

Account of Purley on Thames

Moving the Barn to Goosecroft

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The Move to Goosecroft

As most of the formalities had been sorted out already the gaining of planning permission was fairly straightforward. However on the eve of the planning meeting the county council insisted on a number of conditions that the planning committee were obliged to accept.

The key condition related to parking. The plan was to provide another 33 places around the barn in addition to the parking for the recreation ground. The County Council had worked out from the floor area that 64 spaces were required so they put on a condition that only one half of the barn could be used at any one time. Further conditions relating to hours of use. Permission was finally granted 5th January 1995 and as a result Bryant Homes were left with a vacant site which eventually accommodated 16 new dwellings.

Once the planning permissions had been granted the matter was referred automatically to the Department of the Environment, even though they had decided against called in an almost identical proposal earlier. When the matter was queried it was explained that because a conversion did not involve demolition such a matter need not be referred, but as relocation of a listed building inevitably involved prior demolition there was no option.

The Department were very tardy at even considering the matter and it was not until October 1994 that they finally notified Newbury DC that they did not wish to call in the proposal. As a result Newbury's assistant solicitor Alastair Davies was able to draft a Section 106 agreement and this was considered by the Parish Council at their meeting on October 27th. A few points were asked to be changed but what emerged was the need for Bryants and the Parish Council to have a separate agreement setting out their relative obligations.

A meeting was held on 11th November with Richard Henshaw, from Bryants Winchester Office, John Chapman and Reg Marshal at which a 'Heads of Agreement' and a schedule prepared by John Chapman were discussed. November Richard took the back to Bryants and a draft agreement was rapidly concluded. This was signed by Bryants on 12th December, together with the Section 106 and by the Parish Council on December 13th.

Reconstruction

Work started on the new site to lay drains and services and to construct the foundations. Meanwhile the roof tiles were stripped off the barn and stored in a locked container on the new site. Nottingham University were commissioned to do a dendrochronology survey of the timbers and Bob Howard of Time Team fame came down to Purley to do the work on Jan 31st. He took 16 samples which yielded two groups of felling dates: 1509-1512 and 1725-1731. These correlated very well with the construction dates for the Purley Magna manor house (c1520) and its replacement in 1740.

By the 16th Feb the arcade posts were being re-erected and cruck frames were being reassembled at the old site. When the building control people saw the frames they insisted on the carpentry joints being reinforced with iron bars. They then declared that the barn was too close to the western boundary and would dominate any houses built on the adjacent land so we had to get Sulham Estates to lease us a couple of yards of land to ensure this didn't happen. It all seemed like bureaucracy gone

mad.

Eventually the barn was completed and officially handed over by Helen Jennings the MD of Bryant Homes at a ceremony on 24th June Project Purley put on an historical display to mark the occasion and lots of people came to view over the weekend.

Using the Barn

The barn had been rebuilt in two sections, the eastern portion consisting of a small hall with four small offices under the arcade and occupying three bays. The western end was left open although a small kitchen was built in one of the bays under the arcade. Between the two was a lobby with toilets leading off and a fire escape door.

The eastern part was used mainly by the scouts although for one evening a week the youth club took over. Because of the limitations on usage imposed by the planning conditions the large hall could not be let at the same time as the scouts and youth club were using their part so they were allowed to use the whole barn.

The eastern hall was used only sporadically as it was quite unsuitable for some types of lettings and the closing time restrictions inhibited a lot of the more suitable lettings such as weddings and parties. However over the years a surprising variety of events have taken place there.

When the graveyard was laid out next door and additional parking provided some of the usage restrictions were lifted.

Problems

As time has gone by the poor quality of the restoration work has become apparent. The fire doors were constructed so flimsily they became very easy to open from the outside and had to be reinforced. The cladding boards were not put in with sufficient overlap and were secured only by two nails so as the boards weathered they distorted and had to be nailed back again. For several years there was a steady growth of mould resulting from water penetration around the windows on the south side This was cured eventually by reconstructing the window frames. The barn has suffered a bit from vandals who broke in several times from the north side so the windows there had to be reinforced and secured. They also used to throw bricks onto the roof to break the tiles and so protective shields had to be erected above the guttering to prevent broken tiles and bricks from falling onto people nearby.

Perhaps the worst problem is the cluster flies which invade the upper roof timbers in late summer and autumn. The Parish Council have tried fumigating and spraying but this has had only marginal effect and at peak times one is confronted by hundreds of dead flies falling from the roof.

The heating system was far from satisfactory. Originally only the eastern section was heated by a hot water system run by gas. Unfortunately it could not be kept on all the time and when it froze the barn was flooded. The radiators had to be removed and the whole barn provided with hot air burners which are reasonably effective although a bit noisy.

The Future

In recent years the number of lettings has gradually increased but it is still nowhere near a profitable enterprise and without a public entertainment licence is unlikely ever to be so. Recent health and safety legislation and over keen ministry officials have interpreted European Directives so strictly that no one could possibly take the responsibility for putting the barn onto a commercial footing. It will therefore remain a considerable drain on parish resources.

In 2001 the Parish Council resolved to maintain the barn only at a minimal level as the cost of maintenance and making good the poor restoration work would be prohibitively expensive. There is a hope that one day grants may be available to restore the barn more fittingly.

