

# WHAT SHOULD BE CONDEMNED - THE COTTAGES OR THE COUNCIL?

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**A** month ago I wrote about several condemned cottages in Old Woking that perhaps should have been conserved by Woking Council. The problem really stemmed from the Government's desire to clear slums (mainly in bombed-out inner cities) and the 1958 Housing Act that gave council's the powers to designate 'clearance areas' (as well as declare buildings as being unfit for human habitation). The owners of such properties were given a certain amount of time to bring the them back up to standard or demolish them, and if they did not then the council had the option to do so themselves. There was financial support from the Government to do this and in places such as Woking, where property values were so high and land for new council houses scarce, designating 'slum clearance areas' was seen as a 'win win' for local councillors, who could point out that they were not only providing much needed sites for new homes, but were also 'improving' the district at little or no cost to the ratepayers.

Some old cottages managed to survive, although the old shop front of 84 was lost in the process of restoration.

The Act also helped unscrupulous landlords to benefit too, as tenants of 'unfit' houses could easily be evicted and the way then cleared for smart new properties to be built. With such incentives it is a wonder that any of the old houses of this area survived, although occasionally the owners saw the sense of preserving a property, such as 84-88 Old Woking High Street, which were restored (although the shop front of Number 82 didn't survive later restoration).

Across the road, number 63 (next to the equally ancient Hale End – now a listed building) was not so lucky. It was demolished in 1965 after the council accepted the tender of Messrs H Carter & Son to pay the them £275 for the privilege (so not only was it not costing the council, they were actually making a profit)! In

Sadly No 63, to the right of Hale Lodge, did not survive and was demolished in 1965..

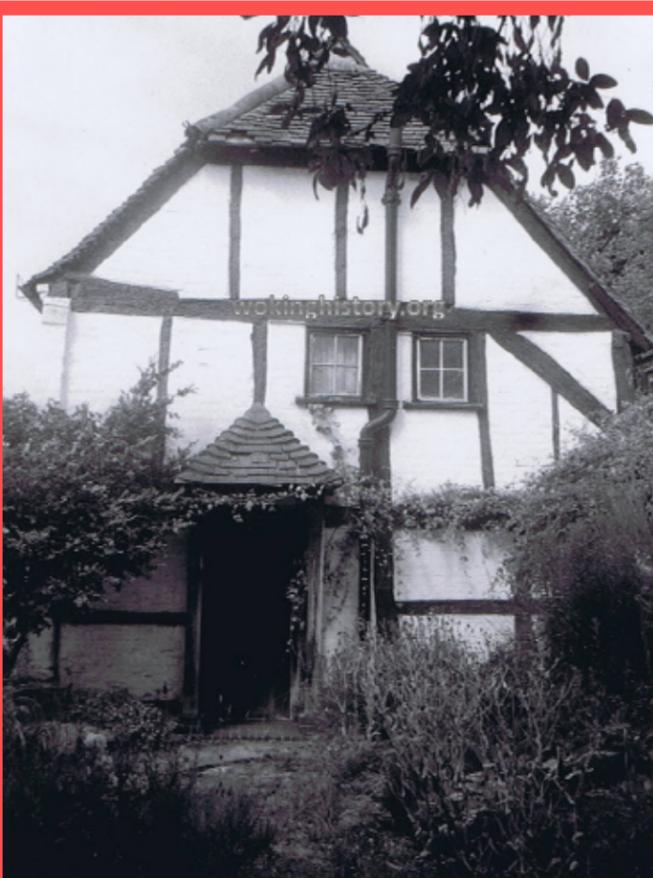




The site is due for redevelopment again, with the disused motor showroom currently on the site due to be demolished to make way for sheltered housing.

this case, however, the benefit to the housing list was not quite so immediate. The land became part of the site of a motor showroom – and has only recently been re-acquired by the council for sheltered housing (I wonder how much they will be paid for the demolition this time).

Another property that did manage to survive was the Old Cottage between Gloster Road and



Shackleford Road, although here it was 'road improvements' that threatened the old building rather than the condition of the property itself. The High Street was particularly narrow at this point and in the early 1960's one of the outbuildings to the Old Cottage was demolished and the hedge cut back to allow the road to be widened slightly.



Whilst the Old Cottage survived the road widening of the early 1960's, its outbuilding (top right) did not.

The property is now a Grade II listed building, and is believed to have once been an 'open-hall' house constructed in the early part of the 16th century,





The old Crowder Cottages in Kingfield were also demolished in the mid 1960's and replaced by modern homes.

Around the corner in Kingfield Road the old Crowder Cottages also succumbed to the council's demolition order, although the equally old Kingfield Arms next door managed to survive – the new Crowder Cottages set well back from the road possibly suggesting that it too could have been at risk from later road widening schemes.



Kingfield also saw some new buildings in this period – the new shops of Ashcombe Parade being built in the late 1950's, and the Old Woking Community Centre opening in the early 1960's.



The late 1950's and 60's were a time of great change in Kingfield. As well as seeing several old properties demolished, the area was also seeing many new places built, such as the shops and flats of Ashcombe Parade on the corner with Vicarage Road and the new Roman Catholic Church of 'Our Lady Mother of God' that was opened in 1962.

On the edge of the village too the Old Woking Community Centre was also built at this time, after many years of speculation and preparation. An Association had been formed in 1951, but struggled to raise enough funds to

get it off the ground. Things seemed to be moving in the mid 1950's until funding dried up once more, but in January 1960 it was announced that work would soon begin on the £12,000 centre and with £11,000 already raised it was hoped the main hall and two smaller rooms would be complete by the end of the year.

By February 1961 the cost had risen to £16,000, but at least by then work had started on the centre, designed to be 'the most modern of its kind in the area'. The large hall, measuring 50ft by 35ft could be used for

meetings, concerts, plays and other social activities, with dancers taking advantage of the 'properly sprung dance floor'. There was also a 30ft by 20ft games room 'suitable for table tennis, miniature billiards and small meetings', with a 'foyer lounge with suntrap windows opening onto a lawn'.

Whether it is in Old Woking or Kingfield is debatable, but the Old Woking Community Centre probably did more than most to help unite the old and the new of the area – providing a meeting place (if not a focal point) for the constantly changing district.

But as with other parts of Woking, not every new building has survived any better than the old ones – the Catholic Church built in 1962 having been demolished and replaced by apartments.

