

HOUSING IN HEATHSIDE & MOUNT HERMON

Iain Wakeford 2017



In 1958 the Surrey Structure Plan set out where (and at what density) houses would be built in Woking in the coming years, and whilst at the time the Council may have agreed with the plan to preserve the low-density character of the land to the south of the railway, it soon became clear that local developers did not. The large houses (and often large gardens) of houses in the Mount Herman and Heathside part of the town, with easy access to Woking Town Centre and the railway station, were seen as ripe for redevelopment by some, especially after Woking Council passed plans in 1959 for the flats and maisonettes (and doctor's surgery) of Hillview Court.

Emboldened by the Sir Lindsey Parkinson Group's plan for the corner of Hillview Road and Guildford Road, applications for similar projects poured in to the council, with developers trying to get more and more high-density (and high-rise) schemes past the planners.

In the spring of 1960 Woking's M.P., Harold Watkinson, added to the debate with the comment that 'it is better to build up than to build out' adding that 'local authorities should give sympathetic and careful consideration' to the problem of housing and the green belt.

His comments would no doubt go down well with modern planners who seem to think that towns are like trees – 'they either grow or they die'. Sadly all too many trees (if not towns) fall down when an unexpected ill-wind blows in, especially if a forest of concrete has blocked out the sun, and the developers have disregarded their roots. Sometimes it is better if

their development is neatly manicured, rather than allowed to grow out of control.

Is it too harsh to suggest (with hindsight) that the local planners appeared to be like rabbits caught in the headlights of the on-coming juggernaut of high-density housing? Looking back some of their decisions seem illogical - agreeing to an outline application to build a ten-storey block on the site of the Cotteridge Hotel (with a bar and ballroom on the ground floor) as well as a nine-storey block at Netley and Woodlands in Constitution Hill (which would also have included a restaurant at ground floor level), whilst at the same time rejecting smaller scale plans in neighbouring Poplar Grove and Brooklyn Road.

Plans refused (or unduly delayed) by the council often went to appeal to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, who then heard the pro's and con's for each scheme. This was an expense that the Council (if not the developers) could obviously do without, which might explain why the planners appear to have passed some schemes that maybe they would have preferred not to have done.

In January 1961 a Mr Goodfellow spoke on behalf of a developer at a public inquiry into the proposed construction of sixteen maisonettes and sixteen flats at Old Oaks, Poplar Grove. He pointed out that they would not be detrimental to existing properties in the area, but in an

At one stage the council approved a plan for a ten-storey block on the site of the Cotteridge Hotel – where Park Heights was much later built.

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One of the first 'high-density' schemes approved by the Council was Hillview Court, by the Sir Lindsey Parkinson Group.



The flats of Hillview Court were heavily advertised at the time.

attempt perhaps to have both his cake and eat it, he then went on to say 'if any degree of detriment was caused, the planning advantages would outweigh the disadvantages'.

In another pre-emptive strike, perhaps, he urged the inspector not to assume that 'people living in the flats and maisonettes would be of a lower moral fibre than present residents of the area' and another speaker on behalf of the development pointed out that 'it is expected that the flats – would be purchased by people who are not very gregarious'. I didn't know that such things could be cause for objecting to a planning application, but in the early 1960's clearly such things were on the minds of some!

At an inquiry into the redevelopment of a property called Sandilands in Brooklyn Road, one appellant likened trying to stop high-density development in the area to King Canute trying to hold back the tide. Henry Randall, who wanted to develop Sandilands, put forward the interesting point that by building up, the character of the area could be better preserved. He noted that in his garden there were a number of specimen trees which 'were among the best for many miles around'. These, he claimed, would not be retained if eight or ten houses were built on the land – a practice it was later noted was happening more and more

Hill View Road, long before Sir Lindsay Parkinson and others got their hands on the houses of the street.



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The large houses of Hillview Road were soon replaced by new flats and maisonettes.

as the old Victorian houses were divided into flats and their gardens sold off for development.

In the end the council's decision on Sandilands was upheld by the Inspector ('without prejudice to the submission of any subsequent application to build flats and maisonettes' on the site'), whilst at Old Oaks, in June 1961, the

Council actually approved a scheme for a ten-storey block of 36 flats to be built! Whilst that particular plan never came to fruition the fact was that the 'flood gates' of high density development had by then been breached.

The leafy, low-density, Mount Hermon area was seen as ripe for redevelopment in the late 50's and early 60's.

