

Uplands, near High Wycombe



Uplands is currently a De Vere hotel and conference centre; the Society lodged a strong objection to a planning application by Redrow Homes to demolish all the existing buildings and erect 17 detached houses on the site. The building is well-named, located on Four Ashes Road which follows a typical Chiltern ridge overlooking Hughenden Manor. Originally a country house built in 1859 by Captain (later Major) John Maddy Moore Hewett, Adjutant to the Royal Bucks Kings Own Militia, the design has been attributed to the (in)famous “rogue” architect Edward Buckton Lamb. Probably most noted for his reworking of Hughenden Manor for Benjamin Disraeli, Lamb’s contribution to Bucks architecture included work at Chequers, as well as on several church buildings and the design of the Judges’ Lodgings in Aylesbury. BAS can claim a link (albeit rather tenuous) to the building since Lamb was an Honorary Member of the Society, and a later owner of Uplands, the banker Vernon Cocks, was the brother of Alfred Heneage Cocks, antiquarian, naturalist, author of “The Church Bells of Buckinghamshire”, eccentric and a former Secretary of the Society.

Uplands continued as a country house until 1957 when it was bought by the Co-operative Permanent Building Society (later the Nationwide) and converted into a conference and training centre. By 1980 the facilities at Uplands were in need of a radical upgrade and plans were prepared by the important architect, Edward Cullinan, to demolish the service-section of the house but retain the front with the addition of modern flanking pavilions and a cloister to the rear. The grounds were landscaped by Georgina Livingston who had worked with Cullinan, as well as the National Trust, on several prestigious sites. The new work was finished by the end of 1983 and got rave reviews in the architectural press as well as design awards from the Civic Trust and Wycombe District Council.

It seemed to us at BAS that the Redrow proposals were the very opposite of sustainable development, a view shared by many in the local community. I’m pleased to report that the planning application was refused and that the building has now been listed Grade II, owing mainly to the quality of the Cullinan additions. At present the hotel remains open but it remains to be seen what De Vere and the developers will do next.

Marian Miller