

'AS SAFE AS HOUSES' IN UNSAFE TIMES

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In recent weeks we have seen how the electrification of the railway through Woking helped to energise the housing market once more, with renewed pressure on land to be found for more housing for commuters from the town.

In Byfleet little housing estates had sprung up off the High Road, Rectory Lane and in Church Road, whilst in Horsell the land of Horsell Grange at Kettlewell and Grove Barrs Farm and Cobbett's Nursery in the village centre, were overwhelmed by new houses and bungalows.

Closer to town The Dell, Cavendish Road, Wych Hill Way and Turnoak Avenue were all being developed, and in Oriental Road in 1938, Davis Estates (who were also building the houses off Meadway Drive in Horsell) were busy laying out Oriental Close on the land once occupied by Woking Grange – originally the home of the Rastrick family.

In Knaphill, Surrey County Council were adding to the houses in Oak Tree Close with 'six pairs of semi-detached houses in connection with Brookwood Mental Hospital' being approved in March 1937 (subject to certain conditions) and Woking Council were again eyeing up land for more council houses – Edger Ashley Cook (the council chairman) calling a special meeting to discuss purchasing land in Lower Knaphill.

Apparently he had discovered that 'a piece of land in Robin Hood Road was for sale by auction on Tuesday 15th June 1937, and he considered this land would make an admirable

Surrey County Council provided new houses in Oat Tree Road for the staff of Brookwood Mental Hospital in 1938, whilst Woking Urban District Council planned to build off Robin Hood Road at Lower Knaphill.

site for the erection of council houses'. The Engineer and Surveyor to the council considered a maximum of £4 per foot of frontage would be a reasonable price to pay, but the councillors insisted that £3.10s was their limit and authorised a person to attend the auction and bid accordingly.

In Old Woking, too, the council would again eventually (after the war) build more houses on part of the land of Ford Farm – the rest of the land being developed as the private 'Hoe Bridge Estate' in the late 1930's. It was developed by two local brothers called Albert and Jack Simmons who formed a company to develop not just Ford Farm, but also the neighbouring fields and market garden of Shackleford Farm (below) as well.



Pea picking on the fields of Shackelford Farm.



The entrance to Shackelford Road (between the eight new shops that they also built on the High Street), was where the old farm of that name once stood, whilst their majority of their 'Hoe Bridge Estate' was given the name of Rydens Way in February 1937 (after Edward Ryde the

former owner of Ford Farm, Parsonage Farm and Poundfield House in Old Woking).

Where the names Coniston Road, Selwood Road and Fairfax Road came from I do not know, but the Highways Committee of Woking

Council agreed to the naming of all three roads in October 1937, when the council also agreed to spending over £3,000 on surface water drainage of the estate, 'in advance of the by-pass being built'.

Shackelford Road cuts through where the original farm house once stood.





The 'green' down the centre of Rydens Way was originally left open to accommodate the proposed Woking Southern By-Pass road.

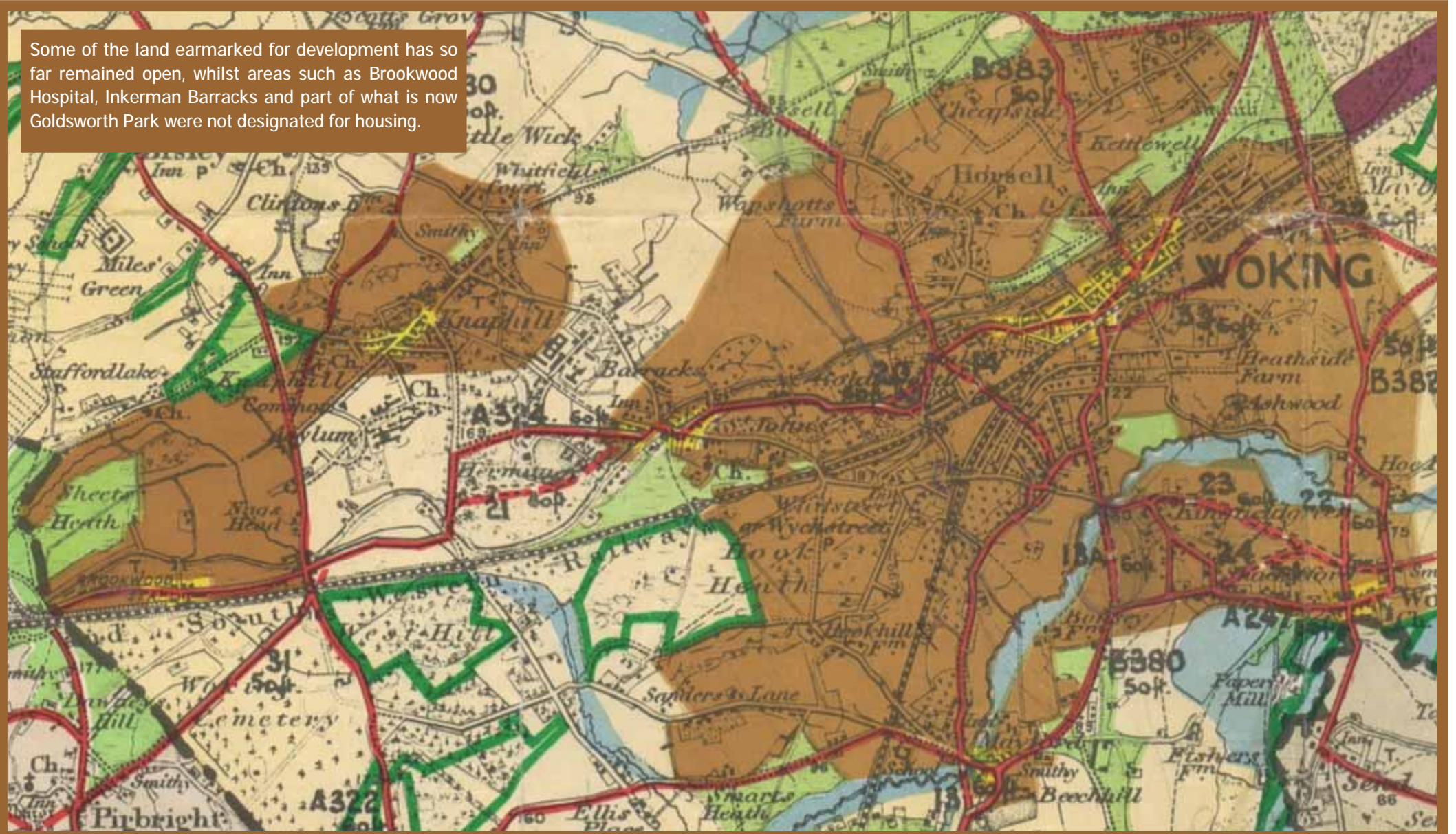
That by-pass was the Southern Woking By-Pass that had been suggested as early as 1928 in the North West Surrey Regional Plan and the reason for the large central green that originally formed the main feature of Rydens Way when it

was first built.

Indeed the 1928 plan had foreseen the development of vast swathes of this district – far worse than anything the current administration has ever proposed – with all the land between Mayford and Woking designated for housing as well as the fields to the north

and west of Knaphill and virtually the whole of Pyrford and Byfleet coloured 'brown'! Thankfully Hitler intervened and 'the powers that be' had time to come to their senses and create the Green-Belt – although don't get me wrong, I am not proposing we start another World War just to buy more time to oppose the 'McLaren New Town'!

Some of the land earmarked for development has so far remained open, whilst areas such as Brookwood Hospital, Inkerman Barracks and part of what is now Goldsworth Park were not designated for housing.



WOKING COUNCIL'S PLANS FOR GUILDFORD ROAD SITE

The first house the council bought was St Austin's in Guildford Road, but eventually they added these houses in York Road and others in Mount Hermon Road (below).



Whilst Woking Council was considering building more council houses in Old Woking and Knaphill, they were also actively acquiring land in the Mount Hermon area of Woking for a different kind of 'Council Home'!

As early as September 1935 the council approved a report which described the 'inadequate and inconvenience of the present council offices' in Commercial Road and as a temporary measure it was decided to rent the first floor of the Grand Theatre (next door) to accommodate the Town Planning Department.

I wonder whether the decision to move the planners into these even more cramped and unsuitable offices was a deliberate move – an incentive for them to come up with a much more comprehensive proposal?

In September 1938 after several sites had been considered, they proposed purchasing a property on Guildford Road (between York Road and Mount Hermon Road) and eventually redeveloping it, and the surrounding properties, into a new civic centre.

As a temporary measure most departments moved into the houses on the site in the spring of 1939, but as you can probably guess events conspired against them and it was not until after the war that new plans could be drawn up for a permanent solution to the Council Offices problem.



THE TEMPORARY MONUMENT BRIDGE



Monument Bridge.

Another problem facing Woking Council in the late 1930's was what to do about Monument Bridge (or Bunkers Bridge as some people still called it). Like all the other bridges over the Basingstoke Canal it had been constructed in the late 1780's when the only expected traffic was the odd horse and cart, but by the early 20th century the amount (and weight) of the transport had increased to such an extent that the old brick arch could no longer cope. Most of the other

bridges had been replaced by the mid 1920's but for some reason the old Monument Bridge remained and so the decision was made to demolish it and put up at least a temporary wooden bridge so that pedestrians could still cross at that point. It was not until January 1940 that the Engineer and Surveyor of Woking Council could report that the work was complete at a cost of £12,780 (the Ministry of Transport paying 50% of the bill).



The original bridge (top) with the temporary footbridge (below) and the eventual replacement (above right).

