KEY WEYBRIDGE PROJECTS
SECURE EBC AND SCC APPROVAL

Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) and Surrey County Council (SCC) have approved and begun work on a few major projects designed to improve traffic and public services in Weybridge, marking a victory for the Weybridge Society which has long championed several of these schemes.

WRAP Success - One Public Estate Funding Granted

In a huge success for the Society, local councillors and Weybridge as a whole, the Government’s One Public Estate Fund has awarded £100,000 to EBC to work up plans for the rebuild, advancement and integration of Weybridge’s health and other services.

The award means EBC now has the financial backing to work closely with colleagues from NHS property, Surrey County Council and NHS’s North Surrey Clinical Commissioning Group to progress through feasibility and options studies as to how these authorities can best use their three town centre sites to achieve health, community and social care requirements, alongside any wider ambitions such as increased parking and/or affordable housing. The feasibility study should get underway in the next few months of 2019.

The award follows a meeting organised by Surrey County Councillor Tim Oliver with the Weybridge Society and Weybridge Town Business Group, after which SCC applied for funding of up to £150,000 to One Public Estate to assess options and feasibility on a single masterplan vision for the centre of Weybridge.

Since 2017 in the aftermath of the fire that destroyed Weybridge’s heath centre, (article continues p. 2)
the Society has pushed councillors to take on board the Society’s Weybridge Rebuild and Advance Project (WRAP), a concept plan to regard Weybridge holistically as one integrated town centre rather than separate sites needing piecemeal upgrades.

Oliver, who had a big hand in securing the One Public Estate funding for Weybridge, said that a committee formed from members representing the One Public Estate, SCC and EBC would be in charge of distributing funds and overseeing the project but that input from a WRAP steering committee would be very welcome.

Weybridge Hall
Despite work by EBC to move ahead with plans for a cinema in Weybridge Hall, initial discussions have failed to produce results, as courted cinema operators so far remain reluctant to invest.

EBC will continue to work to try and find a suitable operator, as this venture would bring more footfall to that end of the High Street. All further plans for refurbishing and repurposing the hall are progressing as planned, including the creation of a number of flats on the upper floors.

The Society had hoped this project would be commercially viable and supported EBC efforts to revive the Hall as a cinema, not least because it would have provided continuity to Weybridge history. (see previous newsletter, winter 2017-18, p. 4, Weybridge Hall: Back to the Future? for the fascinating life story of Weybridge Hall as a cinema).

Weybridge Hall could now fall within the parameters of the broader Weybridge Rebuild and Advance Project (WRAP) which envisions bringing services from various authorities together in the town centre. Residents are asked to give the Weybridge Society and the council feedback on alternatives for development of this important town centre site.

Brooklands Business Park Accessibility
The EBC has secured £2,172,000 from the M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), a government funded body that invests in infrastructure support, to deliver sustainable transport improvements between Brooklands Business Park, Weybridge train station and Weybridge town centre, including a new cycle and pedestrian lane. The scheme also includes the resurfacing of the top end of St Georges Avenue.

The fully scoped, total project budget is £2,896,000, with additional funding coming from local contributions from EBC and SCC. All of this funding is now confirmed as EBC’s Cabinet approved £625,000 in EBC Strategic CIL funding on 13th February 2019.

Surrey Highways are now working to put in place the final legal agreements and cycle track orders for this project, with a view to start delivering on the project from April this year. Updates on this project, along with details of routes, are available on the Surrey Highways webpage at https://www.enterprisem3.org.uk/content/brooklands-business-park-accessibility

Wider Brooklands Traffic Patterns Study
Surrey Highways has undertaken preparatory work for the evidence-gathering phase of a traffic study of the wider Brooklands area, with a view to better understanding the origin, destinations and movements of commuters and residents across Brooklands and Weybridge.

A working committee has drafted three surveys for residents, consumers and employees and sought and received approval from the Woking local committee to
include residential areas on the Woking side of the border in the study, in order to get a better picture of all three user groups.

**Weybridge Streetscape**

On 25th March, Councillors approved £128,000 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for the Weybridge Streetscape project. This town centre scheme aims to improve pavements and create a market place on the high street outside Waitrose and shops adjacent.

As pre-construction work was nearly complete ahead of the 25th March meeting, Councillors were able to accurately assess this project and decided to proceed. Next steps include agreeing a final price and appointing a contractor. The project should then move to construction phase, with works estimated at 16 weeks with a likely six-to-eight-week lead-in time, subject to contractor feedback.

The Weybridge Town Business Group, with support from the Weybridge Society, has been working on the Streetscape project since 2016.

**Surrey Highways**

**Weybridge High Street study**

The Elmbridge Local Committee has given the green light for the Weybridge High Street Study, which will hopefully work alongside and build on the wider Brooklands evidence base (see item Wider Brooklands Traffic Study above) to look at the flow of traffic through the town centre.

‘The point of this study is to understand the movement of people,’ said Oliver. ‘Is the traffic composed of people commuting to work or is it residents driving around or are people seeking parking?’

‘The study will be looking at roundabouts and traffic lights, the configurations and timings, as well as pedestrian crossings and car turning points,’ said Oliver, mentioning even the possibility of instituting partial one-way traffic in places like Baker Street.

No date has yet been set by Surrey Highways, but the project should start in the financial year 2019-20. Highways will welcome local feedback and further information on the scope of the project will be provided via Society emails as soon as it becomes available.

**Future High Street Fund**

In March EBC entered a £200,000 bid with the government’s Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) to improve Weybridge’s high street. The FHSF recently opened for local authorities to seek co-funding towards capital projects that bring transformative change to their high streets, with the government expecting bids between £5 million and £10 million.

The FHSF is looking for applications that support the regeneration of town centres through innovative proposals around transport, housing delivery and public services. As a town, Weybridge demonstrates a range of challenges: housing affordability, a changing local demographic, the need to attract and retain leading international businesses, and a range of projects across the town centre such as housing, sustainable transport, regeneration and services transformation.

If granted, EBC hopes to spend the £200,000 on strategy, further feasibility work to assess the potential for further regeneration of EBC owned properties, and to support the second phase in business case development and £7 million in capital funding for the implementation of Streetscape (see above.) Monies would also go to updating properties in EBC ownership for transformation into affordable housing.

The request for £200,000 is matched by
£5.6 million in agreed projects that the EBC already has underway or has planned in the town centre to transform the town into an economic, social and community hub. Surrey County Councillor for Weybridge Tim Oliver has also written to the government in support of EBC’s bid.

EBC hopes the programme and vision will meet the government’s criteria for bids helping town centres develop beyond purely retail offerings. Retailers are reminded that Elmbridge Borough Council also has a Civic Improvement fund which offers grants to improve or renovate shop fronts as well as supporting start-up businesses with advice and training.

**Social Housing**

EBC has set up a housing company, EBC Homes Ltd, with the intention of buying or building flats to rent for social housing and council income and completed a £17 million purchase of 37,551 square feet of property in central Weybridge.

The move comes amid a growing need for affordable housing in expensively priced towns like Weybridge, even as developers are reluctant to build such housing, preferring to invest in luxury flats, retirement homes and townhouses. EBC councillors agreed that the only way to tackle reduced housing stock for lower income residents in the area was to build up supply owned by EBC, which would also enable the council to ensure a revenue stream as government funding to local authorities continues to fall.

At a cabinet meeting on 10th January, councillors agreed to set up the housing company owned by the council and set aside £200,000 to finance the project. The company is to work closely with social housing providers in the hope that Elmbridge can accelerate building up a stock of one and two-bedroom properties that can then be rented out to residents at an affordable level.

The first EBC Homes Ltd purchase, in Weybridge, from Brunswick Real Estate, comprised a freehold estate of retail and office holdings and 37 residential flats above the commercial buildings, 16 of which will be made available to local people on modest incomes. The site is located at the bend of Bridge Road and Heath Roads, opposite the Queens Head pub: Church Street Parade (including Bedford & Avon Court), Quadrant Courtyard, Bridge Road Apartments, Barnet House and Priory Chambers.

**SOCIETY COMPLAINS TO COUNCIL**

**NEW CHARGING HOURS IN CAR PARKS**

The Weybridge Society has written to Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) querying its move to extend charging hours at its town car parks and requesting consideration of a 20-minute drop-off time to accommodate parents dropping off children to nurseries and schools.

The Society letter queried the logic of extending the charging period by one hour in the evenings because of its likely detrimental effect on Weybridge’s restaurants, which often promote meal offers before 7 pm. The impact would likely be felt by St James Church and other community centres too, as activities there take place in the early evening as well.

The Society’s correspondence follows a move by EBC in early December to raise
fees by 10 p per hour for the first two hours and 20 p per hour for the third and fourth and to extend charging hours from 8 am to 7 pm at its town car parks. Previously the charging hours were from 9 am to 6 pm.

On 20th February, in his letter to EBC, Society Chairman Dave Arnold wrote: ‘The council made this decision solely in an attempt to increase revenue for itself and failed to understand the negative impact this would have on our residents and businesses alike.’

At its 5th December meeting the Council moved to raise fees citing the need for more income. In previous years increases have been in line with inflation, but this time the structure of parking charges was modified to influence how and why car parking was used. The aim was to balance the often-competing needs of shoppers, workers, visitors and commuters.

But EBC’s move quickly prompted a public outcry as parents found themselves penalised for dropping off children to school and nurseries. The need to purchase a parking ticket creates a significant burden to parents, and importantly, poses a safety risk to young children who may be left unattended as parents seek to pay for parking at the machines. This point was emphasised by the Society in its letter to EBC.

The EBC has since stated that discussions are taking place with the nursery and that it hopes to resolve this problem. The Council also stated that there is an on-going review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding car parking charges.

‘The Society understands that most Councils are cash strapped and are having to take measures to increase their revenues,’ Arnold pointed out in his letter. ‘It is marginally possible that as a result of these increases you might see a very slight short term rise in revenue, but it is far more likely that more people will become minded to just stay away from our town centre, thus not just reducing the council’s anticipated revenue but also damaging the viability of our local hard-working traders.’

The Society continues to ask EBC for a complete analysis of the increased parking revenue against the loss of business in the town over the next three months, in particular referencing the changes to evening charges.

SERIOUS BLOW TO TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENT
BRIDGE HOUSE REDEVELOPMENT APPROVED

Long term plans to improve Weybridge’s street scene around Monument Green and make the town centre more attractive for visitors, residents and investors, took a serious blow on 4th March when the South Area Planning Committee granted planning permission for a block of 28 flats on the site of Bridge House at 41-45 High Street opposite Waitrose. (Planning
The proposed design of the Bridge House redevelopment is far too massive and acutely unsympathetic to its environment, as pointed out in 17 public objections, as well as letters from the Weybridge Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) and the Society. Three Elmbridge Borough councillors (two from Riverside Ward) were also highly critical and opposed the proposal, but their views and concerns were dismissed and outvoted by five of the committee members, four of whom represent wards outside of Weybridge.

Copyright considerations mean we cannot reproduce the street scenes that were produced to support the application, but they can be accessed from the EBC website via http://edocs.elmbridge.gov.uk/IAM/IAMCache/3193195/3193195.pdf. These scenes clearly show how incongruous the design is to its surroundings both in style and its overbearing presence.

In a letter to councillors, the CAAC emphasized: 'It is not possible for us to understand that ... the officer can indicate that it is acceptable to introduce a five-storey building just because the 5th storey is set slightly back (1.5m) and constructed using some glass. It should be obvious that looking into and from the Conservation Area (also towards the Grade II listed St. James’ Church) the eye would simply see a new five-storey building sticking out in the middle of the two and three storey buildings. We consider that this is clearly out of character with the area, and the impact should not have been dismissed by the planning officer.'

Moreover, and making matters worse, the Committee accepted the applicant’s assertions without question that only 17 car spaces were required for the 28 flats in spite of current EBC standard requirement of 32, that is, just over 50%. This decision can only add to the high parking stress already being experienced in the area.

Whilst the Society accepts that Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) is under pressure to provide more dwellings in the area, it is imperative that it does so whilst protecting and enhancing the current environment – as clearly stated in its own planning requirements. In this case, EBC has failed to uphold its own rules, and critically for a key site in a high street that is crying out for improvement in order to re-invigorate businesses, it has lessened the chances for long term improvements.

The site, which was undeniably already massive and unattractive and could have used an improvement, forms part of the gateway into Weybridge and is visually important as one enters and leaves the town centre. The site is also directly opposite the planned Streetscape improvement programme, which is soon to be implemented at a cost of nearly half a million pounds, and which envisions better pavements that can be used as a market area in the hopes of attracting visitors and commerce.

The Weybridge Society maintains that this decision to grant planning approval for a building which is out of place to its setting is a serious setback for any future programme to enhance the environment of the eastern end of Weybridge High Street.

Among other concerned local councillors, Weybridge’s Surrey County Councillor Tim Oliver, also has repeatedly spoken of the need for a town centre that brings in more visitors, businesses and residents into eating, dining, shopping and other activities.

Following the Bridge House approval,
Oliver said: ‘It is disappointing that planning permission was granted for this particular development, but following an officer recommendation to approve, the majority of the planning committee didn’t believe that any refusal would be upheld on appeal. This reinforces the need to have a robust local plan that reflects the character and nature of the towns within Elmbridge and indeed greater recognition of the heritage of Weybridge by architects and developers when designing buildings. They should enhance the look and feel of the town rather than detract from it.’

While there have been discussions of launching a ‘Neighbourhood Plan’ championed by the Society – and a Local Plan is even currently being developed by EBC and should go to consultation in summer 2019 – it is unclear how long it will take to finalise such plans. In theory, these kinds of broad local development plans could shape how planning committee decisions would be made, but at the moment, there is no mechanism for dealing with capitulations at the planning committee stage that allow for piecemeal developments such as Bridge House to undercut a vision of a better future Weybridge.

A community-generated and Society led Neighbourhood Plan would envision that works in and around Weybridge take as their central departing point important considerations such as parking, traffic, and impact on the look of the town, and that they target both private building developments and public facilities.
A CHAT WITH TIM OLIVER
NEW LEADER OF SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

In his 18 months on the job, it’s been a whirlwind for Councillor Tim Oliver. Elected in May 2017 as Surrey County Councillor for Weybridge, Oliver already held a post as an Elmbridge Councillor for Esher, where he lives. Soon he was appointed leader of Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC), a post he recently stepped away from in order to take up an appointment as the new leader of Surrey County Council (SCC).

The Society caught up with Oliver at his Kingston offices to learn about his new role and what he hopes to achieve in the future.

WeySoc: As detailed in our front-page story in this issue, a lot of progress has been made recently on multiple improvement projects for Weybridge both at EBC and SCC – such great news!

Oliver: Yes, I’m very pleased that all of these projects are now moving forward. Over the last year at EBC, in addition to what’s been mentioned, I secured £500,000 for improvements at Brooklands College, £300,000 for Heathside School to replace end of life portacabins, and about £80,000 for signage and road safety features for the Triangle area bordered by Queens Road and Hanger Hill. At SCC I have also pushed for Seven Hills Road and Haines Bridge to be resurfaced, while the top of St George’s Avenue will be done in the first stage of the cycle path scheme. So, 18 months in, things are beginning to move!

WeySoc: Actually, that’s more than just a beginning, quite a lot has been done. It seems like a new momentum has been gained. What was the hold-up before? Or are there new funds available?

Oliver: I think it’s a case of my predecessors not having accessed the funds as I have. In my dual capacity as a Borough and County councillor, I better understand how everything works and how to drive forward various agendas. Weybridge had felt unloved for many years, and I wanted to access funds for improvements, whether that’s Streetscape from CIL funds or resurfacing roads from funds at Surrey Highways. Being a cabinet member at SCC has helped in terms of navigating the system. Part of the success undeniably has been knowing where to go and how to do it.

WeySoc: We’re certainly feeling a bit more loved at the moment, so many projects on the go. Apart from those areas mentioned, what would you like to see happen in the short-term for Weybridge?

Oliver: The biggest piece of work is to get resident buy-in for a master plan for the town centre. What is going to make Weybridge better? What will make for a better experience for residents and visitors? Partly it’s roads and parking and better buildings and facilities. But we need to lay out a plan of what is it that Weybridge needs and wants. At the moment, we’re
trying to meet several needs at once. One is the need to be able to travel around town easily, so we need to look at better traffic flow and more parking. Another is to make Weybridge a go-to destination in terms of shops and public facilities. How do we maximise that around a new town centre site and make something special and make it the centre of the community?

In the short term we’ve got the rebuild of the NHS services and several other key provisions. We haven’t got all the details or answers yet, but that’s what many of the studies are for. For my part, I want to position myself as an enabler. My role is about community engagement – to help deliver what people want on every level, from the kind of facilities to how they look.

WeySoc: Not everything is going to plan though. It’s disappointing that the cinema project is struggling at the moment. Obviously, anything put there has to be commercially viable. What incentives have EBC provided, and what is the reason for the operators’ reluctance to take on the project?

Oliver: EBC have bent over backwards to support a cinema operator. The Council even agreed to help with fit-out costs and soundproofing the flats above. But the operators don’t think there’ll be sufficient footfall. EBC was looking at bespoke operators like Everyman, but cinema operators think the market is split between Esher and Walton and Addlestone. There isn’t a plan B at the moment, but ideally some other public or leisure facility will be fit in there. Certainly, Weybridge Hall could fall within the parameters of the broader Weybridge Rebuild and Advance Project (WRAP) which envisions bringing services from various authorities together in the town centre. I’d be happy to hear from residents what they think we could or should do.

WeySoc: What are your long-term goals for the Weybridge area?

Oliver: Long term, if we can talk about 10 years, we need to develop a strong local plan. The vision is for a vibrant High Street with good mix of shops, a go-to town with the attraction of the river, good facilities. We don’t want Weybridge to lose its identity, so it needs to look attractive, and planning needs to be consistent. Buildings that need to be replaced should be replaced with something appropriate. What we don’t want is to see a nice road of single dwellings replaced with unsightly blocks of flats.

Already the Local Plan for EBC is coming out in summer and that will be identifying areas for development and what is suitable. EBC needs to have that firmly set out. There will be an opportunity for the Society to lead a response to public consultation in summer.

WeySoc: In that respect, just losing Bridge House to an even worse design is a bit of disaster for making the town more attractive in the long term!

Oliver: That was disappointing, and as I’ve said elsewhere commenting on this case, this reinforces the need to have a robust local plan that reflects the character and nature of towns within Elmbridge and greater recognition of the heritage of Weybridge by architects and developers when designing buildings. They should enhance the look and feel of the town rather than detract from it.

WeySoc: What are your plans now in your new role at Surrey County Council?
Oliver: As leader of SCC, I’m clear that we first need to get the county into a better financial state so that it can deliver key services. We have ever increasing demand from our adult population in terms of social care, as well as growing numbers of children and adults with special education needs and disabilities. We need to support those people to the best of our ability, as well as deliver good quality education in our schools, repair our roads and keep people healthy.

Second, we are in the middle of a significant transformation programme focused on better ways of working and better outcomes for residents. Part of that change will be forging closer relationships with district and borough councils, as well as charity, volunteer and faith organisations who are key partners in the community. We’ll also see the County Council leave Kingston and relocate its staff and administrative functions into existing buildings in the county so as to be closer to residents. That will happen over the next 12 months.

WeySoc: You got into politics because you wanted to make a difference locally, first in Esher and then more widely. What motivates you when you have setbacks?

Oliver: We all face setbacks in our lives, whether personal, professional or political, but I firmly believe that once we have set ourselves clear goals and ambitions, we must try our hardest to achieve them. This isn’t always easy, so it’s important to remain focused and keep trying. Sometimes it may be that we need to compromise, and sometimes we will need to be patient, but we should never give up too easily either in the face of criticism or opposition if we truly believe something is the right thing to do.

Being a local politician can be very challenging at times, both in terms of managing residents’ expectations and navigating your way around the system. But determination, commitment and a sense of humour helps me get through those darker days!

**SUMMER GARDEN PARTY**
**SUNDAY 7th JULY 2019**

1 pm – 4 pm

Come and join us for this year’s Summer Party at ‘Splash’ in Wey Meadows, the residence of Committee Member Anne Lindsay and her husband Ray. For more than a decade, Anne and Ray have kindly hosted this popular annual event, with outdoor buffet and raffle in their idyllic riverside garden, so don’t miss out on the Society’s best social!

All members welcome, as well as guests and those interested in joining the Society. Turnout is always fantastic so don’t be left out. Apply today for your tickets, application form enclosed with this newsletter or go to the Society’s website www.weybridgesociety.org.uk

Members and Children 11 and over £10 each
Children 10 and under £5 each
Guests (non-members) £12 each

Any questions please contact Margaret Wicks via midgewicks@btinternet.com
PLANNING UPDATE

The following information is summarised from the Weybridge Society’s Planning Panel’s records and actions taken at our regular meetings. Developments are listed in order from the longest running concerns to the most recent applications to Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC). We endeavour to make this update a true representation of the panel’s opinion and our actions and plans concerning local developments. This list is up to date at the time of writing, but for the latest and most accurate changes to planning, please consult EBC or our website at weybridgesociety.org.uk, where you can also check the planning update in previous newsletters for more background and history on individual cases.

2016/1448 - Monument View, Monument Hill. The Society will continue to press Surrey County Council for a solution to dangers posed to pedestrians crossing this junction of the top of Baker Street and Monument Hill. These apartments are now all sold.

2017/0196, 2017/0953, 2018/3154 - Arbrook Farm, Walton Lane. In this longstanding development dispute about fencing, gates and wall, five objections have been lodged against the latest application, which will be decided by the planning committee.

2017/1681 - Locke King House, 2 Balfour Road. An application to demolish this historic building and replace it with 10 flats was rejected in a long and gruelling process (see previous newsletter, winter 2019 issue, p. 7, Locke King House Development Defeated). The applicant has now appealed to the Inspectorate, and the Weybridge Society will be taking further action.

2017/2086 and 2018/1557 - 17 High Pine Close. Both applications for this site are for a detached two-storey house with rooms in the roof space and detached garage in the rear garden. The Elmbridge Planning Officer again refused this application, following 40 objections to a development that still has no proper access (including for bins) and which currently proposes using what is effectively a public footpath. This application is again on appeal.

2017/2710, 2017/2873 and 2019/0187 - Warehouse, 47 Thames Street. The Weybridge Society continues to support residents who are concerned about the dangers from asbestos dust, as the method statements for its removal seem to be problematic. The applicant has recently run out of time to convert the warehouse to residential purposes and has now reapplied. The Society’s planning panel believes the original change of use should not have been permitted, so again we are arguing the case that conditions for change of use are still not valid.

2018/0083 and 2018/2206 - Wyevale Garden Centre, and Whitely Village’s 60 alms houses & a 40-unit care facility (2016/3471). These potential
developments are thought to have implications for Seven Hills Road, as well as being a precedent for development in green belt. The application for Whitely Village was taken to appeal and lost. The Wyevale Garden Centre case has not yet progressed. The rejections of these two cases so far have been positive outcomes, as the Society hopes that stopping such expansion into green areas will stem the ‘slippery slope’ of developing all along the Seven Hills Road.

2018/0905 and 2018/0907 - 18 Springfield Lane, five-storey building. This site, critical to town centre density and parking issues, has had two near identical applications. The one with the largest number of objections (0907) has been withdrawn, but no further progress has been made by Elmbridge to bring this matter to conclusion. An officer’s report recommending refusal is to be considered by the local planning committee but with no proposed date. Please see alternative application 2018/3635, next.

2018/3635 - 18 Springfield Lane, four-storey building. In a case that is hugely important for Weybridge town centre and all residents (packing in more residents and creating major overlooking and new parking problems), this new application for the Springfield Lane site was being decided as the newsletter went to press. Despite 50 objections, the officer recommended approval ahead of a planning meeting on 1st April.

This application is nearly identical to the previous one with the top setback storey removed. Prior to demolition, the site, which is wedged between Baker Street and the High Street and houses the Weybridge Services & Social Club, was predominantly a single storey building with a small area of first floor accommodation and about 12 parking spaces at the front.

In a shocking move that would massively increase density, the current outline application envisions 20 dwellings in a four-storey block of modern design and materials, with only 16 parking spaces to be provided. A previous application (2016/2803) – to which the Society did not object and which had been approved – had planned for a terrace of four two-storey houses, a terrace of three two-storey houses and a detached building for two flats. In the wake of receiving approval for this, the developer upped the ante and decided to make the development much bigger.

The Society is supporting the very many residents and businesses that have already objected to all these applications. The principal grounds for objection include height, mass, impact on existing dwellings in Springfield Lane and Monument Green,
inadequate parking causing parking stress elsewhere in and around the town centre, a design wholly out of character with the immediate area, and a negative impact on the adjacent Conservation area.

2018/0200 - 167 Queens Road and land west of 9 to 11 Hall Place Drive. Sixteen objections have been lodged for this development of seven residential units plus garages. Previously the developer had proposed 22 units (planning application 2016/1644), which was met with 40 objections, refused by the Council and also dismissed by the Planning Inspector on appeal in May 2017. The Society notes that the development of homes down a skinny lane, with no access to waste vehicles or capacity for turning or reversing, could be a problem, as cited in the High Pine Close case (see above).

The Society has objected to the application for this site due to lack of access and for the many reasons stated in the earlier objection, such as bulk, height and massing. Following the application’s refusal by the Planning Officer, this application has been taken to appeal, and the Society’s planning panel is sending a letter in support of the objectors to the Inspector.

2018/2147 - 41 Oatlands Chase and land to the rear of 39 Oatlands Chase. Permission for this proposal was rejected by unanimous vote in early January, with the Society and more than 50 others objecting that it posed a major threat to the Oatlands area. The proposal envisioned the demolition of one house to build 11 new units: one detached house, a pair of semi-detached houses, a terrace of three two storey houses and a two-storey block of five flats. The developer has now appealed to the Inspectorate, with many local residents having filed further objections.

The proposed build is located at the junction of Oatlands Avenue and Oatlands Chase, opposite Cleves School with its student body of more than 700 children. The Society has worked hard to defeat this proposal, supporting the many objections indicating the application was a case of overdevelopment with significant overlooking and pedestrian safety and parking problems in an area of severe parking stress. The Society has also written to the Inspector, to support the many residents who followed up with further objections to the Inspectorate.

Consideration should now be given to group tree preservation orders on the lower bit of the Chase in the interests of preserving local character, as a beautiful canopy of old trees currently flanks the sides of the road at this end. Unfortunately, the developer at 41 Oatlands had already chopped down two such trees in the hopes of winning the application.

2018/2252 Clive House, 12-18 Queens Road. This development poses another serious threat to Queens Road Village and the town of Weybridge as a whole. The Appeal was dismissed for the previous application 2016/4126 on the basis that
the proposed scale and height would have a harmful impact of the street scene. This latest application – to replace this office block with residential accommodation – would have similar implications. This Queen's Road development has received 131 objections. Although the Council Officer recommended permission, the Council area Committee refused the application.

2018/2459 and 2019/0360 - 47 High St. This application is to redevelop the Thai restaurant and its current building to a nearly windowless block of terrible design in order to accommodate five flats and the restaurant/shop front. The Society notes that this mass would be visible from the Conservation area and should have an appearance that will enhance the street scene. Moreover, as this site is located opposite Waitrose as well as the bus stop at the very end of the High Street, this building forms part of the 'gateway' into town and should attempt to be harmonious or at least attractive.

Twelve objections have been raised for this development in the Conservation area, and the Society and Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) have also objected. The first application was refused by the Council Officer with only the reason that it does not secure the necessary affordable housing provision. The Society had asked that the matter be debated in full by the area sub-committee. Unfortunately, this did not happen and the application refusal, only for financial reasons, means that it is difficult to have the second virtually identical application refused on what we believe are the real reasons of the appearance as described above.

2018/2649 - St Michaels, 31 Oatlands Chase – Amended. The Society reviewed changes to this application and supported the 24 other objectors to this proposal. The proposed terrace of houses would be on Oatlands Chase, next door to the Oatlands Chaser pub and not far from Cleves school, an area of highly congested traffic and a dangerous junction where vision is often obstructed, and parking is already dense at peak morning and afternoon times. Our objections were on height, mass, visual impact, trees, affordable housing provision and parking.

2018/2893 - 11a Portmore Park Road. This application is similar to previous applications to convert a small property into a large two-storey house which have been refused and taken to appeal. The Inspector has previously identified significant harm with respect to the character and appearance of the area and dismissed the appeal. The Society again objected to this application as an overdevelopment and for similar reasons to that of the Inspector. The building stands on a bend of the road and if developed could completely overshadow a neighbour whose windows mostly face the proposed build. The application was initially recommended for permission by the planning officer, but the Society is pleased to report that it was refused by the Councillors at the area Committee. This application has now been taken to appeal for a decision.
2018/2989 - Bridge House 41 - 45 High Street. In a case that will have acute and longstanding negative implications for the improvement of Weybridge’s high street and town centre, this application has been granted despite many objections. (See Bridge House Redevelopment Approved, p. 6).

The Society has argued vehemently that as the existing Bridge House is already an ugly dominating block that could use reconstruction, any future redevelopment should use the opportunity to improve its appearance. The Society pointed out that the developer ought to take note of the fact that this site is visible from the Conservation area, forms part of the ‘gateway’ into town and should attempt to be harmonious or at least attractive and have an appearance that will enhance the street scene. Further, the Society argued that this application needed to be considered in relation to the application for a rebuild of the adjacent Thai restaurant (see 2018/2459, 2019/0360 - 47 High St).

Despite the Society’s joining the 19 objectors and the Conservation Area Committee in objecting to the application on grounds of height, bulk, scale, overlooking, affordable housing provision and impact on the Conservation Area, Elmbridge’s planning committee have virtually permitted the application. As this newsletter goes to print, the approval has not yet shown up on the Council Database because a few legal matters are to be confirmed.

2018/3023 - Wessex South Road. This application is for nine flats, after a previous similar outline application had been refused and dismissed on appeal. This current application, however, uses a little known two stage procedure under the Town & Country Planning Act 2016, in which consideration of the matter is split in two. First a decision is made ‘in principle’ (i.e. whether the site is suitable for residential development), and later, a subsequent application is made on the remaining details of the development. This application for “Permission in Principle” (with no details as to how the build would look or be managed) was granted despite 37 objections, including the Society’s. The Society will obviously be following the next submission very closely.

2018/3193 - 70 Baker St + 5 Flats. This site has been the subject of many applications and appeals over a long period of time. The five flats will be produced by using part of the parking space and building into the roof space. The Society has objected to the previous applications, but permission was effectively given on appeal. Five objections have been made, and a long-term decision is still required for this development.
The matter is now agreed by the Council Committee, who have approved the latest application, which includes the provision of fast car charging and a Community Infrastructure Levy. Unfortunately, the loss of parking in this area of Weybridge is very undesirable.

**2018/3350 - 168-170 Oatlands Drive – Revised Signage.** The Planning Panel is considering if an objection or comment is valid in the public interest. We have noted that no member of the public has objected or commented on the application.

**2019/0386 - St Catherine’s House Beales Lane.** This is a very large three-storey block proposed to replace the existing building. The new plan would provide 17 maisonettes, eight units of Social Housing and three intermediate units of housing. Members of the Society’s planning panel very recently attended a large meeting of local residents to consider the application. So far six residents have objected to the application and the Society plans to support them by objecting. The likely grounds of our objection are on bulk, massing, overlooking and being out of character/not in keeping with the neighbourhood.

**2018/3533 - Paddocks Corner, Oatlands Chase.** This application is for four two-storey houses. Twelve letters of objection were received with regards to scale, height, cramped, overbearing, height and density. This was refused by the Council officers on the grounds of failure to make efficient use of urban land and not providing a contribution to affordable housing.
SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY
USE IT OR LOSE IT!

Did you know that Surrey libraries are rated by use and attendance? That means, as with most services and local businesses, it’s a case of use it or lose it! So if having a working local library – and especially ours right in the heart of Weybridge town centre -- is important to you as a resident, here are five easy ways you can support and ensure its funding in the future!

1. Join the library
   • It’s FREE to join the library if you live, work or study in Surrey or visit for more than one week.
   • There’s no age limit – even babies and toddlers can get their own card and borrow under their own names. The more people that register, the better, and it’s easy to do at any local Surrey library in person or online at surreycc.gov.uk/libraries.

2. Come into Weybridge library regularly
   • Browse our wonderful selection of fiction and non-fiction including the best new titles and bestsellers, audio books, large print titles and DVDs
   • Buy greetings cards, beautiful stationery, children’s workbooks and posters, reading glasses and reusable bags and coffee cups at great prices
   • Read ‘The I’ and weekly local papers
   • Work or study using our FREE Wi-Fi, computers, scanner, printing and photocopying
   • Come to our regular FREE activities for children including Rhymetime, Storytime, Board Games Club and our children’s reading group
   • Join our regular FREE events for adults including monthly Reading Groups and a Storytime for Adults – you can never be lonely or bored at Weybridge Library!
   • Encourage teens to take advantage of all the free resources, from books on mental health to free driving test preparation materials
   • Remember that we need you! Having a large number of visitors (actual footfall per month) through our door shows we’re a strong and popular local library and a branch that should stay open, regardless of the cuts that county councils may have to contemplate in the future!

3. Borrow books
   • It’s FREE to borrow books, e-books and e-audio books.
   • You can borrow up to 20 items for three weeks and renew them up to five times online.
   • You can use your library card in all 52 libraries throughout Surrey.
   • Can’t find it on the shelf? You can request particular books from any of our 52 libraries across Surrey and have them delivered to your local library to collect at your convenience.
   • If you have an illness or disability, Library Direct can bring books to you.

4. Explore and use our on-line resources
   • Access online services from home, work or daily commute with our FREE smartphone APP
   • Read an extensive range of national and international newspapers and popular magazines and comics FREE online
   • Library membership gives you FREE access to online services including GoCitizen, TheoryTest Pro, Ancestry, Find my Past and the Britannica Library
• Come in and ask our library staff for details on the range of services we provide, or check out our website at surreycc.gov.uk/libraries

5. Volunteer
• Join our team to help us support your local community
• Meet new people, develop and share skills and give something back to the town you live in and love!
• Find out more and apply online at surreycc.gov.uk/libraries/volunteering-in-libraries

Would you like to help Surrey Libraries offer more to your community? Come and volunteer with us...

Could you spare an hour or two to help us lead Rhymetime or Storytime sessions with pre-schoolers? Maybe you could facilitate a hobby group in the library such as a knit and natter group? If you could help others use computers and digital devices you could be a Digital Buddy. There are lots of ways to help.

See our webpage for details www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraryvolunteers
LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOUR KIDS?

Bring them to Weybridge Library!

Bringing your child to the library is the best way to give them a head start at school and a lifelong love of reading. That’s a priceless gift that costs nothing, because a library card is FREE and provides FREE access to a fantastic range of books, resources and FREE activities!

You’re never too young to join Surrey libraries – even babies and toddlers are eligible for their own Pebble library card. The Pebble’s Reading Adventure scheme also allows the youngest library-users to collect Pebble stamps on their loyalty card each time they visit, with special rewards after only six visits!

Children can borrow board books, picture books, reading schemes, talking books and all the best and most popular fiction, plus school-age kids can get help with homework on our Children’s online reference shelf! Anyone aged up to 18 years can choose a card to suit their own style from a selection of cool designs.

A wide range of the latest and most in-demand fiction, non-fiction and self-help books are available for teens and young adults, with an especially amazing array of titles to support mental health.

Young people can also find volunteering opportunities and access Theory Test Pro with their library card for free. Test Pro is pretty much essential for anyone preparing for their driving test – a highly realistic online simulation of the UK’s driving theory test, which contains the entire set of official test questions licensed from the Driving Standards Agency.

Children can borrow up to 20 items at a time, keep them for three weeks, and renew online or at the library up to five times – so there’s never a reason not to have something to read at home!

To sign up, just come into Weybridge Library with an official document showing your family name and address. Easy!
REGULAR EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES AT WEYBRIDGE LIBRARY

Pebble Rhymetime
Join us to make music and sing some rhymes. Suitable for ages 0 to 4.
**Wednesday** 10.15 am to 10:45 am. **Booking essential.**
**Friday** 10:15 am to 10:45 am and 11:15 am to 11:45 am. **Booking essential.**
**Saturday** 10:15 am to 10:45 am.

Storytime
The perfect free after-school activity, rain or shine! Escape the weather or join us for a story before a play in the park. Suitable for ages 3 to 6. **Tuesday** and **Thursday** 4:00 pm to 4:30 pm. Please check website in case of changes. Adults must be present in the library during the event.

Board games club
Bring your favourite board game to this FREE event. Suitable for children aged 5 to 11. **Wednesday** 3.45 pm to 4.45 pm. **Adult supervision required.**

Chatterbooks
Especially for children in Year 4 or Year 5 who love to read. **Friday, monthly** 3:45 pm to 4:45 pm. New members welcome, please sign up at Weybridge Library. **Check website for dates.**

CoderDojo
Learn to code in our volunteer-led coding club. Suitable for ages 7 to 17. **Saturday, monthly** 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Adult supervision and laptop required. Check website for more information and dates. **Booking essential.**

Holiday craft sessions
Regular arts and crafts for children aged 5-11 in the school holidays. **Check website for dates.**

Summer Reading Challenge
Join us in the summer for incentives and rewards when you visit the library and read six books over the holidays. Suitable for ages 4 to 11.

Group visits to the library
We welcome visits from school classes, Brownie & Cub packs, etc. Please contact Weybridge library or other local libraries for information.

Volunteering in libraries
We offer opportunities for Duke of Edinburgh volunteering at all levels, especially during the summer holidays when teenagers can volunteer to help with Summer Reading Challenge.

More information on all activities can be found at surreycc.gov.uk/libraries.
EM FORSTER IN WEYBRIDGE

Weybridge’s foremost literary figure to date is undoubtedly EM ‘Morgan’ Forster, the twentieth century novelist, biographer, essayist, short story writer and librettist, who spent twenty of the most productive years of his writing life in Weybridge.

Born in January 1879, Forster moved to ‘Glendore’ at 19 Monument Green with his mother Lily in 1904, taking over the lease from a previous tenant (rent £55 per year). Weybridge then was a town of about 5000 people, a fraction of today’s population, but Forster’s house still occupies a central point in the town. A historic landmark of which Weybridge should be proud, the house bears a prestigious red plaque that reads simply, ‘EM Forster lived and worked here 1904-1925.’

The Forsters re-named the house ‘Harnham,’ and in its small study with views of Monument Green to the front and fields behind, Forster wrote all six of his novels – the five published during his life, including *A Passage to India* and *Howard’s End*, and the sixth, *Maurice*, his homosexual novel which appeared posthumously.

Forster also published several short stories, including a ghost story and a futuristic fantasy, but held back those of a homoerotic nature, keeping secret from his mother and the public his sexual orientation. (Homosexuality remained a crime in the UK until 1967.)

Forster, one of the subtlest of ironists, must have appreciated the irony of living in a newly built red-brick villa – Harnham was constructed in 1901-02 – exactly the sort of house said by the ladies to ruin Summer Street in *Room with a View*. He described Harnham as ‘small and somewhat suburban, but not genteel. Wood and field behind.’

According to Wendy Moffat, author of *EM Forster; A New Life* (Bloomsbury, 2010), on the ground floor were a drawing room with a piano, a dining room and a kitchen, while on the first floor there were two large bedrooms.
and a bathroom. In the attic were two more bedrooms, one used for the maids and the other as Forster’s small study.

Forster observed in parodic vein that the house’s views to the rear were of ‘a field full of dropsical chickens,’ also noting drily that, ‘the villa has a beautiful brass bound doorstep . . . none of our neighbours have one.’

The author seems to have settled in happily enough though, and his routines show that not too much has changed for those who live in suburbia. Writing to a friend in 1908, he noted, ‘Weybridge is just nice enough to ask people to, and that means I am very often at home at weekends.’

Forster went into London frequently, usually taking the last train from Waterloo at 11.50 pm, arriving in Weybridge at 12.32 am. The need to return to Weybridge seems to have suited Forster’s introverted nature, as Nicola Beauman, author of Morgan, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1993) noted: ‘He would use Weybridge as an excuse to escape from enforced, and especially late-night gregariousness.’

During his Weybridge years, Forster made several trips abroad, visiting India in 1912-13, and from 1915-1918 working for the Red Cross’s Wounded and Missing Bureau in Egypt. He later returned to India (1921-22), working as private secretary to the Maharaja of Dewas.

Although benefitting from a great aunt’s inheritance, Forster continued to work at various jobs, lecturing at the Working Men’s College (an early adult learning institute) and occasionally at the University of London as an extramural lecturer. In 1919 he began reviewing for the Daily News, Daily Herald, Athenaeum, and various other papers and in 1920 was appointed literary editor of the Daily Herald, though he soon gave that up.

Working still left Forster time to write and play the piano, and he also joined the local literary society, even presenting a few papers.

In his personal life, Forster’s longest-term sexual partner was a bisexual mixed-race Weybridge bus driver called Arthur ‘Reg’ Barnet, with whom he had an intermittent relationship for more than 40 years. Barnet’s wife, Bess must have become suspicious, because she forbade her husband to attend ‘French lessons’ with Forster when Lily was out of the house shopping.

As Moffat notes, ‘The two men creatively found ways to be alone together. In 1925 they made love in the half-empty parlour of Harnham while Lily was at West Hackhurst (the house to which they were moving), unpacking the china.’ Forster himself described the incident as ‘a queer ending to my almost 20 years in this suburb.’

On examining Forster’s diaries (Poor Dear, How She Figures! London Review of Books, Vol. 35 No. 1 · 3 January 2013), the celebrated novelist, Alan Hollinghurst wrote: ‘When “Old Reg” comes to see “older Morgan” in 1966, Forster notes: “I can think of nothing which has lasted so long … a forty years’ prank.”’ Forster added, ‘without . . . old Arthur Barnet. . .I should have passed a much more uncertain and disquieted old age.’

In 1925 Forster’s aunt Laura died, leaving him and his mother ‘West Hackhurst’ in Abinger. Although he continued to write, Forster’s move from Weybridge coincided with the end of his
ZOLA IN EXILE IN WHEYBRIDGE

Even without today’s instant news and social media, at the turn of the 19th century the Dreyfus Affair was a legal case that rocked the world.

In 1894 in France, a Jewish army officer named Dreyfus was falsely accused and found guilty of treason. Two years later, evidence proving his innocence was suppressed and the culprit vindicated, while Dreyfus was found guilty of further trumped-up charges.

In early 1898, the famous novelist Emile Zola took up the cause. Publishing his famous statement J’Accuse...! on a newspaper front page, Zola defended Dreyfus and accused the government of a cover-up and entrenched anti-Semitism. As a result, Zola faced prosecution for libel and was also found guilty. Amid uproar in France and abroad, Zola fled his unjust jail sentence, and for days speculation in the global press was rife – where had he gone? Switzerland? Norway?

In fact, Zola had headed straight for London, arriving with only a nightshirt packed in a paper parcel. He checked in to the Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria, where he was met by his English translator and editor, Ernest Vizetelly, who had come to help him, as Zola spoke no English.

Soon after, Zola was recognised in the street by a French lady and his discovery published by newspapers. He left London in search of a more anonymous hiding place, eventually travelling by train to Walton station and taking refuge at the Oatlands Park Hotel.

On Saturday 23rd July, recognising that exile might take a while, Zola went house-hunting in Weybridge. The plan was to bring over from France his two children Denise and Jacques, and their mother, Jeanne Rozerot, his mistress, while Zola’s childless, long-suffering but still-devoted wife Alexandrine would largely remain in Paris to handle his legal affairs.

Zola soon found ‘Penn,’ a detached, double-fronted two-storey house surrounded by trees on a long straight road (now 24 Oatlands Chase). Within ten days of arriving at the Oatlands Park Hotel, after a trunk full of his papers, books novel-writing. He did continue to write until his late 70s, however, publishing short stories, essays, a biography and even collaborating with Benjamin Britten on the libretto for Billy Budd.

Forster turned down a knighthood in 1949, was appointed Companion of Honour in 1953 and awarded the highly prestigious Order of Merit in 1969. He died on 7th June 1970.
and favoured camera had been delivered to the hotel on 29th July, Zola moved into Penn.

Thus, in Weybridge, one of France’s greatest revolutionary writers launched into an incredible period of waiting and writing and living as a family man for the first time. Zola began *Fecundite* (Fruitfulness), a treatise on the ill-treatment of mothers and infants, including graphic scenes of abortion, abandonment and infanticide. Writing in the ‘naturalist’ style — what today we might call realism, about how life really was at both ends of society — Zola sought to impress on readers that the well-being of mothers and children and family life was paramount. There was no word on how Alexandrine felt about this point, though she remained Zola’s loyal first reader and the faithful wife who had once lost a child herself.

Initially Zola seemed to view his forced stay in Weybridge as a toss into some backwater. He was certainly less than impressed by English food, or class divisions and poverty, and recorded as much. ‘The food continues to be revolting, their vegetables are always cooked without salt, and they wash their meat after they’ve cooked it. I am so sick of it...’ the famed exile noted, quoted by Michael Rosen in *The Disappearance of Emile Zola*.

Yet Zola also revelled in his stay outside London once Jeanne and his children arrived. It was the only time they ever lived together as a family, and later he recalled the summer of 1898 with great fondness as ‘a little corner of life.’

According to Rosen, the period beginning at Penn was for Zola a turning point on three fronts – personal relations, literary output and political profile – and all three areas were rollercoasters of contrasting emotions. Zola encountered times of newfound peace but also deepest turmoil in his predicament, vacillating between great joy and hope on one hand, and rage and despair on the other.

In his personal life, Zola had to negotiate the minefield of his desire and closeness for family life with Jeanne and his only children alongside maintaining his marriage to Alexandrine, whom he held in high regard and friendship. Zola avidly wrote letters to both mistress and wife during his stay, and after Jeanne and the children first came out to Penn in early August 1898, Zola reported an idyllic family life. In the mornings at Penn he wrote, and in the afternoons took long bike rides with Jeanne around Walton, Weybridge and the area, also experimenting with another of his passions, photography.

The family moved from Penn after their lease expired on 27th August, finding a house with a bigger garden in Addlestone called ‘Summerfield’. The summer soon passed, and just before the children returned to school in France, on 10th October, the family moved to London. Thereafter, Zola lived a lonely existence at the Queen’s Hotel in Norwood, trying to keep up his spirits by correspondence, supplemented by visits from Alexandrine,
though separation from Jeanne kept his moods low and volatile.

So too did the vicissitudes of the Dreyfus Affair. As news on the political front buffeted Zola to new highs and lows, he was thrown back into the heart of French politics and international scandal but also remained helpless at its periphery. As Zola had purposefully sought to hide and not make public comments until legal matters and the tides of angry opinion against him and the Jewish Dreyfus died down, he could only pour his angst into private correspondence and fiction.

And so, on the literary front, while at Penn, Zola wrote a story based on a ‘haunted’ house called the Castle in Oatlands, while the Dreyfus case slipped into one of his later novels in a barely disguised plot. Zola completed *Fecundite* during his exile, but his standing as an author had taken a hit from the Dreyfus scandal and his book sales plummeted. In Paris Alexandrine had to sell furniture and effects to meet bills.

In all, Zola’s exile in England proved a great trial for him – and matters hardly improved on his return to France. Within two years, he was dead from carbon monoxide poisoning due to a blocked chimney, an act said to be murder politically motivated by anti-Dreyfus sentiment.

Unquestionably, Zola’s legacy lives on today in his heroic fight against anti-Semitism, his unflinching revelations of real life and his vision for a better societal future. Weybridge should be proud to be a part – albeit a small one – of this history.

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**LIVING IN HISTORY: ZOLA’S HOUSE TODAY**

The Evans’ children were still little when the family decamped from a Victorian house in Putney to find a new home in Weybridge, hoping again for a period property full of character. As ever, when house hunting, pickings seemed scarce, but suddenly ‘Penn’ at 24 Oatlands Chase went back on the market.

Susan Evans says she knew instantly the place had to be theirs. The famed French novelist Emile Zola had lived at Penn while in exile during the Dreyfus Affair, and for anyone interested in history or literature, it was like landing a crown jewel.

‘The Zola connection was just wow,’ says Evans, who hails from Northern Ireland and who studied English and French Literature at Trinity College Dublin. ‘The house came with all the photos on the walls. It was like a Zola shrine.’

A previous Penn resident, Mrs. Barth, who had been a literary and history enthusiast and clearly a Zola fan, not only collected many old photos for display but left a treasure trove of documents. Two of her framed pictures still adorn the hallway.

Evans stored much of Barth’s collection in the attic when it came time to restore the house and turn it into a family home, but no major structural changes have disturbed the original exterior or interiors. Apart from an updated rustic country kitchen and traditionally
hued walls (repainted long ago, covering up the strange colourful murals that Zola first encountered), the house today remains much as it would have been at the turn of the 19th century.

Light and airy rooms with high ceilings, original doors and mouldings greet the visitor, along with a sweeping staircase at the front of the house. As soon as one enters by the front into a small entrance alcove between doors, a reproduction poster of J’Accuse catches the eye. Zola’s famous public letter to the President of the French republic was printed on the front page of L’Aurore newspaper, and here it still hangs large as a powerful statement by a writer audacious enough to accuse the highest echelons of his government of duplicity, complicity and blatant anti-Semitism.

Further along, beyond the first internal door, on one wall of the spacious main hallway, hangs a framed compilation of photos of Zola and his family in around the house and gardens. The collage includes the photograph famously used by the New York Times alongside Zola’s obituary in 1902: Zola’s children at the front gate of Penn. The outside of the house then was still in its pebbledash and brown timber original, rather than painted white with black timbers, as homeowners later favoured their faux-Tudor style in the Edwardian period.

‘We’d leave the memorabilia for the next people,’ says Evans, her conditional statement assuring any visitor that her family has no plans to leave Penn in the foreseeable future but at the same time, she sees herself as a caretaker of this historic home.

The previous resident, Barth, who was active in contacting Zola societies and enthusiasts, had also arranged for the famed blue plaque that marks historic buildings. It is still mounted prominently outside, front and centre on the façade, where it reads:

The French Author
EMILE ZOLA
Stayed and Wrote Here
While in Exile
During the Dreyfus Case
August 1898

Evans recalls that however much she was impressed by the house’s great literary and historic link, ‘it was a bit dispiriting when we moved here that so many people didn’t even seem to know who Zola was – they confused him with the Chelsea footballer!’

On the other hand, it could get slightly awkward when the odd person turned up enthusiastically on the drive, forgetting that Penn is a home and not a museum. Nowadays the house gets only a wayward occasional visitor or official tour group inquiry, mostly from France.

‘In France, Zola is the equivalent of Dickens,’ says Evans. ‘A few years ago, the Zola Society inquired and stopped by. It was, unsurprisingly, a group of octogenarian French.’

Though Zola lived at Penn for only a month before moving to ‘Summerfield’ in Addlestone (so the family could enjoy a bigger garden – a motive that wouldn’t be unfamiliar these days) this Oatlands residence remains important as the first place Zola settled when he fled Paris at the height of the Dreyfus Affair. It is also the first place and time in Zola’s life when he managed to live ‘en famille’ with his children and their mother, Zola’s mistress.
Jeanne Rozerot. (Read more in Zola in Exile in Weybridge on p. 23)

Zola himself seemed taken by ‘Penn,’ if not fully cognisant at the time of his rental of the eventual significance that the location and stay would have for him and his legacy. On finding the property on July 23, 1898, Zola simply noted he had been pleased to find ‘Penn’ – ‘a charming house surrounded by trees. Five guineas a week.’

Unfortunately, many of those trees came down in subsequent adjacent housing builds, and now a huge housing development dominates one side of Penn, built massively and too close to the boundary line, despite objections.

Like many Oatlands and Weybridge residents, Evans generally laments that the preservation of old buildings and trees isn’t made the priority it should be, with older properties too easily giving way to huge developments and blocks of flats, with little or no consideration of proportion, mass and overlooking, never mind regard for history.

But Evans isn’t about to give up on Penn or Oatlands by any means, having lived here now for 12 years, her children currently teenagers at local schools.

‘It’s an honour to be part of so much history and help preserve it,’ she says, ‘and it’s not just a link to the past but a lovely house and our family home.’

WEYBRIDGE’S GREAT LITERARY TRADITION

While EM Forster and Emile Zola (see separate articles) are the most famous writers to have resided in Weybridge for any length of time, our town has also played host to many other well-known scribblers. It’s a grand tradition that Weybridge Society hopes will continue long in the future, so if you’ve always thought you had a novel in you, get writing!

George Meredith, whose writing influenced Forster, and who was best known as the author of The Egoist, and his first wife Mary Ellen lived at ‘The Limes’ for several months after they first got married in 1849. ‘The Limes’ was described as “a pleasant house with a large garden,” run by a rather superior landlady. Meredith was subsequently appointed to the Order of Merit and nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature seven times.

Robert Louis Stevenson famously stayed at the Hand and Spear while writing
Treasure Island, and his desk can be found among the Elmbridge Museum’s collection.

Warren Deeping, a renowned writer in the 1920s and 30s, is best known for his novel Sorrell and Son (1925). He lived in ‘Eastlands’ in Brooklands Lane after giving up being a doctor to become a full-time writer.

Nina Bawden wrote her 1973 children’s novel Carrie’s War in Weybridge. She went on to be shortlisted for the Booker Prize for another novel in 1987.

John Lennon, who lived from 1964-1968 in ‘Kenwood’ on St George’s Hill, was best known as co-founder of the Beatles, but he also produced short stories, plays and poems. His work was collected in In his Own Write (1964) and A Spaniard in the Works (1965).

Weybridge wasn’t just home to many writers, it was also written about in major works! The town is referred to in Jerome K Jerome’s Three Men in a Boat, and importantly was the location of a battle in which a Martian fighting machine was destroyed in HG Wells’s War of The Worlds. Wells described Weybridge’s ‘respectable inhabitants’ as ‘men in golf and boating costumes, wives prettily dressed.’

Weybridge also featured in John Wyndham’s novel The Kraken Wakes where the main characters are stopped in their attempt to reach Cornwall in a dinghy. In Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses it was referred to by one of Saladin Chamcha’s interrogators as both his place of residence and also as that of The Beatles.

With many active Weybridge authors continuing to publish works – including Patricia Jones (Threads of Life, Cutting the Ribbon), Lesia Daria (Forty One) and Nick Thripp (The Code), and writing groups such as Walton Wordsmiths providing a focus for encouragement and support, the town’s literary future seems assured.
EXPLORING THE CODE BY NICK THRIPP

Though he’s a busy man, catching up with local author Nick Thrripp wasn’t difficult for the Weybridge Society, as Nick is an active member of the Society and Weybridge community. Nick regularly attends the Society’s Executive Committee meetings in his role as a Trustee, as well as giving input from his other role as Chairman of the Triangle Residents Group (TRG), which represents residents living in the area north of the train line and within Queen’s Road and Hanger Hill. A Weybridge resident since 1990 and a visitor to the area since his teens, Nick also counts himself a regular at the Jolly Farmer.

Over leisurely coffee and fresh mint tea at Café Rouge, we asked Nick what made him decide to tackle writing and about his first published novel, The Code, available online and at Weybridge Books.

WeySoc: Before you retired you worked internationally in human resources in the oil, gas and chemicals industries, and there are traces of the high-flying business life in The Code. But what prompted you to write this particular tale and to take up writing generally?

Nick: I’ve always been a story-teller with an active internal world. At one point, when one granddaughter was ill, I regaled her with a story in instalments that lasted three years! But I also did an English degree at university and wrote a novella and various stories even then. Retirement in 2011 opened up time and new opportunities – I finished my first novel within three months and in 2012-14 completed an MA in Creative Writing at Kingston University, a highly practical course which really honed my writing and ability to take criticism. My second novel was an experimental one that was shelved but may yet emerge, and The Code was my third, begun on a holiday in Italy.

WeySoc: The Code is a life narrative, one man’s epic tale of woe and redemption. Why did you choose to write a story that runs from childhood to adulthood?

Nick: I kept wondering what would happen if a schoolboy who was unpopular, bullied and aggrieved about it, turned out to be in a position of power over his former bullies. I was intrigued by the exchange of positions in life and wanted to explore the shift of power. Playing the story out long, over a span of time, allowed for an exploration of twists and turns in the tale.
WeySoc: Your central character, the narrator, seems so different from you. You’re actively engaged in the community, while he seems rootless, buffeted by events – before he settles down in a village, though even there, troubles plague him.

Nick: There’s a long tradition in English literature of the hapless hero. I’m thinking Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, *A Handful of Dust*, characters upended by events. The key thing in *The Code* is that the narrator eventually stops living a lie because of what he’s been through.

WeySoc: Was the antagonist drawn from real life, something or someone evil you wanted to expunge?

Nick: Yes and no, he was the product of two real people, but nothing was fleshed out as in reality. I had in mind (sketchily) people I knew. But those were seeds planted, and a totally different character grew from that.

WeySoc: It’s a rollicking good read, finished all in one long sitting! Are you working on anything else now, writing another book?

Nick: I’m in the fourth draft of another novel with the working title of *Coconut*. The protagonist is a black gay man living in the UK but originally from West Africa, who suddenly learns he’s the grandson of the last tribal chief and first president of his home country. He’s called back there to act as figurehead of a revolution. He’s in trouble in the UK, so he goes, with many adventures after that. I guess I like the idea of the outsider and combining depth of character with fast pacing. *The Code* is sometimes called a black comedy or even categorised as a thriller, and I’d say the next one is Evelyn Waugh meets Indiana Jones!

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**WALTON WORDSMITHS – Working Together on Literary Pursuits**

On a cold spring day, Patricia Jones’s brightly lit kitchen sets the scene for another monthly meeting of Walton Wordsmiths (WW), a warm and dedicated group of local writers offering each other advice and support.

The group, which has been running in the area for more than 15 years, counts about eight members, mostly from Weybridge, but Jones says they use ‘Walton’ instead of ‘Weybridge’ because, true to form as writers, ‘it sounds better.’ WW members cite various literary pursuits and work styles, from novelists working daily from 9-to-5 to short story writers who take up the pen (or keyboard) when inspiration calls.

‘Whole days can be spent on research,’ Jones affirms. ‘Thank God for Google!’

And just as a writer’s day can vary, so too do Wordsmiths meetings.

‘We share writing news, good and bad,’ says Jones. ‘Whoever’s got a manuscript to review, we give them time. We’ve helped
each other with cover design and choosing titles. We’re here to review and support whatever members bring to the table.’

On this particular day, the group is rallying around Jones, who has a presentation to give at an upcoming book festival on the topic of the classic storyline thread, ‘the hero’s journey.’ The group advises her to make a link to her own upcoming book, Redemption in Eden, soon to be published by local publisher GBP. (see story on GBP, p. 32)

Also seeking advice is Howard Schaverien, short story and script writer, who’s brought in a piece based on real experience. He reads it aloud and the group comments and makes suggestions on style, adding dialogue and other improvements.

‘We’re a sounding board for work, and we’re all different,’ says Alex Rushton, who’s awaiting publication of her second novel with SCRIPTORA, the publishing arm of the Society of Women Writers and Journalists (SWWJ). SWWJ also published Rushton’s first apocalyptic novel, Sunrise at An Lac. ‘It’s nice to get feedback to see where things didn’t work, but also because it’s lonely being a writer.’

Shelley Miller, another member who writes fantasy/children’s fiction under the name Shalbey Bellaman and who’s published two titles, Dragons in the Looking Glass and Jack in the Wallows, agrees: ‘We give each other constructive critique, not criticism. We encourage each other and we share.’

Encouragement can take the form of assigned writing exercises as well. Schaverien admits he’s been suffering from writer’s block and brought in his real-life vignette in an attempt to get moving again. Miller offers a few random items and a character’s name around which to build another story, and short story writer Ann Braine, who also hasn’t written since the last meeting, enthusiastically takes up the task too.

At the moment, WW writers are mostly self-published, an effort that requires enormous work, from writing and editing to design and computer layout, and finally, marketing and promotion.

Guy Blythman, a prolific member of the group who writes across fiction genres, non-fiction, poetry and essays, admits he’s been contacting literary agents lately for his next novel but so far without progress. His collected stories and essays Tapestry and his novel Cryptids were both published via a self-publishing company, New Generation Publishing.

With the decline of retail outlets for books (fewer and fewer bookstores with shelves for displaying new works), the publishing stream has become squeezed. These days the publishing industry favours already well-known and popular authors who can generate steady revenue. As a result, literary agents take on fewer and fewer untested new writers. An agent may receive hundreds of manuscripts per month, and a publishing house will receive thousands, so the funnel is quite tight for any one author to pass through. The self-publishing industry, on the other hand, offers unknown writers a chance to put their work directly to the public at low cost and with few barriers to entry.

‘We don’t do it for the money,’ Miller assures with a smile. ‘We write because we enjoy it. If you’re a writer, you have to write.’

And that makes support from a writer’s group like Walton Wordsmiths all the more essential to any author trying to carry on!

Walton Wordsmiths welcomes new members. Writers interested in joining should contact Patricia Jones at patriciajoneswriting@gmail.com
LOCAL PUBLISHER GBP LOOKS TO EXPAND

At a time when many were betting against traditional books – and retirement could easily have beckoned – former oil and gas engineer George Boughton went in the opposite direction, embarking on a daring career: publisher of paperback, hardcover and e-books.

The idea for a publishing company flowed from his own efforts at self-publishing in 2012, which in turn came about from a desire to share ideas. His first book, the dystopian novel OutTack, looks at climate change and how natural forces, human inaction and conflict mount, finally destroying Earth’s environment and resulting in the inescapable need for a Planet B. Meanwhile Boughton’s memoir Black Gold, Black Scorpion traces the true story of his capture and his family’s survival in Biafra during the conflict there that cost over a million lives.

‘Publishing my own work became a first step,’ said Boughton. ‘In the process, I came across inspiring friends who wanted works of theirs published, and who in turn referred others. Strong alliances were built, with illustrators, graphic designers, copy editors, the press, distributors, and even consultants to major publishers.’

GBP (George Boughton Publishing) officially started work in 2013 and now features a variety of titles in its catalogue. As Boughton is a local resident, GBP may well be Weybridge’s first ever publishing house. Certainly, Boughton is happy to take on deserving local authors, like chef Ozlem Warren.

Warren, another Weybridge resident and a chef who teaches cookery at Divertimenti in London, has been a particular success for GBP. Warren’s book Ozlem’s Turkish Table, which will be officially released by GBP in spring 2019, has already pre-sold incredibly well and been featured at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

But GBP’s focus isn’t especially local, and the publishing house’s publications run the gamut from fiction to non-fiction and across all subjects.

‘Our main goal is to publish works that are so good they become classics, never out-of-print, and in all formats (present and future) – the publishers’ holy grail,’ says Boughton.

Among GBP’s other authors making their mark are Christopher Ritchie, who won silver in the Foreword Indies Book Awards, and Derek E Pearson a three-time finalist in the Indies and also featured in The Sun.

Another GBP cookery book, also ready for release in spring 2019, is The Ginologist Cook. Capitalising on the global resurgent

GINOLOGIST
The Ginologist Cook

150 Delicious Recipes with Gin

IWSC Silver 2018
The popularity of gin, *The Ginologist Cook* features 150 starters, main courses and desserts — all ‘written, simmered, grilled, sliced and baked by South African food “maker-uppers”’ who like to mix gin with food to achieve new flavours, textures and experiences. Boughton has high hopes this gin recipe book will give the flavoured tonic water trend a run for its money!

Not limited to cookery or adult fiction, GBP’s current list also includes several children’s books like *Crumbdog*, with a foreword from Dame Jacqueline Wilson, and *Searching with Sam Widges*, with a quote from Richard Evans, the designer of the Pink Floyd record sleeve. GBP is also proud of *Tulsi the Tiger*, a tale about the last tiger on Earth, and *Noah’s Ark*, a storybook which aims to tie-in with a prospective TV series and an ambitious project to save animals in the wild.

A new area for GBP is women’s fiction, with *Redemption in Eden* by local author Patricia Jones (see article on Walton Writers, p. 30), and Boughton says he’d be keen to welcome more high-quality fiction aimed at female readers.

‘Publicity is our main objective now, as well as continuing to find excellent authors engaged in interesting projects,’ says Boughton. ‘If you’ve got something wonderful written, do get in touch!’

https://www.gbpublishing.co.uk/

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**WEYBRIDGE SOCIETY TALK**

Come hear Ray Pennock, St John Ambulance volunteer for over 60 years, talk about his experiences. Ray has worked 47 years at the Weybridge Division, celebrating its 80th year in 2019!

May 16 – 8.00 pm

St James Church Centre Small Hall

For more information visit our website: https://www.weybridgesociety.org.uk/events/st-johnss-ambulance-in-weybridge/

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