last year in this column I touched upon the problem of high-density housing being proposed in the Heathside and Mount Hermon area’s in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s and how it was contrary to the 1958 Surrey Structure Plan. In April 1960 Woking Council looked to alleviate the problem by revising the structure plan and allowing a limited amount of high density development in an area ‘running approximately from the corner of Guildford Road with Claremont Avenue, north of the Park to the west side of White Rose Lane’ and bounded on the west by the extended site of the council offices between York Road and Mount Hermon Road. ‘In this limited area will be some further development of similar density to the new Hillview Court, including four tower blocks’ with the density ‘shaded off towards the edges’.

Hillview Court had been built by the Sir Lindsey Parkinson Group, who in 1961-62 were busy advertising their latest developments in the town – Southview Court – on the opposite corner of Hillview Road with Guildford Road.

As part of Woking Council’s scheme for a High Density Zone south of the station, there was to be extra parking for commuters in a new car park off Heathside Crescent.
and Radstone Court further down Hillview Road.

The Ministry of Housing and Local Government were still hearing appeals against the council’s refusal to give permission for several redevelopment schemes, including a house on Guildford Road called Craigmore, and the houses on the opposite side of the road (Chagford Cottage, Moorholme, Oak Bank, Samaras and Heathercroft). At the latter the developers wanted to build sixty-three new dwellings in place of the five already on the site, whilst at Craigmore the plans (by Day & Sons ( Builders) Ltd) was for a more ambitious ten-storey block containing thirty-four flats.

The council’s ‘High-Density’ scheme – covering some 27 acres - was at the time quite controversial, but included ‘sweeteners’ such as the provision of a new school on the site of a Ringrone and Lismore in Heathside Road, and the creation of a car park for commuters at Heathside Crescent. The latter was vital as the streets of Woking were by then being choked by cars parked all day, whilst their owners went up to London by train – a situation that would not be alleviated by the building of more properties in the immediate vicinity of the station.

Indeed the folly of citing Woking as an ideal place for continued expansion due to its excellent train service to London was laid bare by the fact that even then, at peak times, the railway could not cope with the number of commuters (and that was without a cut in the timetable)!

Building more and more flats in Woking would only add to the transport problems, not solve them – especially as it was recognised that all the extra residents would still want to have cars (as well as season tickets on the trains). It is a lesson that the planners clearly could not understand then, have not learned now.

But back in 1961 Woking’s scheme for high-density accommodation was, if anything, thought by some to be too conservative. The County Council proposed a larger area of approximately 45 acres spreading down towards Brooklyn Road at Mount Hermon, with the density increased from fourteen persons per acre, to fifty-eight per acre. That scheme was finally approved by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in the Spring of 1962.

Not everyone on the council was happy. Cllr A D Campbell, former headmaster of the Boys Grammar School and one-time chairman of the Council (after whom Campbell Avenue in Westfield was named) asked whether the shopping facilities of Woking should be updated before extra people were encouraged to move into the area. He also noted that councillors ‘are here to represent the existing residents and not this hypothetical 20,000 odd people who want to come to Woking’. The wishes of those already resident, he insisted, should be taken into account, ‘not just the extra funds that the newcomers would bring to the area’.

Cllr Campbell was obviously ahead of his time - but sadly it seems he may even be ahead of our time too!