UDP Public Inquiry in 1992.

Although we had commented on a number of other matters earlier and some had been accepted, we brought 5 subjects before the Inquiry for its consideration. These were:

- The need for additional controls over development immediately outside areas of Metropolitan Open Land (as already applied to Green Belt).
- The proposed method of including half road widths (up to 6m) when measuring sites for density calculations.
- The proposal not to apply any maximum density figures to smaller sites.($<0.4ha$).
- The proposal not to include any

descriptive or area standards for amenity space provided for flats.

- Bromley’s refusal to designate any of our area as an “Area of Special Residential Character” (ASRC).

The first issue was accepted by the Inspector and was included in the adopted UDP. We regret that the second, third and fourth points were not accepted and they continued to cause unwelcome anomalies on many of the sites in our area until the fixed density figures governing when a site could be considered as “overdeveloped” were no longer in force and subjective judgements had to be made .

Our greatest disappointment came with the refusal to grant our area ASRC status. This is discussed in greater detail later.

Lewisham

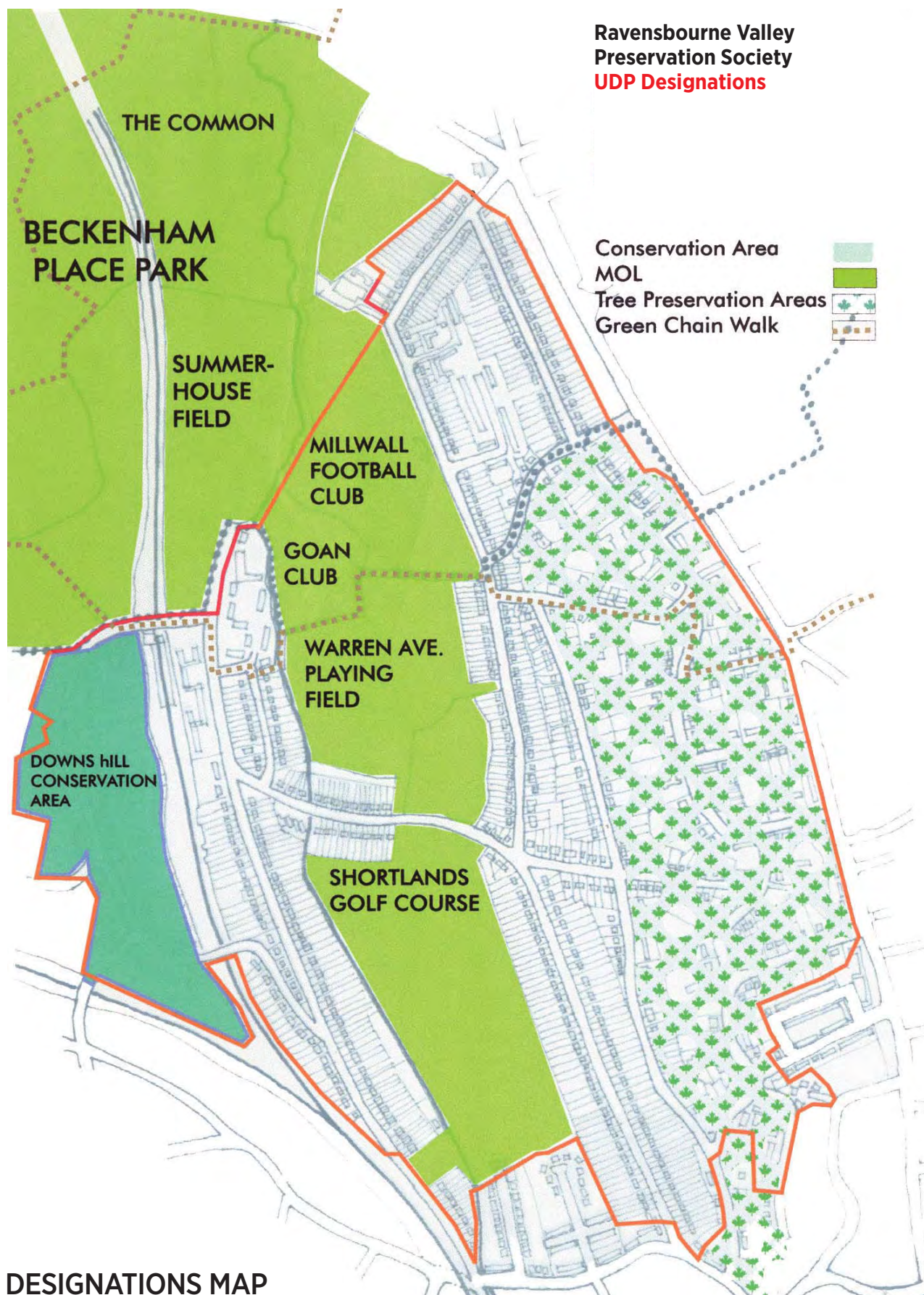
When Lewisham’s UDP was adopted we considered it a better document than Bromley’s. It usefully referred back to the source documents by government and other agencies on which the various policies were based and in many important respects it was stronger and more explicit. These attributes were a great help to us when fighting the Beckenham Place Park proposals in 1993.

UDP REVIEWS

As was anticipated when the Plans were adopted, a process of review was begun by both Boroughs in about 1996. The resulting updated UDP’s were expected to be adopted by 2002.

In order to ensure that our views are as widely based as possible a working party of interested members was formed to consider our responses to the various Review Papers issued. In addition to responding to consultation documents, we attended meetings in both Boroughs during this period and continued to do so throughout the Public Inquiries.

For Bromley there were 17 Review Papers and we commented on most



DESIGNATIONS MAP (FOLLOWING ADOPTION OF UDP'S)

The above map shows the planning designations which apply to our area—the open space in the Valley Bottom is all Metropolitan Open Land which is the urban equivalent of Green belt land. Downs Hill is a Conservation Area and the Bromley Court side of the valley is protected by an extensive Tree Preservation Order.



TREES & OPEN SPACES MAP

This map shows the principal areas of mature trees and open space within our area—taken from aerial photographs. Not every tree is included but it does give a fair representation of the concentrations of the significant trees which remain.

of them, including those on: • Biggin Hill
• Bromley North • Bromley Town Centre
• Beckenham Town Centre • Housing
• Transport • Green Belt • Open Space
• Recreation and Leisure
• Conservation and Built Environment
• Community and Environmental Services
• The Natural Environment

Lewisham issued fewer Review Papers but we responded to each. Their “Deposit Draft” was issued ahead of Bromley’s. We made 29 comments on this of which 18 were supportive and 11 were against. Four of our objections were accepted another four were not and the three left over were left unanswered.

On balance the reasons given for the rejections were such that we considered that little could be gained by pursuing them at an inquiry.

The consultation periods and inquiries for both Borough UDP reviews continued with Bromley lagging behind Lewisham at every stage. No sooner had Lewisham eventually adopted their UDP than the Government changed the system and decreed that UDP’s as we had known them would be replaced by Local Development Frameworks (LDF’s) for which a new consultation period had to be set in motion.

Was there no limit to the love of goal post moving by the Authorities?

AREA OF SPECIAL RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER (ASRC)

When the early drafts of Bromley’s original UDP were seen, we found that a new designation—just short of a Conservation Area—had been given to various areas in the Borough. A large area of Petts Wood was one example. It provided additional

constraints on development which threatened to dilute the recognised character of an area. It would have made it easier to avoid blocks of flats—perhaps Oaklands Road might have been “saved”.

Having looked at the diversity of the ASRC’s already proposed we considered that our area would qualify although there appeared to be no clear criteria established at the time on which to base our application. We were encouraged to apply by the Chief Planning Officer, which was advice that he probably later regretted having given.

A detailed document of over sixty pages in length including photographs, diagrams and maps, was prepared in June 1990 to make our case—and it was a good one. The precise boundaries were negotiable and at one Council meeting it was on the point of approval when one question was asked and the tide of acceptance ebbed away. This was in November 1990 after many months of hard work. We were very disappointed.

When the UDP Inquiry was held we appealed to the Inspector to reconsider our case—to no avail. We still think our area deserved ASRC status, at least in parts.



BECKENHAM PLACE PARK

It was as long ago as the summer of 1991 when the dramatic proposals for a Tennis Centre in the park first came to our attention. Lewisham had called a public meeting. It proved to be a very noisy affair and Lewisham were left in no doubt that opposition was widespread and adamant. It was clear from the start that this would be the most important case which had come our way since the Society had been formed. Indeed, it remains at the top of our list of successes over twenty years later. It also came at a time when we were busier than ever before with other significant issues. It was to overlap with our dealings with the Christ Church proposals, with the tail end of the Cedarhurst saga, as well as a good number of the normal smaller planning applications and work on the UDP.

Once the full extent of the proposal had been assessed the Society recognised that such a scheme would not only ruin this historic park and restrict free public access but would seriously compromise Lewisham's own policies on the protection of open space as set out in their Unitary Development Plan. A campaign seeking its rejection became one of principle. Such a dangerous precedent for building on Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) could not go unchallenged. Just as unpopular was the 99 year lease promised to David Lloyd if planning approval were to be granted.

The Society worked closely with The Save Beckenham Place Park Campaign. (Later to become The Friends of Beckenham Place Park) They managed to collect over 30,000 signatures against the proposals on a petition delivered to the Secretary of State for the Environment (on forms provided by us) and created a vast amount of valuable publicity. Meanwhile we concentrated on the planning issues and prepared our detailed "Statement of Case" followed by the

more important and more complex, "Proof of Evidence" ready for the Public Inquiry. Again we had produced a long and detailed document of over 70 pages plus appendices of about 200 pages. It was to become our most important battle.

At the time, about a third of the Park, including the Mansion, was in the Borough of Bromley and Bromley were against the proposals. This provided us with another powerful ally.

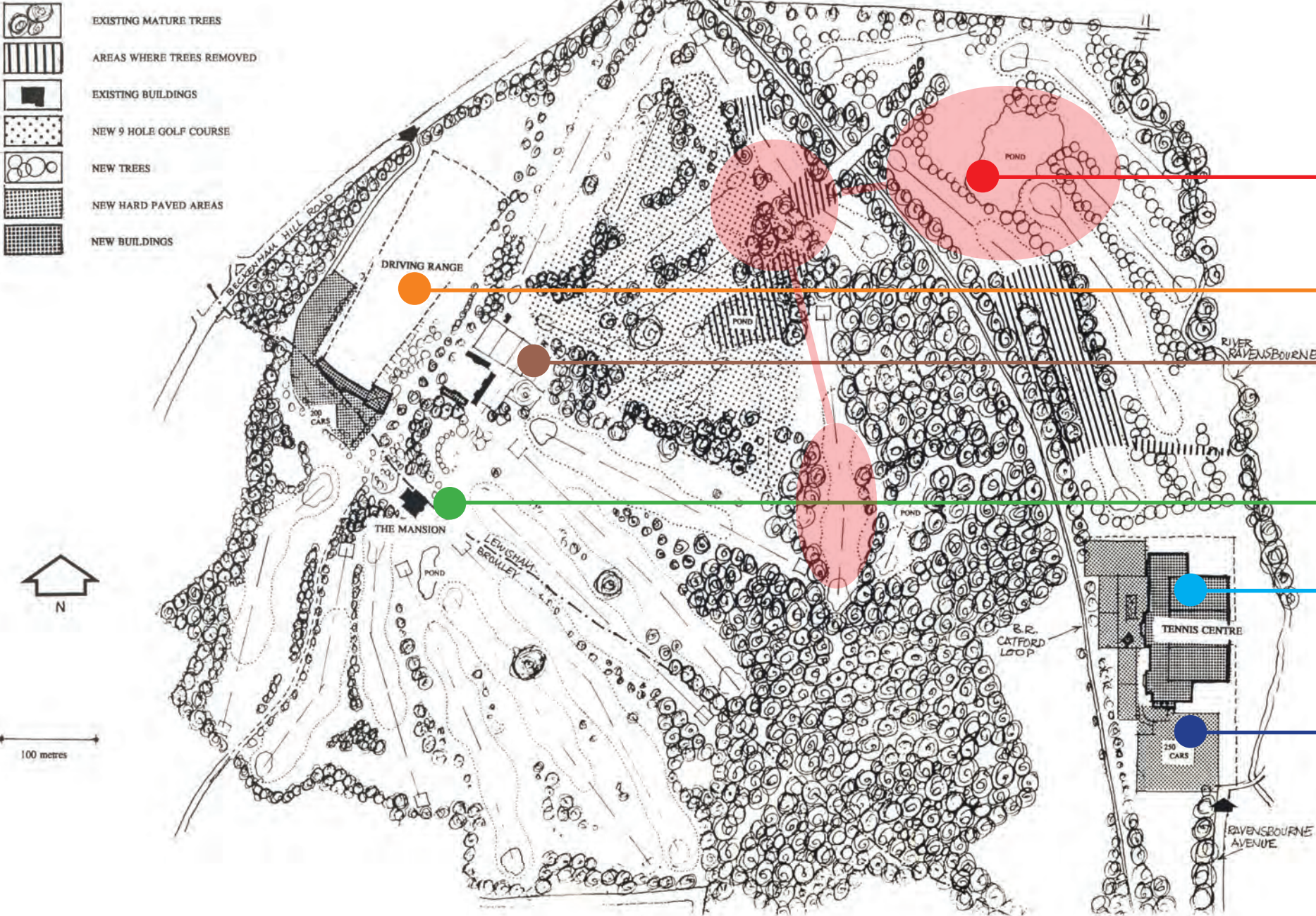
In spite of vehement protests at two of their meetings, Lewisham's Planning Committee approved the scheme. However this was a hollow token act as DOE had already issued a "Holding Directive" which meant that Lewisham had to refer to them before anything could happen on site. As DOE had been made aware of the strong local opposition and that Bromley were against it, the case was immediately "called in" by DOE. This meant that an Inquiry was inevitable.

The Public Inquiry began in July 1993. The main parties were: **Defending the proposals:** Lewisham and David Lloyd Leisure, **Against the proposals:** Bromley and RVPS (we also represented London Borough of Bromley Residents Federation).

Many other groups and individuals spoke against the proposals but it was only those recognised as "Main Parties" that could cross-examine the other side. All the other main parties employed planning barristers and other experts; we were on our own.

We were the only party to submit our detailed "Proof of Evidence" by the correct date and we realised later that ours was the only set of documents which were thoroughly cross-referenced back to the supporting legislation. As a result, the Inspector tended to refer to our statement more than any other when searching for particular references—this did us no harm at all! Our other great advantages were that we knew and understood the park and

BECKENHAM PLACE PARK PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT



The plan of the Park on the left shows what was proposed in 1991, including:

The existing 18-hole golf course to be extended into the playing fields by the river to make way for a new 9-hole course.

Build a new 2-storey, 36 bay, golf driving range with high fencing and floodlights.

Convert the stable block for housing and build three new houses.

Convert the listed Mansion into a golf club hosue.

Build a covered tennis centre with swimming pool, gymnasium and shops in a building the size of three football pitches.

Provide parking for 250 cars for the tennis centre plus 200 for the driving range with new access roads.

To all Beckenham Place Park DOG WALKERS AND THEIR DOGS

*Do not miss this unique opportunity
to purchase this fine example of
PROTECTIVE LEISURE WEAR*

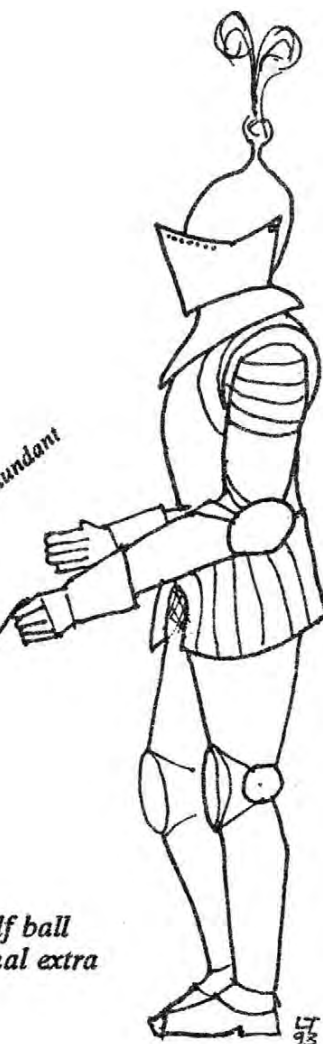
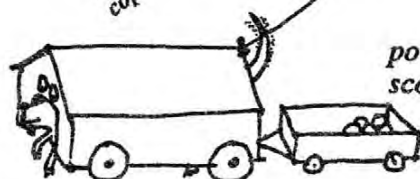
*Designed with you in mind and
essential if the golf course
is extended - **BE PREPARED !***

*Send no money now!
When ordering please give
1)-your inside leg length
2)-your dog's inside leg(s)
3)-nose to tail length*

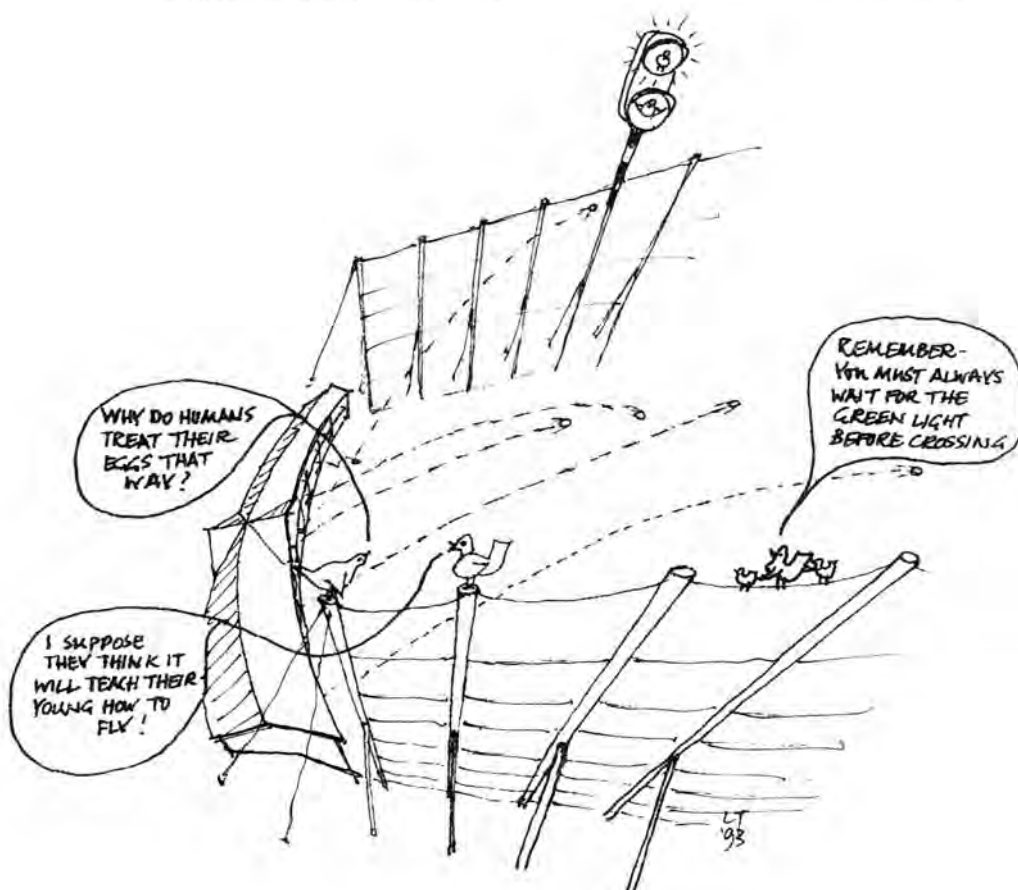
*Mobile kennel
sensitively designed
to be in keeping with
the Tennis Centre*

*Fashioned by skilled craftsmen by secret method using redundant
copies of Lewisham's UDP - Guaranteed rustproof*

*poop and golf ball
scoop optional extra*



The proposals for the park posed many serious problems. With the enlarged golf course, safe public access was one—so we suggested this remedy, left.



Threats to wildlife also concerned us. The 30ft high fence to the Driving Range with barrages of balls in flight might have been a hazard for birds. We suggested that these aerial traffic signals might help.

believed in what we said. The barristers and other experts employed by the other parties may have been more familiar with the correct procedures but we could often beat them with our local knowledge.

The Inquiry lasted ten full days plus an extra day for representatives of the main parties to accompany the Inspector round the park and mansion—we were involved throughout. In the late spring of 1994 the Secretary of State's decision was published. It was all that we could have hoped for—a complete rejection of all the significant elements of the applications. David Lloyd Leisure decided not to appeal.

BUT WHAT OF THE PARK'S FUTURE?

Within a few weeks of the decision Lewisham invited “interested parties”, which included RVPS, to join them to form a Joint Working Party to advise on the future management of the park. We decided to attend, and have done so ever since. This, more positive task than stopping David Lloyd, has proved to be many times more difficult. In the early years of the Working Party much time had been taken up by agreeing and writing its own constitution. Almost twenty years since these meetings began no permanent solution to the running of the Park has been found. The many reorganisations within Lewisham Council have caused much of the frustration. However, the “Friends of Beckenham Place Park” have created and run a Visitor Centre and continue to organise a regular series of other events in the Park.

In the early days one of the principal achievements of the Working Party was the production of a detailed Management Plan—which was adopted by the Council but sadly Lewisham now seem to have forgotten its existence.

THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

A small Sub-Committee of the Working Party, which included our two representa-

tives, spent several years writing and editing this important document. After the required Public Consultation, it was adopted by Lewisham as the Park's main policy document.

After a general description it went into greater detail under the following headings:

- Physical features • Biological features
- Human influences • Physical infrastructure
- Current management • Resources
- Prescription • Monitoring and review

“Prescription” included Recommendations for:

- Woodland management
- Grassland management
- Wetland management • Other habitats
- Buildings & infrastructure
- Recreation • Education and interpretation
- Security • Identity

Perhaps “Identity” needs an explanation—as the park now lies entirely within Lewisham, the suggestion was made that it should be called “Lewisham Country Park” with Beckenham Place Mansion retaining its name. The Park's suggested name change appears to have been forgotten—thankfully.

The Management Plan with over 100 pages had an Appendix of similar thickness which included relevant reference material and 11 maps. These maps were all produced by one of the two RVPS representatives and both played leading roles in writing and editing the documents.

We continue, more in hope than expectation, to be able to influence the future of the park for the better by continuing to attend these meetings and to take the frustrations on the chin.

The principal motivation for Lewisham to initiate the development proposals was their need to find a way of financing the repair and maintenance of the Mansion. It remains their central problem as far as the park is concerned.

What is an appropriate use for this Grade 2* listed building? An acceptable solution which is also financially viable has yet to be found.



This inset above shows the stables and outbuildings to Bromley Hill as seen and painted (c.1820's) by Lady Amelia Farnborough. The three gables beyond the lean-to are still there, as seen in figure 1.



LISTED BUILDINGS WITHIN OUR AREA

The three Statutory Listed Buildings in our area are in Elstree Hill—"The Cottage" (1) which originally served as the stables for Bromley Court, the "Italian Villa" (2) originally built as a Casino and summer house for Lord Farnborough and that monumental entrance gateway to a London School (3) which is mainly notable for not being where expected. It could be called our neighbourhood folly—it was put there in 1930 by the architect who was carrying out alterations to the Villa to turn it into a house. He had also been involved with school buildings for the London School Board. He must have had a spare triumphal gateway that



3

The Italian Villa appears here again and gives its relationship with the Gateway and Elstree Hill.

he didn't know what to do with. This one is dated 1874.

If you look at the front and back cover picture you will find in the shadows below the Italian Villa a house of a very different type with a similar one on the back cover in full view. These were designed to be self-built by the occupants. The architect was Walter Segal who significantly influenced housing design in Britain immediately after WW2. Perhaps, one day, someone will suggest that these should also be listed!

All of these buildings used to be in Lewisham before the 1994 boundary changes brought them into Bromley.



LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

There are also three Locally Listed Buildings in our patch: Brabourne Cottage in Oaklands Road (above) which was nearly lost to make way for a row of Town Houses. We fought to save it and succeeded. Number 3 Grasmere Road (below) with its Coach House both designed by Ernest Newton a well known Edwardian architect. The third is 14 Highland Road (left) which is waiting redevelopment which may well require more intervention by us.

Buildings on the Local List do not enjoy the same protection against demolition or significant alteration as those on the Statutory Lists. They are simply identified as being of special historic or architectural value and deserve more careful consideration of any Planning Applications if they are threatened.



OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Society has not only addressed the sort of Planning matters outlined on the previous pages. Although those have demanded a good deal of our attention, our members have also been concerned about many other issues. There follow a number of examples in which we have been involved.

Rail

We had been involved with the effects of the increased rail traffic due to the Channel Tunnel up until the time when the High Speed line came into use directly to St. Pancras and the Eurostar service no longer passed through Shortlands.

It began with the infamous proposal in 1990 to erect a steel flyover taking trains on a new viaduct above the junction of the main line and the Catford Loop just north of Shortlands Station. It would have towered above houses in Ravensbourne Avenue and the visual impact and increased broadcasting of noise across the valley would have been horrendous. We prepared a drawing to illustrate the proposal and this was published across the width of page 1 of a News Shopper issue. Thankfully, that suggestion was scrapped.

Bromley Council formed a “Channel Tunnel Consultative Committee” to organise those in the Borough affected by the High Speed Rail Link proposals. RVPS were represented. In the years which followed there have been a bewildering number of policy changes by government on whether there would be a new dedicated high speed track and if so, what its route should be. Until such a route was constructed right through to St. Pancras, Eurostar trains continued to pass through Shortlands. Channel freight trains are expected to continue to come our way in any case. We were originally told that even after the High Speed link was completed some of the Eurostar trains would still

terminate at Waterloo and use our route. That proved not to be the case.

Early in 2000 came a new solution by Railtrack to improve the capacity of the Shortlands junction by taking a track *under* the main line to link with the Catford Loop. This would serve the same purpose as the earlier flyover without its worst long term disadvantages. However, it did involve the demolition of one detached house in Downs Hill and there were other considerable local problems requiring reactions from RVPS and others remaining. There followed correspondence with Railtrack when we asked for various additional information and assurances. A public meeting was held when local residents could express their views to both Bromley planners and Railtrack. This helped to concentrate minds generally before a Public Inquiry was held in December 2000.

We prepared documents for this and presented our case which was principally to ensure that construction procedures would be as considerate as possible and that in the long term, satisfactory landscaping design would be undertaken to restore the existing ambience as far as possible.

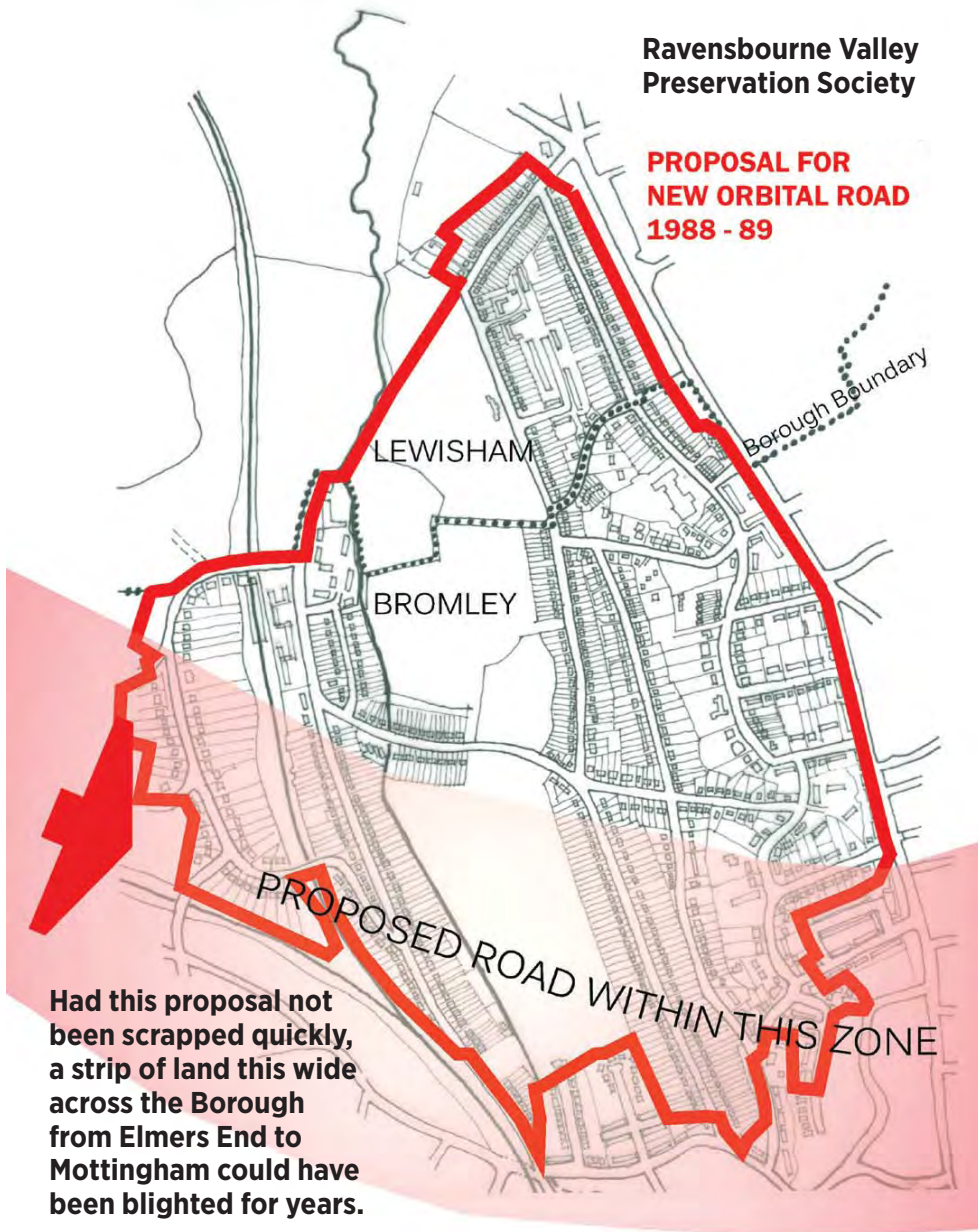
During the construction period which began in the summer of 2001, monthly meetings were held between local residents, Bromley, Railtrack and the contractors. We found these meetings very helpful. From the Society’s point of view the project was a good deal less painful than it might have been although we have to recognise that some owners at the southern end of Downs Hill had reason to be less relaxed about it.

Roads and Traffic

What could have been by far the most dramatic proposal for Bromley, and our area in particular, was made in 1988—89 when one of the options being considered in the “South London Transport Studies” was a four lane motorway across Shortlands Golf course. It would have been part of a new South Circular Road requiring the purchase

**Ravensbourne Valley
Preservation Society**

**PROPOSAL FOR
NEW ORBITAL ROAD
1988 - 89**



to turn right out of Ravensbourne Avenue. After much correspondence and some meetings between ourselves, Bromley's Highways Officers and a representative of Transport for London (TfL) we asked for adjustments to the traffic signals so that more than one or two vehicles could manage this movement during one green phase. Some subtle adjustments were made to the light phasing and some improvement was claimed but it was difficult to detect. We were told that everything possible had been done. However the problem remained.

It was then observed that the likely cause was that the majority of drivers exiting from Station Road and wishing to turn left towards Beckenham were

and demolition of over 1000 houses in Bromley between Elmers End and Mottingham. It was so expensive and "over the top" that mercifully, it was dropped without the need for a fight—but we were getting ready for one!

Ravensbourne Avenue/Beckenham Lane Junction. Returning to relative sanity—we could then worry about pedestrians crossing Beckenham Lane more safely to reach Shortlands station. This has still not been properly addressed although that has not been for want of us trying. More recently attention has been given to another problem at this junction. This time it has been about the difficulty of traffic wanting

blocking the Ravensbourne Avenue vehicles by jumping the red light. On the spot surveys were done to confirm that the practice was frequent during busy times but the police were not able to provide sufficient officers to stop it. We could get no effective help from the authorities although they claim to have tweaked the lights again. We were left with the advice that drivers wishing to turn right to go under the bridge from Ravensbourne Avenue should be more pushy than those pushy Station Road drivers and should go as far forward as they can when at the front of the queue. For those lucky drivers who desired to turn left out of Ravensbourne Avenue the future is brighter. Here a positive improvement was

made after relatively little persuasion by us for Bromley to change the road markings to allow for left turning and cars going straight ahead into Station Road to wait for the green light alongside those right-turning unfortunates

Oaklands Road. In 2004 we suggested that the yellow line on the corner of Grasmere Road and Oaklands Road was too short and allowed cars to be parked in Oaklands very close to the junction. This seriously restricted the sight lines of drivers exiting Grasmere Road and wishing to turn right. Eventually, in 2012 the few yards of yellow paint has been applied—although it took two attempts to get it within a foot of where it should be. We intend to leave it at that. The sight lines have improved.

Pavements. Commenting on the condition of pavements from time to time has also been something to keep us off the streets. For this we look to members to tell us about their local concerns. Street and footpath cleaning is also something where we often need help from members to keep their eyes open.

Farnaby Road/Bromley Avenue. The road changes which we asked for in 1991 at the junction of Farnaby Road, Warren Avenue and Bromley Avenue were carried out during 1992 and traffic safety was improved as a result. However more than once since the planting bed was built there we have had to request that the shrubs be trimmed to retain vision for drivers between Bromley Avenue and Warren Avenue .

The 354 bus route. When the 354 bus route was originally proposed a good number of residents voiced their opposition. Initially it worked as a “hail and ride” service which was fine for those requiring a ride but less satisfactory for passengers already on the bus who just wanted to get to their destination as quickly as possible. In about 2002 we

were told that hail and ride would no longer operate and fixed bus stops would be provided. Soon after new signs and road markings revealed where these stops were to be. There were a few objections by residents who didn’t want a stop outside their house but in other cases completely unsuitable positions had been chosen. We surveyed the route within our area and sent a list of suggestions for improvements.

Adjustment were made and the service and most residents settled down. Then came the making up of Crab Hill and the proposal that the buses should divert past Ravensbourne Station instead of going along Downs Hill. Consultation was better this time and the majority view that the established route would remain was agreed.

Law and Order

RVPS has been represented on the Police Consultative Committee for the Borough and has taken part in consultation exercises when appropriate and promulgates police and Neighbourhood Watch information to members through our Newsletter and website when we can.

London Borough of Bromley Residents Federation

There are about forty Residents Associations in the Borough of Bromley which belong to the Federation, including RVPS. This organisation supported us when we were fighting the 1992 Tennis Club proposals in Beckenham Place Park and we have been able to provide support to others on certain issues since that time.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS AFTER 2000

So far we have only looked at a few significant planning applications which we had dealt with up to the new millennium. Those chosen for comment were the few public buildings in our area. As has already been said we do not intend to include all the cases in which we were involved nor to

repeat the frustrations which we had to suffer on the way. However this publication should present readers with an outline record of our activities up to the present time. There follows a number of our more significant activities and/or fights during more recent years.

Greenhill, Oaklands Road. This Care Home used to be based in one of the large Victorian houses which was like many others in this area plus a later addition. It is now second only in size to Bromley Court Hotel as a building in our area. The earlier buildings, providing about 26 bedrooms, were demolished to make way for the new block with 60 bedrooms and other facilities complying with current standards. Our concerns were principally about parking, the original height of the roof and the relationship to other properties nearby. Considering its size we do not believe it has caused any significant problems to neighbours.

“Kowloon”, “Penfro” and 8 Highland Road. A developer concurrently made two separate applications for these three properties. The two named family houses were to be demolished and number 8 was to be converted to provide a total of 22 flats. The rear garden of number 10 was to be taken to provide car parking. This would have had a significant impact on the character of this part of Highland Road and was vigorously opposed by us. The application was refused by Bromley and an appeal followed but was later withdrawn before being considered.

14 Highland Road. This property has been pictured as one of the Locally Listed Buildings in Bromley. The first proposal submitted to Bromley in 2006 was for it to be converted into 9 flats plus a small house. This would have required both side and rear extensions. Some of the flats in the original house would have been very unsatisfactory. The proposal was refused. The next version

submitted in 2008 was still for nine flats but no house and no side extension—against our wishes it was approved. But this was not the end. In 2009 an application for it to be converted to become a Special Needs school for 14 to 15 year olds was made and refused. More recently it has been sold again and we wait to hear what is now proposed.

100-102 Madeira Avenue. Three planning applications were made for developing this steeply sloping site. The first was for a block of 14, 2-bedroom flats. This was refused by Bromley. That was followed by a proposal for a terrace of seven 4-bedroom town houses. Bromley deferred their decision and asked the developer to reduce it to a terrace of six houses. This they did in their next application but by some madness they managed to make this row of six houses longer than the one for seven had been. It was refused by Bromley. The developer did not appeal neither did he make another application. We had objected to these proposals as they required deep excavations which could have put the adjoining properties at risk. We also considered them to have been an over-development of the site

126 Madeira Avenue. This series of applications, made by a local Councillor, began in 2006. They involved the demolition of one existing house behind a group of houses in Madeira Avenue with the only access being up a steep and narrow driveway. In place of the house were to be built a terrace of eight town houses, each with five bedrooms. The scheme would have affected properties in Elstree Hill, Hawkshead Close and Lullington Garth, as well as those below it in Madeira Avenue. The latter premises would have been seriously overlooked. Bromley were showered by objections from local residents and the Society and refused it. A second application for six similar houses was then submitted and an appeal was lodged on the first application. The inspector gave such an adamant dismissal

that the developer withdrew his second application. Subsequently a further application was made for three detached houses. This was also refused.

La Capaninna, Grasmere Road. This is a bungalow between Cameron House and Townend Court. There were two planning applications for this site between early 2008 and 2009. The first was for a block of flats, taller than the adjacent buildings, with a very large footprint virtually filling the site. A second, slightly smaller application was made for a 4-storey block of 7 flats. We objected to both. The first was withdrawn and the second was refused by Bromley. After a delay the developer appealed but the appeal was refused. Apart from us, local residents were also well organised in their opposition.

Telecom Masts. In the early days of telecom masts most objections to their siting had been based on health fears. Whether these were justified or not, the consideration of the possible health risks feared was not within the remit of the planning authorities. We therefore had to restrict any objections we made to those which came within the planning laws. Two applications were made for masts by two competing telecom companies. Both were

to be in Shortlands Golf course just off Farnaby Road. We objected on the grounds that they were not acceptable within Metropolitan Open Land. Bromley agreed with us and refused the applications. One of the firms appealed and won. Their mast was the artificial fir tree still standing there which we are supposed to have forgotten about. When the second applicant realised that their competitor had won their appeal, they also appealed. This time we repeated our point about MOL but added the warning that if this should be allowed there would be no defence against the further proliferation of such masts. This was accepted by the inspector and he dismissed the appeal. Had it been approved we were promised that the “mast” would have been disguised as a “dead elm tree”!

Cable TV. From late 1992 to the end of 1993 the whole of Bromley had to suffer virtually every pavement in the Borough being dug up. We were to be treated to the advantage of being able to connect to a state of the art network of fibre-optic cables for our telephones, television and the mysteries of the internet (whatever that was). The contractors were a firm called Nynex—they were everywhere. They frequently damaged existing services and frequently failed to adequately make good damage to



pavements. We had to join the rest of the population in ensuring that the work was done properly. It brought on the desire for another cartoon. Making fun of an enterprise is usually an effective spur to improved performance.

Projects outside our patch. These have usually been projects in or near the Town Centre which are likely to affect residents throughout the Borough. Bromley have prepared a “Town Centre Area Action Plan” (AAP) which offers 12 sites to developers for which they may propose development schemes. Recently two of these have been taken up and we have commented on both of the planning proposals submitted. One was the very large development proposed at Bromley South. We mainly commented on the effects it would have on the near neighbours in terms of overshadowing and overlooking. However, probably the views of the residents directly affected would carry more weight than our more theoretical views. The scheme has been approved.

Still being a controversial issue is the second proposal to build an extension to the Glades Shopping centre within part of the Queen’s Gardens. It would contain five restaurants. We have objected. Currently it has been rejected by Bromley but an appeal is expected. If the remaining ten town centre sites produce other firm proposals we expect to be kept busy for some time.

As this is being written the new Travelodge Hotel on the corner of London Road with Blyth Road is nearing completion. This site used to be occupied by two premises, one on Blyth Road was a small hotel and on the corner was a snooker hall which had previously been a works where high quality car bodywork was made. There had been an earlier application for the hotel to be replaced by a new block of flats but this was overtaken by a new submission for a new, larger hotel on the combined site. This application was refused as being too large but was soon replaced by a slightly smaller version which was approved and is under construction. We had objected to both of these later schemes on the grounds that there was too little on-site parking provided and that it was too high compared with existing nearby buildings.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Ravensbourne Station. Our first “Community Project” was to provide a planter with plants in the station booking office. This was done in recognition of the selfless work done, at his own expense, by Ernest Chang-Tive, (known as Chang) the station master. He transformed Ravensbourne Station into a colourful garden and had won a prize for “The Best Kept Station”. Soon after we had made our contribution he was posted to Catford Bridge and actively discouraged from planting anything there. Apparently, without his knowledge, a book had been published illustrating all the “Best Kept Stations” that the author could find. Ravensbourne was included. We bought him a copy and searched him out at Catford Bridge. His surprise and gratitude were self evident.

Millennium. It was decided in late 1998 that we should do something to mark the beginning of the new Millennium. After some discussion it was decided that it would take the form of a marker to indicate the position of the Greenwich meridian as it crossed our area. Leslie Tucker took the lead and chaired a sub-committee to develop the proposal, taking care to consult the regular Members’ Meetings and the membership as a whole. By the end of 1999, his design details and budgets had been agreed and the marker had been ordered.

On the 9th of April 2000 we arranged for the Mayor of Bromley, Sue Polydorou, to come to Farnaby Road to unveil it and to attend a reception at Shortlands Golf Club thereafter. Local Councillors, our MP and relevant Council officers also attended, plus of course, many of our members and a few passers-by.

Valley School. Over the years we have donated funds to the Valley School to enable them to achieve various projects which were outside the remit of the local



The day of the unveiling: The Mayor of Bromley on both knees, Peter Pain, our chairman on one knee and Leslie Tucker fondling “his” meridian marker.



Valley School: This is one of the four murals designed and painted by the children round their playground. We paid for the materials required.

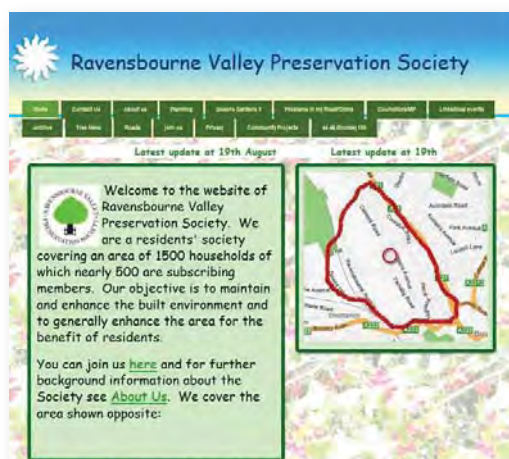
Valley School: Aquatic Plants provided for this new pond.

education authority's budget. If possible we have tried to choose projects which have some environmental element. These have included a sensory garden, a story telling chair, murals by the children in the playground, bird and insect boxes, aquatic plants for the new pond, an outdoor classroom and various other wild flower planting.

Seats. We have provided a bench seat at each of the two bus stops near the Ravensbourne Avenue/Farnaby Road junction and another near the river as it meanders along the edge of Beckenham Place Park.

Trees. We wish to do everything possible to ensure that the tree-lined character of the valley sides in our part of the valley is protected for future generations. On the east side the mature trees are largely protected by Tree Preservation Orders but the younger trees are not. The problem is that those younger trees are potentially the mature trees of the future and at present they are at risk unless or until each specific tree is covered by a TPO. In these circumstances we have to be very watchful and anticipate when particular trees are likely to be at risk and request Bromley or Lewisham to issue a TPO. This we will continue to do and we have obtained a number of new TPO's in recent years, but members should keep their eyes open and warn us if they suspect threatening activities in a particular area.

In Memoriam—Charities. When some of our most active members have died we have given a donation to a charity known to be dear to their hearts. It has happened far too often. In the case of Paul Bennett, our founder and faithful supporter right up to his death at too young an age, we planted a cedar tree in Beckenham Place Park. Having read this little history, readers will understand the special significance of this species for Paul and the Society.



RVPS WEBSITE

One of those younger members of which we would like to see more (in this case Clive Lees) has applied himself to the task of creating and updating our website at www.rvpsbromley.org. The website is generally updated monthly, or more frequently if an important development is taking place. Visits to the site are surprisingly high with peaks being seen in connection with the large development at Bromley South Central and with the persistent water leak in Highland Road, of sometime ago.

Information available on our website includes the history of the Society, the area in general, various contact details, information about current proposed developments and other information that residents might find of use. More illustrations on current topics can be seen there than is usually possible in our regular Newsletters.

Recently another use of digital technology has been adopted by the Society. We have used digital images and computer drawing programs to create artists' impressions of proposed developments in order that Bromley's planning committees can clearly see what the impact of a development would be. This technique was crucially influential in persuading Bromley to refuse permission for the highly controversial development at 126 Madeira Avenue.

It is expected that such uses of technology will greatly increase in the future although we have no intention of ceasing to issue our usual Newsletters to all members..

We know when we have lost when the final decision is not the one we had advocated—but if the outcome is all we had hoped for, can we claim to have “won”?

The truth is that we can seldom prove that our intervention in a case has been decisive. So is the effort worth while? The answer must be “yes”.

Without us, and other groups like us, there would be little effective weight to counterbalance the preoccupations of the developers. Government and Local Authorities also need to have their resolve stiffened by a public opinion which is known to care about the environment.

There is continuous pressure for new development, particularly here in the SE. We have to accept that new buildings are required and will be permitted. Our role is to do all we can to ensure that these new buildings are reasonable in size in relation to their sites and surroundings and do not adversely affect neighbouring properties or the general character of the area. It follows that there are many cases where we have accepted proposals in principle but made constructive suggestions about matters of detail.

We have to be particularly vigilant and react to any threats to our local open spaces. Once these are lost, they are gone for ever.

Protection of the natural environment, including our trees, we see as greatly important.

However, to retain our credibility in the eyes of the Planning Authorities we must largely restrict our comments to those which reflect valid Planning policies—if emotion is allowed to creep in, it must be used very sparingly. We must retain the respect of the Councillors and Local Authority Officers with whom we have to deal.

It is also important that we do not automatically object to every part of every proposal; some may improve the area; change is not necessarily bad news!

Every case needs to be judged in a balanced way and if there are good things to say, they should be said.

After all, everyone living in Bromley now occupies a building which changed the previous environment in some way when originally built.

Perhaps the most important rule when writing a letter of objection is never rant. A ranting letter is usually counter productive. We must keep to the rules: we must cling to logic and try to keep calm! That is the best way to make our case.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

We believe that over the past 25 years we have endeavoured to stay faithful to our motto of preserving the best and improving the rest: but as we look into an uncertain future, likely to be dominated by the serious economic recession in which the country finds itself, we must be ready for a possible turning point in what we face and how we can react.

The Government's current thinking is that we need to build ourselves out of the present recession and thereby invigorate growth in the economy as happened after both of the last Wars. The country is suffering from an acute housing shortage with a rising population and more people living longer and alone. Much more affordable housing is becoming an imperative and yet at present the property market is sluggish and in our area applications for newly built houses and even for house extensions, have recently almost dried up.

We must expect therefore that there will be a relaxation in the Town Planning laws which will sanction environmental changes which we may view as undesirable. Obviously we must heed the plight of so many who need an affordable home of their own, but at the same time, we will continue to support our community and keep true to our motto to the best of our ability.

With your help we will do our best. Wish us luck.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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