

THE WONDERFUL WALTON COURT

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The problems over building at Bullbeggars (as recalled a few weeks ago), and the delays at Priors Croft, Old Woking (as mentioned last week), meant that in the Spring of 1966 the Chairman of the Housing Committee at Woking Council, Mr G.C.T. Pook, had to admit that only six new council houses would probably be complete that year.

That was obviously not a good situation, but as the good councillor pointed out, that didn't mean the council were not trying. Along with the sites at Old Woking and Bullbeggars, they had thirty-two homes planned for the allotment site at Highclere in Knaphill (Waterers Rise) and over a hundred new maisonettes due to be constructed at Walton Road – although he failed to point out that in order to build the latter estate, a total of sixty-eight houses (plus two factories and a church) were set to be demolished! Most of those properties would have to go before construction of the first phase could begin (providing fifty-six new dwellings), with phase two of sixty homes delayed for at least another year.

The Walton Road site – between that road, Boundary Road, Courtney Road and Omega Road - had been on the council's radar as far back as the late 1950's. Numbers 129-143

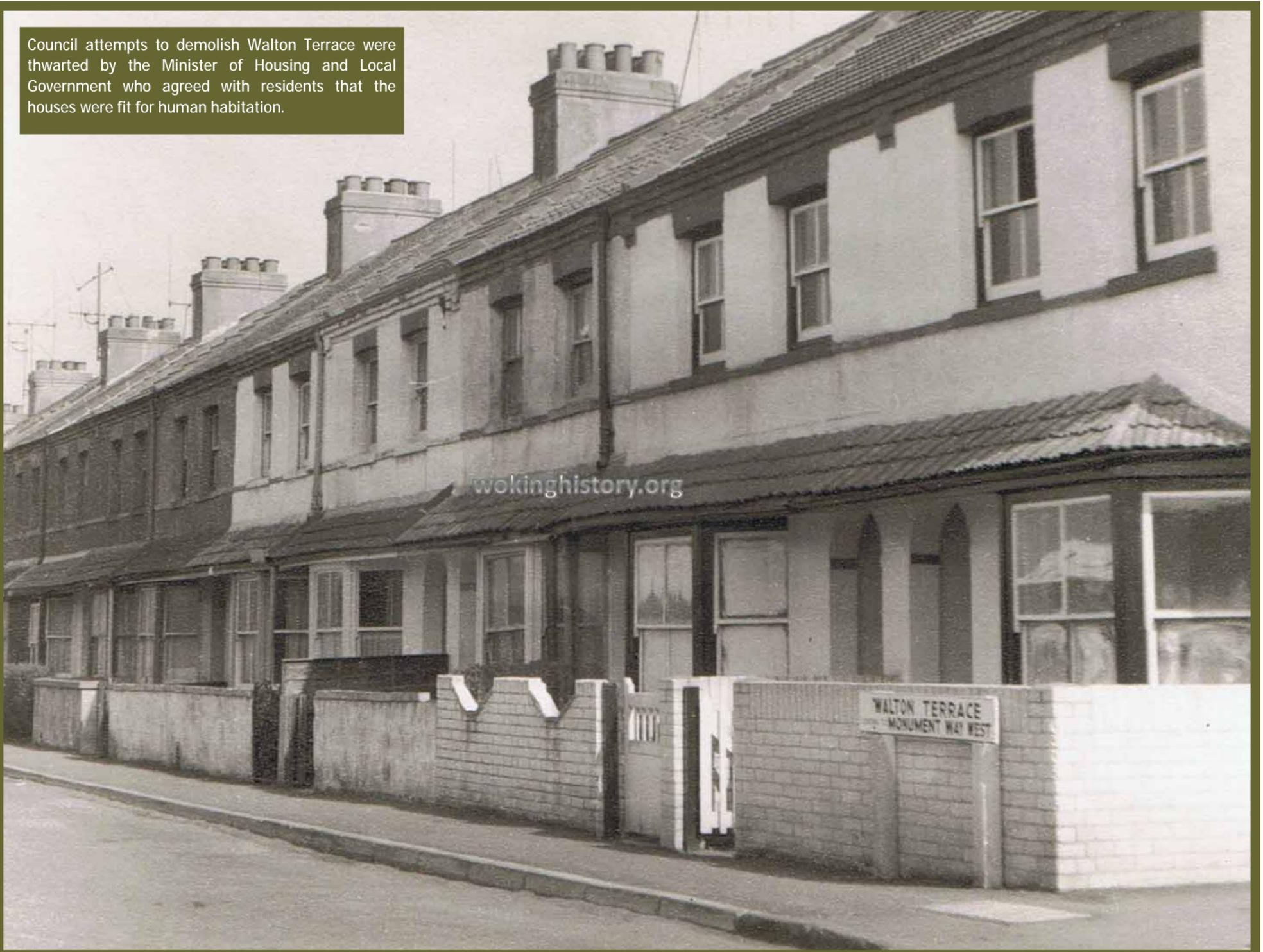
Courtney Road, and seven houses at Firgrove Terrace in Boundary Road, had been condemned for years, which Councillor Mrs Rhoda McGaw saw as an opportunity rather than a problem. In February 1963 she wrote 'I feel very strongly that we should not look on this as slum clearance, but as a redevelopment scheme', noting it as an 'exciting idea' – even if

part of that idea was to demolish some houses that were not actually unfit for habitation in Walton Road to make way for the redevelopment.

The 36 flats and four shops at 204-246 Walton Road had been built in the 1890's and by the mid 1960's were described as in a 'poor state



Council attempts to demolish Walton Terrace were thwarted by the Minister of Housing and Local Government who agreed with residents that the houses were fit for human habitation.



of repair' requiring 'modernising and improving'. Woking Council's idea of 'modernising and improving' in April 1965 was in fact demolition, so that the five-story maisonettes of Walton Court could begin to be built. The future of numbers 248 to 270 (a row of twelve terraced houses built in 1930) was decided a few weeks later, when the Conservative controlled Council voted not to demolish them (much to the disgust of Mrs McGaw and her fellow Socialist councillors).

Phase One envisaged the erection of 56 dwellings, with Phase Two a further 60 dwellings deferred for a year.

Earlier the council also wanted to serve a compulsory purchase order on eight houses in Walton Terrace, but the Minister for Housing and Local Government did not agree that they should be included in the slum clearance area. The council had acquired two of the terrace in 1962 which it said were unfit for human habitation, and tried to use them as an excuse to compulsorily purchase the rest and redevelop them with industry. Local residents, however, pointed out that if the other eight were in a fit state then surely, given the housing crisis, it would be better for the council to repair their two buildings, rather than condemn perfectly respectable properties, just so that the council could consolidate what would become the Monument Way West industrial estate. The Minister agreed, and the terrace remained.

It is perhaps interesting to note that in the same newspaper that reported on the houses in Walton Road being demolished to make way for Walton Court, there was an item about the Civic Trust Award for the construction of the Maybury Estate. The council had been given a plaque commemorating the award, but it seems concerns over vandalism meant that the councillors decided (by thirteen votes to twelve) that the plaque should be placed in the council chamber instead of on the estate! What has

happened to the plaque I do not know – perhaps it would have been more cared-for on the estate in the first place.

Unfortunately the design of the new Walton Court was not quite so award-winning, although the local press did report that with lifts large enough for prams, gas-warmed hot air heating systems, and spacious lawns and play areas, the new venture would undoubtedly be 'a paradise for kiddies'!



Walton Court, when it was completed, was to be a 'paradise for kiddies' with its spacious lawns and play areas.