

Bulletin 4: (1968/69)

Flass Vale and central housing

The Durham Advertiser once more showed its independence in head-lining the threat to Flass Vale as an open space, and the size and spontaneity of public reaction was impressive. Most of the names in the virtually unanimous letters it printed were previously unknown to the Trust (although we hope they will think of joining us), and petitions also sprang up outside our membership. The Annual General Meeting was strengthened by this concern, and the Secretary agreed to transmit the lists of petitioners to the Town Clerk, as well as the meeting's vote to the same effect. 575 signatures were sent in, and the latest news is that the Council has refused the applications to build, on the advice of the County Planning Officer.

If housing is to be provided within the "saucer" round the peninsula, it should be by discreet reconstruction or replacement of derelict property (of which there is plenty), not by destroying our exceptional riches of woods and grassland. Developers will do better to direct their ingenuity and investment into reviving neglected areas even closer to the centre than Flass Vale, by creating houses and flats of a character for which there is an unsatisfied demand, and for which they should now be able to obtain increased improvement grants within the Conservation Area,

Bulletin 19: (1980)

FLASS VALE : What's in a Name?

The battle for Flass Vale was fought in 1973-74, and victory sealed when the newly-formed District Council bought that part of the Vale on which developers were threatening residential growth. At the time the local authority promised it would remain open land; its recent Report of Survey reiterates the intention to leave it as "an informal recreation area." There was some surprise therefore when the local authority objected to the Trust's proposal that it be registered as common land, or alternatively as village green, before a hearing of a Commons Commissioner in July. The surprise was compounded by the fact that some days before the hearing the City Solicitor had indicated there would not be sustained objection to confirmation of registration. On the day the same solicitor produced the City Engineer as one of the two opposing witnesses and objected even to the consideration by the Commons Commissioner of written evidence on the basis that most of those who had submitted the evidence were not present to give evidence in person – they could have been if a contest had been expected! – and that the very volume of evidence might have undue influence on the Commissioner.

The result, announced in September, was that the parts objected to – including the threatened part acquired in 1974, plus an addition – were excluded, but the remaining two-thirds were pronounced Common Land. Presumably the intention of the City remains unchanged, and perhaps it was a quibble in legal niceties, but it was a strange interlude given that the practical effect of registration is to ensure public access to the Vale for fresh air and exercise by right.

The Trust is grateful to those members who assembled the evidence – Dr. Ashby, Mrs. Crosby (who also collected the evidence for Gilesgate Green

registered by the University Extra-mural Dept.), Ms. Sales, Dr. Doyle, Mr. Norris – and to Mr. Paul Claydon (Commons Society, who acted as legal adviser).

Bulletin 20: (1981)

FLASS VALE

The solitary remaining item in the long-playing saga of Flass Vale was the subject of a Local Inquiry in October. Members will be well aware of our 1973-4 campaign, the pronouncement of the Commons Commissioner last autumn that two-thirds of the area be Common Land and the local authority's plan to leave the whole of the Vale as "an informal recreation area", The latest Inquiry arose from the County Council's Draft Revision of Public Rights of Way on which the Trust had lodged as a right of way the entrance to the Vale past the former Rose Tree Inn. Objection came from the owner of the parcel of land stretching across the entrance to the Vale, a parcel of land retained when the rest of the area on which development had been threatened in 1975 was exchanged with the Council for residential land elsewhere,

The Trust presented its 1973-4 written evidence of people who had walked the path unimpeded for many and, at short notice, was able to present witnesses to substantiate their evidence. (In this respect gratitude is expressed to Mrs, Ashby, who did the recruiting, Miss Leheup, Mr. Morgan, Mr. Rowland, Mrs. Till and Mr. N. Till, Mrs. Tulip and Mr. West). A decision is not expected for several months.

Bulletin 21: (1982)

FLASS VALE

The saga is finally completed, with a public entrance from Waddington Street past the former Rose Tree Inn into Shaw Wood and Flass Vale now assured for all time. The D.O.E. Inspector, having sieved through evidence submitted by the Trust and supported by witnesses at the Inquiry in October 1981, published his conclusions in September. There was sufficient evidence to find in our favour, but not for the minor path which leaves Shaw Wood diagonally for the bottom of Back Western Hill.