

Looking to the future

At a meeting in London on 19 July 1865, at the instigation of the future Lord Eversley, it was decided to found a society to 'organise resistance to the threatened enclosures of commons in the neighbourhood of London'. Some London commons had already been enclosed: Berkhamsted, Plumstead, Tooting and Bostall Heath, for example. Hampstead Heath and others were seriously menaced. If these enclosures had been allowed to remain unchallenged, Lord Eversley was to write some 40 years later, the whole of London commons would undoubtedly have been lost to the public.

In 2015 we shall be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the July 1865 meeting that gave rise to the Commons Preservation Society. Appropriately, we share this anniversary year with the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 and with the foundation of the Women's Institute in 1915. And let us not forget either that next year is the seventieth anniversary of the end of the second world war in 1945. A full programme of joint events for our anniversary is being planned. So far these include an open day at Burseldon, a picnic with the High Wycombe Society, and an event in Burnham Beeches.

This is my last AGM as chairman of the society. It has been a great honour and privilege to serve as your chairman of the past few eventful years.

As the concluding paragraph of the annual report says: 'with a firm grip on our finances, a strong five-year strategic plan in place and the exiting prospect of celebrating our 150th birthday, we can face the future with a degree of confidence that has not always been apparent in previous years'. We are now well-placed to concentrate on what the society does best—campaigning on all the causes about which we care so passionately. Perhaps a dash of organised resistance might help too.

There will be a general election next year. If the society is really going to make an impact in its 150th anniversary year then the manifesto we have drawn up provides a golden opportunity for the society to make its voice heard loud and clear. The ideas we are promoting in this manifesto under the heading 'space close to home' are in my view a crucial part of this manifesto, and it is through the reform of the planning process that I believe we find the key to unlocking some of the problem that have been with us since 1945.

I am just old enough to remember the passing of the ground-breaking 1947 planning act. Indeed it was the radical ambitions of that legislation that excited my lifelong interest in what we used to call town and country planning but which is now more appropriately termed town versus country planning. The financial parts of the 1947 Act, with the complexities of the development charge and the claims on the £300 million fund for loss of development value have long since gone but the remnants of the planning-permission provisions of that act of parliament remain, though they are disappearing fast.

Is it too much to hope that the reforming spirit of the late 1940s can now be reawakened?

Tim Crowther
Chairman
Open Spaces Society
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