

SPECIAL PROJECTS GROUP: REPORT TO HARPENDEN SOCIETY COMMITTEE

SOUTHDOWN STUDY

1) Introduction

Southdown is an attractive shopping centre with a pleasant variety of architectural styles - humble nineteenth century cottages some of which have been converted into shops, between-the-wars buildings including mock tudor, two post-war terraces of shops, a non-conformist church with a modernised front, a gothic style wood and corrugated iron church hall which badly needs maintenance, an Edwardian pub and another much older one.

However, two features tend to spoil Southdown: an almost total absence of trees and its three car parks.

Unlike Harpenden which gains so much of its attractiveness from trees, Southdown is almost devoid of trees. There is a small tree in one of the few remaining cottage gardens and a row of elms (one of which has Dutch Elm Disease) at the front of the smaller of the two public car parks. There is little vegetation apart from the triangular green and, at the foot of Piggotshill Lane, a patch of grass with one small withered tree (presented by the W.I.) surrounded by an assortment of street furniture.

The attractive view, as one looks up Cravells Road, of nineteenth century houses with their stepped roofs is marred by an exceptionally ugly car park with its prominently situated temporary public conveniences. The car park has a poor surface and the open fence surrounding it reveals all the untidiness of the neighbouring backyards and gardens. One of the two exits - the one on Grove Road - seems unsafe. While I was there, two cars entering or leaving Grove Road nearly had accidents. The corner of the car park bounded by Cravells Road and Grove Road cannot be fully utilised because there is not enough space for two rows of vehicles. We understand that people in Southdown feel very strongly about the ugliness of this car park and the public conveniences.

The other two car parks could be improved though they are far less detrimental to the town. The chain link fences of both the church hall car park and the smaller public car park make them unnecessarily obtrusive.

2) Some Suggestions

a) Cravells Road/Grove Road Car Park

- i) The public conveniences should be moved to the small car park where they would be less conspicuous or at least screened by an attractive, preferably evergreen, hedge.
- ii) The open fence work should be replaced by a close boarded fence or dense evergreen hedge.
- iii) The surface should be improved.
- iv) The corner of the junction of the two roads should be landscaped with low shrubs which would not obscure the view of motorists - as mentioned earlier, much of the space in this corner cannot be used for parking anyway.

Pat Wilson

a) For inf

b) Thanks for  
suggesting M17

(c) Returned  
with thanks

Brue

- v) The boundary of the car park bordering the road should, where possible, be screened with attractive shrubs or trees.
  - vi) Some trees could be planted between the rows of cars.
  - vii) It is suggested that a combination of conifers for screening and silver birches which look attractive even in winter is used.
- Mature trees should be used if available.

b) The grass plot on the corner of Grove Road and Piggotshill Lane

- 1) A group of trees would look far better than the single poor little tree. Three large trees are suggested.
- 2) The grit bin could be resited.

c) The Church Hall Car Park

- 1) An evergreen hedge should be planted behind the chain link fence.
- 2) Some more trees could be planted.
- 3) The Church Hall could be painted - it could look really attractive. Maybe some voluntary labour could be organised.

d) The Small Public Car Park (site of former St John's School)

- 1) Again, there seems little point in the chain link fence which should be removed or replaced with a dense hedge.
- 2) Some trees on both sides of the entrance would be an improvement - the elms are doomed.

e) The Green

- 1) Some groups of large forest trees such as horse chestnuts would greatly improve the town by providing a contrast to the unrelieved bricks and mortar. The green could be a really attractive recreational area. Compare it with the greens in Harpenden.

3) Implementation

To implement these suggestions, apart from moving the public conveniences, would cost very little. The Council already has the trees (I understand) and the labour required.

It would seem essential to consult the people of Southdown in some way.

There is not much time as planting should preferably take place in October or November though February is possible.

Arrangements would need to be made to water newly planted trees.

After we have reached agreement, we should write to Mr McKenna for the attention of Mr Plant and also seek the advice of Mr Arnold. We should also consult the appropriate councillors.

B C Nixon  
3 September 1975

Acknowledgement

I should like to acknowledge the help I received from Michael Meacher who walked round Southdown with me and contributed many ideas.