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## DISMAY OVER NEAR DOUBLING OF HALL HOUSING PLAN

Controversial plans to almost double the size of the housing scheme at historic Firbeck Hall met strong opposition at an extraordinary meeting of the parish council as FLAG went to press.

The developers, who had previously been granted permission for 33 dwellings on the site, are now asking Rotherham MBC to sanction 62 dwellings - which would see a near 40 per cent increase in the number of households in the village. The parish council say the proposals represent "unsustainable over-development."

MP Alexander Stafford, who attended the meeting, joined with the council in lodging a formal objection to the scheme.

Objectors had until Friday January 15th to make submissions. RMBC's planning board is expected to reach a final decision on the plans in the next few months.

The new application proposes a development catering specifically for over 55s with 22 apartments in the hall itself, seven apartments in the stable block, one large house in the walled garden and 32 apartments in a new block. A pool building, spa and restaurant for residents and their guests is also included in the scheme.

The parish council expressed "dismay" that there had been no public consultation over the new inflated development.

It argues the scheme conflicts with Rotherham's own planning framework - which states that residential development should have good access to shops and services.

Parish councillors also list other issues, such as the lack of good public transport, water supply problems and the potential impact on local businesses and heritage buildings among their objections.

The council also voices concern that no formal agreement has been reached for a new public footpath to access the site.



*Letwell youngster Sam Hall thought he was going to die....but sky diving from a light aircraft at 15,000 feet turned out to be adventure of a lifetime!! Read more about Sam's exploit inside the latest issue of FLAG.*

## FALLING FROM THE CLOUDS

On 11th September my dad and I set off on our sky diving adventure, 15,000 feet, how hard could it be? It was with great apprehension that we set off and it was fair to say that I was scared (I honestly thought I was going to die). We arrived at the centre in Hibaldstow, kitted up, had a pretty brief safety demo (not the 5 hour intensive prep I anticipated!) and headed out to board the plane. So, courage plucked up, we made the short bus journey to the runway only to be told when we arrived at the plane that the wind speed had increased materially and the skydivers who had just dived were landing miles away from where they were supposed to. Needless to say, that this didn't particularly help my already shaking legs, sweaty hands and feeling of nausea!

An hour later when the wind had died down (the windsocks were still flying horizontally but then again what did I know!) we set off again to the plane. We were first on the plane as we were the last to jump, another slightly worrying development! The only crumb of comfort was that I was jumping before my dad who gets vertigo on a step ladder never mind 15,000 feet above sea level.

The plane finally set off and during the journey our tandem partners attached themselves to us making me feel a little more at ease. Watching the ground getting further and further away, moving past the clouds and then the doors opening at 10,000 feet with the cold air rushing in to allow the few less brave souls than us jump out soon put my nerves on edge again.

Then, it was our turn to jump. I sat on the edge of the plane, wrapped my legs under the fuselage and before I could process what was happening my partner had already thrown me off and we were free falling. It took less than a minute to fall 10,000ft. then the parachute was pulled for the final 5,000 feet and the exhilaration you feel for the rest of the descent is impossible to describe – its an experience of a lifetime and one that I'll never forget.



## STOP BATTERING THE HEDGES

The roadside hedges in and around Firbeck have recently suffered their annual destructive battering from mechanised flails. In the tractors wake remains a trail of bare and shattered branches distributing macerated debris across the road including broken twigs displaying sharp hawthorn spikes to puncture passing cycle tyres [wheelchairs], and vulnerable dog paws. There are alternatives to this brutal but cheap control of a natural growth in our countryside.

The laying of hedges is a historically proven craft which produces an attractive stock-proof boundary. It encourages controlled growth, a safe and protective habitat for all manner of wildlife, which repays in balanced, sustainable agricultural 'pest' control. It ensures water retention and is carbon beneficial – a significant aid to dealing with the increasingly energized weather system from climate change. Any hedge 'waste' is used to further reinforce the infra-structure, not cast across the tarmac or burned on a fire.

Hedge laying is a craft skill, training courses are available which could increase the 'Green Jobs' we so urgently need. It clearly costs more than the diesel fuelled flails which race to diminish our environmental heritage and the treatment lasts for many years resulting in a landscape manicured to benefit us all.

I have enjoyed the resurgence of active transport. There are many more pollution free individuals, families and more serious pelotons travelling through our village. People are regaining the freedom and joy of our countryside while I personally gain the mobility of a wheelchair, hopefully without too many thorns puncturing our tyres again!

Ian Barkley



## DAVID WRIGHT'S POPULAR NATURE REPORT...

I'll begin by being controversial. When I was a kid, the loudest firework you could buy in a shop was a threepenny Canon. Today you can buy fireworks that sound like bombs. In 2020 there were loud explosions in Firbeck for several consecutive nights and again one night later in the month. It can't be good for pets, and it's definitely bad for the local wildlife for which the local environment is a haven. Let's hope our pets and wildlife have a less stressful November this year.



*Brown Hare*

Having got that off my chest, it's good to receive regular reports of Red Kite on our local patch. I'm pleased to report a Little Egret which flew over my back garden on New Year's Eve. I'm also very pleased to report a visit to a local site in the Firbeck area on New Year's Day which produced seven drake Mallard and three ducks, a considerable improvement over recent times.

But I'm really delighted to report a sighting of a number of Brown Hares on 2nd January. It was late in the afternoon as the light was fading that I decided to take a walk. The animals showed up well against the snow-covered ground. There were five active and possibly a sixth resting.

The Brown Hare is thought to have been introduced into the UK in Roman times, or even earlier. It is most common in grassland and at woodland edges, favouring arable fields, grasses and hedgerows. It grazes on vegetation and the bark of young trees and bushes. The hares don't dig burrows, but rest in 'forms', which are shallow depressions in the ground or grass. When disturbed they can be seen bounding across the fields, using their powerful hind legs to propel them forwards, often in a zigzag pattern. They're at their most visible in early spring when the breeding season encourages fighting or 'boxing'. If you see them boxing it's most likely you're watching a female warding off the advances of an amorous male, not two males fighting. In a fight the two hares stand on their hind legs and attack each other with their front paws, pulling out fur. This gives the impression of two boxers in a ring. Females can produce three to four litters of two to four young (known as leverets) a year. The lifespan of the Brown Hare is usually 3-4 years. Unfortunately, like so many other species in the UK, it's on a significant decline and is said to be locally extinct in some areas.

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## FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

Activity at Firbeck Hall is at a virtual standstill awaiting approval of Planning Applications in respect of the changed interior layouts of both the Hall and stable block and the proposed apartment block which replaces the original individual houses. The changes represent the revised designation of Firbeck Hall into residences for the over 55s, complete with bar, restaurant, bistro, gym and pool.



*New Fence Firbeck Hall,  
Saturday 2nd January 2021*

With the roof completed and windows and floors fitted, the stoppage is at least occurring at probably the best time, with regard to mid winter weather and also the current Covid 19 National Shutdown.

Since our last report there has been considerable landscaping around both the Hall and pools with removal of the many self-set trees and bushes. Also some dredging of the heavily silted lakes. The most recent activity has been the erection of fencing along the New Road boundary.

Anticipated date for full completion of the project is August or September when we can hope to see activity restored once again to Firbeck Hall after some 30 years when it's busy days as a hospital and rehabilitation centre ended.

Sid Ellis.

## UPDATE FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WI

Happy New Year!!

Well, we're now in another lockdown, and of course we cannot have any meetings until it is safe for us all. Hopefully, that will probably be about April/May time, but that depends on whether restrictions are lifted by the government. When we do resume normal service, information of this year's programme will be announced.

It is our Institute's 75th Anniversary this year and it would be wonderful to be able to celebrate it in the summer so let's hope we can. I think everyone will be ready to have a party by then.

As ever, our members are still keeping in contact and supporting each other and being active with their various hobbies e.g.. quilting, knitting, walking and yoga.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Secretary on 01909 540751 if you would like more information.

Janice Pritchard

## THERE'S GOLD IN THEM THERE LETWELL HILLS....

Letwell's ace metal detectorist Christina Warr has been talking to FLAG about the ups and downs of her favourite hobby..

One thing led to another when Christina decided to explore the earth cleared from a farm ditch by Bert Hollingworth.

First she found a little black packet, and when she opened it Christina could see the faintest glint of gold. "I thought it was going to be a great find, but it turned into a Pirates of a Caribbean coin and a 1/2 win bingo token.

"Quite close by came a blue pot.

"This was sellotaped up, I opened it to find the chocolate coins. Not quite the gold I was hoping for.

"We did think it might be a child's game looking for hidden treasure which had been forgotten. Either that or someone having a joke!.

It hasn't put me off ...just left a few people chuckling!"

Since then Christina has found a silver Russian coin dating back to the time of Ivan The Terrible.

As Christina says. "How did this arrive in Letwell as it's almost 500 years old..."



## IS THAT DONALD TRUMP?

Here's an unlikely image.....Donald Trump, or at least a stuffed effigy of the ex President, preparing to do a spot of grass cutting at Letwell's Gally Knight estate.

The effigy - produced by some of the residents prior to November the Fifth - ended up on the communal bonfire.

One of the by-standers told FLAG: "Donald went up like a house on fire...."



## THE GALLY KNIGHT BONFIRE



## FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL - STILL ZOOMING ....

With Tier/lockdown measures still in place the Parish Council continues to meet virtually with our most recent meeting having taken place on the 25th November 2020. We were pleased to welcome our local MP Alexander Stafford and a good number of residents to that meeting. Minutes of our meetings are made available on our website where you can see what decisions were taken at the meeting so I won't repeat what can be read there in this article.

**Firbeck Hall However,** I just want to make reference to the issue that excited the most interest and discussion at the meeting. That was the new planning applications for the further re development of Firbeck Hall. As no public consultation was undertaken by the developers regarding these new plans, the Parish Council has been making every effort to ensure that residents are made aware of what is proposed. Had these been normal times we would have organised a public meeting ourselves. We have succeeded in obtaining an extension to the consultation period (and hope to get a further extension still in view of the fact that we are now in lockdown) allowing us more time to collate views from residents. We need to impress upon people wishing to comment on the applications that they need to file their comments on the RMBC planning portal IN ADDITION to sending their views to us. At the time of writing we have called an extraordinary meeting to decide upon the Parish Council response to the applications and we will of course endeavour to take into account all comments made to us in so doing.

**Oh Christmas tree, oh Christmas tree...** Well Christmas celebrations were a bit different this year weren't they? However, the village looked very festive as we all made the best of it and what a delight it was to see the lights and decorations in so many gardens - especially at dusk - it quite lifted the spirits. Thanks to everyone who brightened up our lives in this way and in particular thanks to the representatives of our local groups (Bowling, WI, YCA, FOFH, the Village Hall Committee and businesses (The Black Lion & Sue Pepper), St, Martins and St Peter's churches for each decorating so beautifully a tree in the churchyard; to Julie and Brian Dunker, John Colver and Bert Hollingworth for their assistance with erection, decoration and disposal of the big tree; and to everyone who contributed to Cllr Jo Pittard's star initiative with the Christmas star decorating. (PS - should you wish to recover your star Jo will leave them out in a waterproof box outside No 77 New Road until 24th January. What are not collected will be stored for re use next year.)

**Coping with lockdown?** We seem to be taking lockdown 3 in our stride here in the village and to date it has not proved necessary to reinstate system for delivering food. However, if anyone needs any help with obtaining provisions etc please do let me know

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# FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL - STILL ZOOMING ....

## Tweet tweet?

To widen our channels of communication with residents we plan on being on Twitter before long so watch out for further information on that. In the meantime we make extensive use of firbeckonline and the firbeck community facebook page in our efforts to keep everyone up to speed on our work.

Do please remember that residents as members of the public can join our virtual these meetings to observe and we have retained the opportunity for you to speak to us about any item on the agenda before the councillors's discussions commence. Please check postings on our own website, Firbeckonline and the village notice board for details of the agenda for a meeting.

Stay safe everyone

Cllr. Caroline Jopling

NOTE; THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL



## PERSONAL SERVICE - FROM THE POLICE

One Letwell family had a surprise visit from South Yorkshire Police...and they were pleased to be dropped on.

After national reports of so-called keyless cars being stolen by thieves who clone the owner's key by using a radio searching device, Letwell resident Roger Brooks sought advice from the local constabulary about the best ways of preventing such thefts.

After being given what he described as 'a bit of a technological run-around' on various phone lines and online sites, he abandoned hope of getting anywhere, but his message obviously got through somehow.

Two days after launching his enquiries, two PCs arrived to advise him, AND present him with a 'signal proof' wallet in which to keep his keys.

'I was surprised and very pleased,' said our man with a plan.

'I know car thieves can use readily-available radio devices to lift the keyless car codes, even through walls and doors, but I didn't realise how widespread this crime was.

'Although I already followed the general advice to keep such keys in a metal box away from the house door, I didn't realise something else the police told me.

'Apparently the biggest threat is when you're out in your car at, say, a supermarket car park, and the crooks can follow you and lift off the signal while you're shopping.'

So the police gave Roger a radio-proof pouch to help thwart any attempt to snatch his code.

Lucky man...



*Roger's Radio-proof Key Pouch*

## STOP BY THE PHONE BOX

There's a new item on sale at Letwell's red telephone box.

As well as the books and the eggs there's now a collection of hand-carved door stops available to purchase at just £2 a time.

All the proceeds are going to Bluebell Wood hospice....so there's nothing to stop you - sorry about the pun!! - if you want to give more.

The food bank is still operating. Villagers are being urged to leave donations on the floor inside the kiosk.

## THE FLAG'S FLYING AGAIN

A specialist firm have been called in to repair the mechanism of the Letwell flagpole.

The glitch meant that the pole had to be lowered - blocking the road - each time there was a problem with the flag.

Normal service has now, thankfully, been restored with the Yorkshire flag flying proudly.

## 30 TYRES APPEAR OUT OF THE BLUE

The morons who dump who fly-tip seem as busy as ever - Covid 19 or not.

The number of beer cans and bottles piling up on our rural street verges both at Firbeck and Letwell has reached epidemic levels. And yet nobody ever witnesses the culprits at work and nobody ever gets caught!!

Villagers are be applauded at Letwell for clearing the Ramper of debris on a regular basis.

The latest bulk item to arrive by the side of Lamb Lane on the way to Penny Hill, took some moving however,

Streetpride had to be called in after 30 truck tyres appeared out of the blue.



## TWIGLET'S PERKY NOW

Twiglet, the giant pot bellied pig, is back at Letwell after a disastrous re-homing experience.

The 30 stone porker - who had been living at a first floor flat at Dinnington for two years before being saved by staff at the Peppersfield animal rescue centre - was all set to start life afresh at a petting zoo at Penrith in Cumbria.

The chance arose after one of the zoo's two pigs - a female called Pinky - died.

Unfortunately, the other resident pig, called Perky, took an instant dislike to Twiglet.

Louise at Peppersfield explained to FLAG: "It wasn't Twiglet's fault...Perky was like a pig with ADHD.

"She was nipping Twiglet all the time, and just wouldn't leave her alone. The poor thing couldn't settle at all.

"In the end the zoo felt it'd be better if Twiglet came back to Letwell.

"Twiglet was delighted to be back. She walked straight back into the stables, and flicked open all the doors which had always been one of her habits.

"She's really happy. She's even lost some weight, and you can see her middle now."

