

Faversham Society Newsletter

November 2023

714



This original drawing of the Faversham Almshouses, prepared by the architects in 1860, has been expertly restored and will go on display shortly See pages 2-3

Chairman's column

HAROLD GOODWIN

Planning and environmental issues have been the dominant focus of attention this month. The society has grave concerns about the safety issues arising over the battery energy storage system (Bess) for the solar power station at Cleve Hill, Graveney.

Sir David Melville, the scientist who is the society's vice-chairman, has prepared two submissions sent to Swale Council. We put the issue clearly: "Our conclusion is that the battery safety management plan is inadequate, misrepresents and fails to take account of experience of battery fires elsewhere, has a dangerously cursory

approach to toxic gas emissions and water requirements, lacks sufficient detail to make a judgment and fails to address important matters raised by Kent Fire and Rescue Service and the Faversham Society." More on page 2.

A campaign by residents and objections from the Faversham Society, Faversham Town Council and many residents has led to the withdrawal of an application to build a bungalow at Johnson Court, off Churchill Way. There have also been concerns about the potential sale of land next to 36 Beech Close and a campaign has secured three tree preservation orders which should protect this land as a green space. Beech Close was not thought suitable for listing as

a green space in Swale's Review in 2021. See pages 4-5. These are two examples of small green spaces being designed into the estates built in the final decades of the 20th century. These spaces add substantially to the quality of the environment. Far fewer are being built on estates now.

If you know of, or live near to similar green spaces, please consider securing a tree preservation order. Contact me on the address below if you need to know how to do it.

We are concerned about the fabric of the Grade II*-listed 1 Market Place, most recently Saddlers, and we have raised our concerns with Swale Council. Works are going on within the building and the exterior is in a poor state. It is in a prominent position and its listing says it is "probably 17th century, refronted in the 18th century". If you have expertise or enthusiasm for the conservation of built heritage we would be grateful for your help and enthusiasm. Please get in touch.

With our partners in Open Faversham, the Friends of St Mary of Charity – which I also chair – we held a well-attended review of this year's events. There will be a strong ticketing regime next year, and the closing date for the inclusion of events will be much earlier. Next year's Open Faversham runs from 17 to 25 August and we shall begin planning in earnest from mid-November.

chair@favershamsociety.org

Cleve Hill blast danger

HAROLD GOODWIN

The battery safety management plan for the Cleve Hill solar power station presented to Swale for approval has not

To page 6 ►►►

Almshouses plan restored

JONATHAN CAREY

This original drawing of the Faversham Almshouses, prepared by the architects Hooker and Wheeler of Brenchley in 1860, was donated to the society by Mrs Helen Colebrook last year. Although worn and damaged by extensive use during construction by the Chinnocks of Southampton in 1861-62, it has now been cleaned, stabilised and restored in 2023 through the generous support of the Swire family.

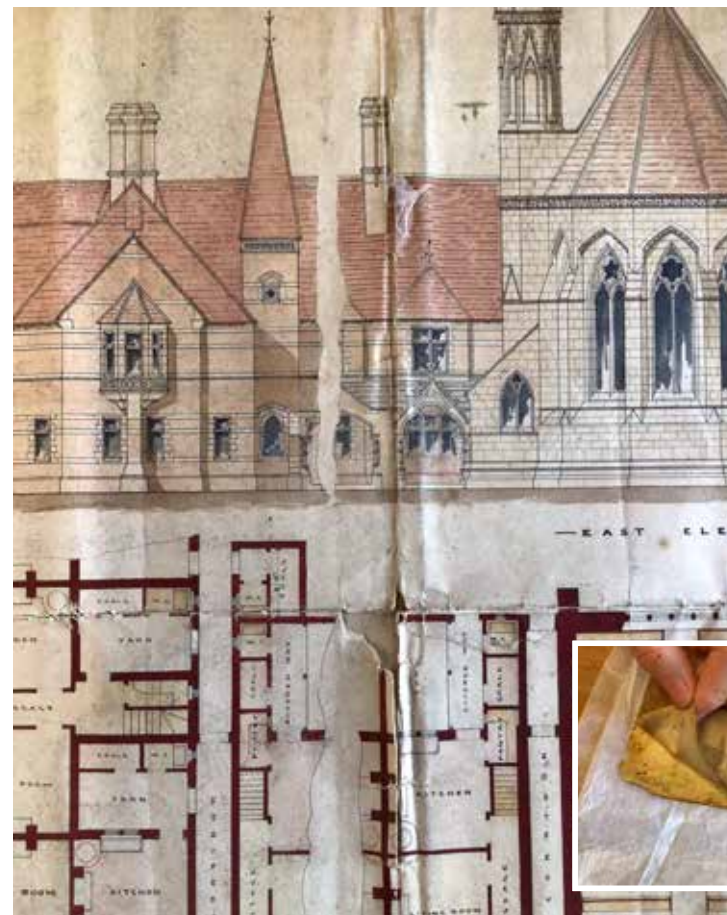
Drawing No 5, as it is known, is annotated in several black inks and colour-washed in reds, creams and light browns. The drawing is on a thin, light cream paper backed by a most fine linen,

It shows the intended plans, elevations and sections of the central almshouses chapel and of the main, long run of domestic units facing towards South Road.

Comparison of the drawing with the building fabric now indicates that, apart from cost-saving simplification of some ornamental detail, the almshouses were built in accordance with this original design.

However, the interiors were much changed in the mid-20th century and face further change over the next few years. Significantly, this drawing provides the only record of the original layout of the main part of the building and thus tells us how generous, enlightened and advanced a housing scheme it was, given the prevailing social conditions of the early 1860s.

The drawing was clearly well used during the 1862-63 construction process for it had been much folded and creased, presumably for pocket use by the



The drawing, which was in a fragile state, has been cleaned and restored. It will be displayed in the Visitor Information Centre shortly

contractor while on site. It is signed by the three male members of the Chinnock family.

Although it had been framed behind glass for some 30 years, by 2022 it was in a worryingly fragile condition. Extensively creased, cracked and split, it had also become frayed at the edges and was somewhat stained. Furthermore, the loose and stained linen backing was peeling and bubbling away from the paper. The society therefore commissioned a fully registered and experienced local conservator to test the

stability of the inks and colour washes and then to clean, de-stain, stabilise and re-back the drawing.

This four-month process included removing the linen backing, applying an acid-free isolating layer to the back of the paper and then re-applying the original, cleaned linen backing. The drawing has now been re-framed in an acid-free mount behind "museum glass" to reduce future fading.

It will go on display at the Visitor Information Centre at 12 Market Place shortly. Pop in to take a look.

Trees were in danger: this is how we fought for our green space

LAURA POLDEN

I was among a group of Faversham residents who met on 12 October to protest against the potential destruction of a small but beautiful plot of green space in my neighbourhood.

The land is shortly to go to auction, and might be bought by a developer wanting to build over it. My neighbours and I were joined by councillors and a representative of the Faversham Society board, and at the peak of our protest, we numbered more than 60.

We were outraged when we discovered that the plot, next to the Westbrook stream, between Beech Close and The Knole, was at risk. Central to our concern are the three aged and established trees: a weeping willow, an acer and the Beech Close beech.

This green now also includes a sapling, planted recently by Faversham Town Council to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee last year. These trees house diverse wildlife: owls, sparrowhawks and bats have been seen there, and squirrels and foxes roam in abundance.

It is also valuable as a community space and for dog-walking. It has hosted jubilee and coronation celebrations, and has seen traditional tug-of-war games, treasure trails and Easter egg hunts.

Our first course of action was to contact the Faversham Society, Friends of Westbrook Stream, and our town councillors, who were all extremely forthcoming with the best course of action to protect the land. They spread the word and helped us to contact other



townspeople fighting similar problems, particularly at Johnson Court.

Working together, within a fortnight, we managed to raise tree protection orders on all three trees with Swale Council and are now hoping to have it recognised in the forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan as a local green space. We are hoping that, with the orders in place, the land is now much less attractive to anyone wanting to build over it.

Residents are celebrating the strength of our campaign. We really feel it shows that by working in partnership across the

town we can fight this kind of unwanted development. We also hope that we can inspire others across our town to come together and fight to protect these green spaces, purposefully left to keep Faversham as a green and leafy place in which to live.

Please follow Beech Close Greens on Facebook if you wish to get involved. Our thanks again to the Faversham Society for its immediate and invaluable support in helping us to protect our natural environment.

Laura Polden is a new member of the Faversham Society



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been determined and it seems likely, as we go to press, that the developer will now ask the secretary of state for approval.

It is unfortunate that, in 2020, Swale did not point out that it lacked the technical expertise to determine whether the battery safety plan was adequate. Swale has had advice from the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has washed its hands of it. Its response is on the planning portal (23/503812/SUB) and includes this: "Although the development consent order indicates that HSE should be consulted in relation to a battery safety management plan, HSE does not provide comment on such plans."

The society has written to Helen Whately, the MP for Faversham, requesting her assistance when the developer approaches the secretary of state.

Below is the text of the press release – headlined "Huge protest at plans for dangerous giant battery near Faversham" – sent to the *Kent Messenger*. A journalist has since spoken to David and we hope to make the paper on 19 October. We have raised our concerns about battery safety in two posts on the planning portal, which are more easily accessed on the policy blog on the Faversham Society website.

"The developers of the controversial Cleve Hill solar plant at Graveney near Faversham have published their plans for the associated battery storage system sparking an uproar from concerned nearby residents, as well as the Faversham Society, the Graveney Rural Environment Action Team (GREAT), the Countryside Charity (CPRE) and local parish councils. The Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) has also

raised a large number of detailed requirements, questioning whether the plan is adequate to make a judgment prior to its approval.

"More than 100 objections have been lodged on the Swale Borough Council planning portal. There have been more than 65 fires and explosions reported in grid-scale battery storage systems across the world and many hundreds more smaller battery fires. Overall, these incidents represent up to 6% of global installed capacity, suggesting a significant probability of incidents. The larger the battery, the more cells there are to fail and the proposed Cleve Hill battery will be one of the largest in the world.

"As well as fires, vapour cloud explosions have taken place in Belgium, Arizona and Liverpool. The type of battery proposed for Cleve Hill (lithium ferro phosphate, or LFP) has been shown to be particularly prone to explosions. Toxic gases emitted in battery fires and explosions have required the evacuation of residents to avoid life-threatening exposure. At Cleve Hill, there are residential and commercial premises only 300 metres away.

"Swale planners are required to rule on the application shortly, but it is evident that they do not have the technical expertise to make an informed judgment and there is no sign that they have taken expert advice as advocated by the Faversham Society and others.

"The Faversham Society has submitted a detailed analysis of the battery safety management plan, prepared by Professor Sir David Melville, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kent, and an expert on battery safety.

"Our conclusion is that the plan should be rejected since it is inadequate,

misrepresents and fails to take account of the experience of battery fires elsewhere, has a dangerously cursory approach to toxic gas emissions and water requirements, lacks sufficient detail to make a judgment and fails to address important matters raised by KFRS and ourselves."

Uploading Faversham

JANE SECKER

As part of Open Faversham the Faversham Society collaborated with Wikimedia UK and the Umbrella Centre to run two Wikipedia editathons – free training sessions open to all, where participants learnt how to edit Wikipedia pages. They followed on from an event held last year.

The main aim is to train townspeople so that over time we can improve the pages about Faversham on Wikipedia. During the session we made several edits to the page, adding new content, several historic photos and some additional references.

The Wikipedia page is gaining interest: more than 3,400 visits have been made to it in the past month. With all the publications about Faversham in the society's archives, our group hopes it can improve the accuracy of the pages about the town.

A small sub-group has now been formed to identify priorities for editing the Faversham Wikipedia pages, and we already have suggestions for topics to focus upon, including the explosives industry, shipbuilding, hop-picking and notable people. We are also identifying significant, but out-of-copyright, images in the museum archive to add to Wikipedia in the spirit of sharing our cultural heritage openly. If you would like to join us, please contact me at the address below.

secker.jane@gmail.com

Just barrowing a book ...

PETER QUINCE

In the Fleur Bookshop we are accustomed to receiving donations in cardboard boxes, plastic bags, shopping trolleys and even, on the odd occasion, in a basket attached to a mobility scooter – but never, until a few weeks ago, in a wheelbarrow.

Yes, barrows are ideal for transporting modest amounts of unwanted books, something I have only just come to realise. Some books are like bricks anyway, and could support a joist at ceiling height at a pinch, although their original purpose of simply being read is probably, on balance, a better idea.

Just as I was about to leave the bookshop, a man shoved a dusty-looking barrow through the door.

The volunteers on duty were gobsmacked, but the gentleman, unfazed, wheeled the barrow through the middle of the non-fiction section to the office at the back. He had what I think is called chutzpah.

I wonder if the donated books focused on bricklaying, gardening, farming or wheelbarrow-racing (there is such a pastime).

I have walked up and down Preston Street hundreds of times, but I have never yet seen anyone shoving a wheelbarrow along the pavement, not even during the Hop Festival. It would make a change from scooters and skateboards.

FAVERSHAM SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The Faversham Society Newsletter is edited by Stephen Rayner, who is independent of the board.

Contributions are welcomed, and should be received by midday on the 15th of the month before publication, preferably by email to favnewsletter@gmail.com. Views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Faversham Society or of the editor. All contributions will be edited and the editor's decision is final.

Advertising

Clubs, societies, organisations and businesses are encouraged to advertise in the newsletter. The cost is £40 a page (discounts are available for block booking). The minimum boxed ad measures 59mm x 93mm (or equivalent) and costs £10. Cheques should be made payable to the Faversham Society and sent to Jan West at 12 Market Place, Faversham. We also use BACS – ask for details.

Digital edition

Please consider saving the society printing costs by receiving your newsletter by email. Contact membership@favershamsociety.org.

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FAVERSHAM SOCIETY OPENING



The **Visitor Information Centre** and book and gift shop at 12 Market Place, Faversham, is open 10am-4pm Monday to Saturday and 10am-1pm Sunday (opening hours may vary).

info@favershamsociety.org

The **Fleur de Lis museum** at 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, is usually open on Fridays and Saturdays from 11am to 3pm. It is also open on Wednesday, 25 October for half term

The **Fleur de Lis second-hand bookshop** in Preston Street, Faversham, is open 10am-3.30pm, Monday to Saturday.

The **Chart Gunpowder Mills** in Nobel Court, off South Road, Faversham, are open on Saturdays and Sundays from 2pm to 5pm until 29 October and will then close for winter.

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www.favershamsociety.org