

HOUSE BUILDING CRISIS & POPULATION BOOM

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A few weeks ago we saw how some local building firms gained out of the Council's policy of employing local people on the post-war council house programme, and last week we looked at how the council planned to build a new 'home' for themselves in Guildford Road. But as the latter plan slipped away through lack of funds, the former suffered through a severe lack of land as the 'farm estates' at Elmbridge, Maybury, Barnsbury and Grove Barrs reached completion.

Despite building nearly 800 homes between

1953 and 1955 the waiting list for council houses had stubbornly refused to go down. With about 1,500 families on the register it was clear that it would take years to clear the backlog (if that was ever possible), but in the first few months of 1956 just 48 new council homes were completed.

Like their counterparts today, the council in the early 1950's had gambled on a golf course to solve their thirst for development land. Back then it was not the New Zealand, but the West Byfleet Golf Course that they had their eye on.

Fortunately both Woking and Wimbledon Council's plans to redevelop West Byfleet Golf Course was defeated.

In July 1952 the council suggested the 124½ acres site 'was suitable for 1,000 houses' and drew up plans to compulsory purchase the land. Local opposition from the Byfleet, West Byfleet and Pyrford Resident's Association (amongst many others) defeated that idea, only to see

Local Building firms, such as Davis Estates and Walter Deakin's (whose office are shown here in Guildford Road, Woking) prospered at this time as numerous estates were developed around the district.



Wimbledon Council (acting under the 1952 Towns Development Act) almost immediately put in their own Compulsory Purchase Order for the site.

It wasn't until 1955 that that scheme was successfully opposed, but in the meantime whilst the council was having trouble finding affordable new sites to develop, the number of private houses being built in the area was on the rise.

According to a report in the press in the spring of 1956 'the demand and supply of private enterprise houses shows a rise every year since controls were relaxed. From 147 in 1953, builders erected 308 in 1954, 402 in 1955 and are set fair to top the 600 mark this year'.

'In 1955 plans were submitted for 910 houses and flats and 42 other buildings. In the first four months of 1956 plans were submitted for 450 houses and flats and 23 other buildings. At this rate Woking will reach its development to 68,000 population long before the target year of 1971 is reached'.

They were right. Even by 1961 the official population was 67,519 and by 1971 the total had reached about 76,000.

Back in 1956 it was claimed that local building firms had sites for at least three years ahead, and 'practically every saleable piece of land is snapped up by a developer'.

W Deakin & Co were given permission in May 1957 to build flats near the junction of Brewery Road and Chobham Road; Davis Estates were looking to build at Pyrford; the MOD were wanting to erect seventy-one houses on their Broadoaks Estate; and in Byfleet the former Royston Chase Hotel was demolished so that redevelopment could take place.

Plans had been submitted as far back as 1954 by H B Kingston Ltd for forty-four maisonettes in eleven blocks to be built on the land of the old private hotel in Byfleet, but it was not until May 1957 that permission to redevelop the Royston Chase Estate was finally approved.

All across the district where once there were properties with many acres of grounds, now we were seeing many dwellings to the acre. The Woking area, it was noted, was 'being vacated



In 1957 the Royston Chase Hotel in Byfleet was demolished so that redevelopment could take place.



by the wealthy' and 'many of the former residences are now new homes for aged, for children and, in some cases, large business concerns'. Houses with large grounds were

'eagerly sought so that small dwellings can be erected where once lawns, shrubbery and woodland delighted the eye of some rich stockbroker'.

