

# HASLEMERE UNCOVERED



## One Large Housing Estate

Unless you have any reason to stray beyond Chessington Tyres (opposite Majestic Wines and behind 'Cook') you may be unaware that there is a small but important site which goes under the rather grand title of 'The Haslemere Youth Campus'. The users of the assorted buildings there are not exclusively youth such as the ATC, Army cadets and Scouts and Guides - but include some used by 'Care' and 'St John Ambulance' as well. As with so many very worthwhile ventures, the premises occupied by these organisations are fairly unimpressive. The site is quite scruffy and some of the buildings need some TLC, but they provide accommodation of incalculable value in the community: they provide worthwhile activities for young people.

A little over a year ago I received a phone call from a mother whose offspring is a member of the Haslemere Air Cadets. She had heard that Waverley Borough Council was planning to evict them from the hut which the Air Cadets use.

I wrote to councillor Nicky Lee, one of our six local Haslemere resident Waverley Borough councillors and the one whom I thought would be best placed to know the facts. Her reply included a response from Councillor Carole King who said: *"All the groups on the Campus have the standard rights under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 with regard to security of tenure. That is, they have the right to a further lease of up to 14 years on similar terms and conditions as their existing leases with the exception of rent, which is to be at market value. No one has been given notice to quit and it is highly unlikely that this will happen in view of the above (sic)."*



In legal terms the reply is correct: the various occupiers apparently hold the premises under the terms of a business lease and they therefore have a degree of security. However, while that may provide some comfort, it is not adequate. All buildings require maintenance and repairs, and these are not cheap. If the tenants have a full repairing and insuring lease then the obligation to repair falls on them. With only a short term lease there is little incentive to do more than the bare minimum to comply with their legal obligations. This short termism helps no one. Of course, the question of the revised rent still remains a great concern.

I have little doubt that Waverley would say in mitigation that they are under ever increasing pressure to provide Social Housing. (Sorry, I refuse to use the politically correct euphemism of 'Affordable Housing' - affordable to whom?) and that the site is one of the very few they have left in their diminishing property portfolio. It's true, they have sold off all the rest already! Worse, they have allowed all the small industrial sites to be developed for housing too, so we are left with a town where we have a plethora of small, badly designed houses on cramped sites that are the slums of the future. Few have garages and, where they have, they are used for storage as the houses themselves are too small for normal use. Gardens have all but become a thing of the past.

The reason that I mention industrial sites is simple. Next door to the Youth Campus are the timber yard and fencing works of Mr Steve Homewood, a family business established on that site for more than 40 years, but currently a Waverley tenant as well - and one with even less security. Quite apart from the valuable work carried out there in making and installing excellent fencing for the area, the place provides employment, and even exports fencing to the rest of Europe. Steve is a great supporter of all community things where fencing is required. The annual Christmas tree for example is always fenced by him at no cost to the town. More of his fencing appears at the Fringe Festival site, currently in use as I write this.

Can we really allow our borough council to deprive us of every resource in the town? What is the point of having every space filled with cramped housing if the youth of the town have nowhere to go? Why has employment been regarded as unimportant by our borough planners? We have in recent years lost Bake House Yard, Sickle Mill, Haslemere Motorcycles workshops with its 14 other users, as well as several other small but invaluable sites used by small businesses.

If Waverley BC is unable to recognise the worth and importance of such facilities then it may be that the great progress made by Haslemere Vision in getting established and recognised as a force for good can be brought into play here. Sites having a recognised community value can be taken over as registered Community Assets and their longer term use safeguarded. Let us hope that the Localism Act of 2011 really can work for us all.

*Robert Serman*  
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