

OurView

Secrecy over 'garden city' simply invites more concern

THE claims by Liberal Democrat president Tim Farron that Oxfordshire is identified in a Government report as a site for a huge new "garden city" have drawn plenty of interest.

Worryingly, there has not been a lot of definitive comment from the Government. Mr Farron's statement may be wide of the mark, as he has not apparently seen this report, but it will cause considerable concern nonetheless.

It would appear logical that if the county had been earmarked for the potential of a new town, it could well be the mooted 25,000-home development near Steventon and that will lead to worry in that part of the county.

But that's sort of the point: nobody really knows.

As an Oxfordshire MP and the man at the very top of Government, David Cameron could end the speculation once and for all and tell us if Mr Farron was correct or, as county council leader Ian Hudspeth said, is just "scare mongering".

But so far, there has been a deafening silence from the Witney MP.

His counterpart in Wantage, Ed Vaizey, may well be correct that any plan for a garden city would stand as much chance as the derided proposal for an airport at the same site but, by saying nothing substantive, the Government effectively feeds suspicion that there may indeed be a secret plan.

Planning to significantly change the face of Oxfordshire will be damaging enough for the Government, but any whiff of secrecy will make it far worse.

Death of HMV will be big loss for city

THE closure of HMV will leave a large hole in the centre of Cornmarket Street.

The music chain has been staggering on like a wounded beast for over a year now, the victim of several factors including a sea change in how people buy their music.

And while it is no great surprise that it is closing the doors on that big store in Cornmarket, it has to be a blow to Oxford's retail scene in general.

It may open elsewhere – although that has not been confirmed yet – but still this is one of the anchor stores of our shopping high street.

Its demise cannot be positive.

Ourpolicy

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A difficult journey to reach Brookes' 'Promised Land'



HISTORY: Hannah Marsh at Oxford Brookes University looking through its archives

Picture: OX64199 Damian Halliwell

A MOMENTOUS step in Oxford Brookes's journey took place just over 50 years ago. What was then the Oxford College of Technology saw the doors of its new buildings at Headington officially opened by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.

Finally, after years of being spread around the city; in damp basements, borrowed laboratories, cramped classrooms and generously lent spaces, the college was under one roof.

Guiding spirit John Henry Brookes, who had seen in many changes since being appointed principal of the School of Art in 1928, later leading the combined Schools of Art, Commerce and Technology, called the Headington site 'the Promised Land'.

But it was no easy journey to reach it. The opening was the result of a hard-fought battle that saw what *The Oxford Times* dubbed, 'Town, Gown and Overall,' united in fighting for the new buildings.

Although the land was bought and development schemes approved back in 1949, when the plans came before Oxford County Council's planning committee the following year, they were turned down.

The decision scandalised many. But post-war Britain was still reeling from the effects on the economy and divided on whether money should be ploughed into defence, housing or education.

The Oxford Times roundly condemned the decision, reflecting the thoughts of plenty.

Hannah Marsh

Hannah is a digital journalist curating and collating material on the history of Oxford Brookes and its predecessor institutions for a dedicated website to mark its 150th anniversary in 2015

"Protests come from Town, Gown and Overall," the leader writer penned furiously.

"The city deplores the dropping of a scheme which promised to its sons and daughters advanced technical education under the most advantageous conditions.

"The university condemns it as a blow to the sphere of education which has attained paramount importance under modern economic

conditions. And industry is shocked that the training, which seemed within the reach of its young recruits, should be snatched away."

The council's own finance committee had already noted the plans as a long-term investment, balancing the substantial cost against the desperate need to improve Oxford's technical education services.

But one of the college's strongest

LEAVES TAKEN AS SOUVENIRS

▲ AS he planted a commemorative tree, the Duke of Edinburgh, *right*, joked that he lacked green fingers.

Sure enough, the tree was soon bare – but not through any fault of the Duke.

Eager visitors stripped the tree of its leaves, stealing the tokens as souvenirs.

▲ There was one man who missed the royal opening altogether – city architect Edwin Chandler, who planned the buildings.

But he had to miss the main event when he slipped over and broke his wrist, missing the Duke's speech as he was carted off to hospital in an ambulance.

▲ The new premises meant that the Oxford College of Technology impressed enough to make the list of 29 proposed new polytechnics in 1967, becoming Oxford Polytechnic in 1970. It became Oxford Brookes University in 1992.



supporters was Professor Kenneth Wheare – Gladstone Professor of Government at Oxford University – who announced a protest meeting at Oxford's Town Hall. Writing later, he remembered supporters spilling out of the door as they eagerly crammed in to voice their anger.

"I had been assured of so much support for the proposal in circles outside the city council that I felt the city council must be wrong; that it had misjudged public opinion," he wrote in *John Henry Brookes: Craftsman, Educator, Administrator*.

"So, to my own surprise, I found myself proclaiming that a protest of the citizens would be organised against the city council's decision.

"We called a meeting in the Town Hall and we had so many supporters that the council chamber was filled, the main committee room was also filled and there was an overflow meeting on the staircase."

The plans were brought once more in 1952 and voted through without discussion.

Viscount Nuffield – one of the College's first students – laid the foundation stone, over copies of the *Times*, the *Oxford Times* and *Oxford Mail*, the Education Committee's minutes and the order of proceedings, in 1954 and the buildings finally opened officially in 1963.

▲ Have you got a story to share? We're interested in memories and personal reflections from staff, students and residents. Contact hmarsh@brookes.ac.uk or a.myers@brookes.ac.uk if you'd like to share your story