

Eshott: It's not about restoration

SIR, — Your report ('Herald', July 31) concerning Mr Ho Sanderson's plans for the development of his businesses at Eshott Hall Estates is headlined 'Bringing back the community'. As a rationale for developing 30 new houses in the current settlement, he cites the 1881 census indicating that there were 140 residents 'in Eshott' and that he plans to restore the village to the number of residents present in Victorian times and 'bring back the community spirit' and 'heart and soul'.

These claims are of particular interest to me, as, like Mr Sanderson, I too had ancestors in the Eshott area in 1881. However, Mr Sanderson seems to have made the common mistake of confusing a 'township' which is a census enumeration area, with a specific community or village. In order to understand correctly the distribution of the population of the 'township' of Eshott, it is important to use the primary source of the census images. If you examine these, it is clear that the 'township' of Eshott covers a wide geographical area and the population is largely located on scattered farms. In 1881 this covered the widespread area that is now South Farm, Eshott, Birnie Farm, East Farm and The Brocks, as well as Eshott Hall (uninhabited in 1881), Home Farm and Eshott. There are also 11 residents registered in the township

at the tile works some distance to the South of South Farm.

Agriculture in the 1880s still relied heavily on labour and the census images show dispersed farm houses with agricultural labourers' cottages, some with as many as 17 members of the same family in one dwelling. Examination of old maps from 1866 up to 1927 reveals much the same distribution of dwellings and these can be viewed on www.old-maps.co.uk. The original census images are available on www.ancestry.co.uk.

Although the population of the 'township' in 1881 is 140, this is dispersed amongst this widespread area and in fact, only 40 people are to be found at this time in the area defined by Mr Sanderson's present development plans. This is far fewer than the present community of approximately 75 people living in the freehold properties alone.

This re-examination of the evidence would appear to call into question Mr Sanderson's rationale for the 'restoration' of a village, as it appears the entity he envisages seems never to have existed as such. This would imply that his plans to develop 30 houses in a small rural community would be purely a financial initiative to fund his other businesses, and should not be confused with enabling any heritage or regeneration agenda. I would suggest that the decline

in the population of this area has more to do with the mechanisation of agriculture than the decline of Eshott Hall.

I would, however, agree with Mr Sanderson that the small present community of Eshott is a lovely tranquil place to live with the diversity of wildlife he describes, both of which would inevitably be jeopardised by the scale of development he proposes. The residents already share a strong sense of community with a well developed communal programme and activities which reflect a diversity of interests. I have lived in villages all my life and Eshott is no different in this regard.

I also agree that the development ten years ago of 26 newly-built and four restored freehold houses has quickly blended in with the environment. This can be attributed to the size of Eshott which was designed specifically to be of a scale which would be in harmony with its rural setting and blend sensitively with this area designated as being of high scenic value.

Dr LESLEY
CLARKE

By e-mail

We understand concerns, says developer

Residents call for action over complaints

A CASTLE Morpeth developer is facing tough action over a breach of planning conditions.

Businessman Ho Sanderson has won national praise for his conservation and restoration work at Eshott.

But now he may have to answer to Council chiefs over problems at his luxury Hartford Hall development near Bedlington.

Residents say environmental and landscape works that were promised when they bought their homes have never been completed.

And they have complained that waste material has been left on the Estate.

Residents Association Secretary Christine Purdon said: "The original sales literature extolled the virtues of living on the Estate, where the woodland and river pathways, flora and fauna would be carefully and compassionately managed, making Hartford a wonderful place to live.

"None of the promoted environmentally friendly and sustainable projects have come to fruition. In fact, the management company has even been fined by the Environment Agency for polluting the River Blyth."

The Hartford Hall Estate, which is a separate entity to the Eshott company, accepts there have been delays, but insists that regular maintenance

work is taking place and that material left on site is Northumberland stone and other resources for the final phase of landscaping.

A company spokeswoman said residents are obliged to contribute financially to the Estate's upkeep and were advised in 2006 of the need for enabling development to fund further work.

However, the Association has rejected the idea and is calling for enforcement action.

A Wansbeck Council spokesman confirmed the authority is preparing breach of planning condition notices to be served on the developer and a number of issues need to be addressed.

"There has been constant dialogue with the Estate owners over the past 18 months in an attempt to resolve these issues. Whilst the developer has made some attempts to address a number of outstanding problems and deal with the planning consent conditions, this has proved to be unsuccessful," he said.

A spokeswoman for the developer said: "Hartford Hall Estate understands the concerns and frustrations caused by the delay to ancillary works.

"The company has been working hard to finalise an application for enabling development. The application is expected to be ready for sub-

mission in the near future.

"Hartford Hall Estate has spent time partly ensuring that residents have been fully informed.

"Following consultations in 2006 with residents, Wansbeck Council and heritage authorities, all parties were advised of the need to submit a further application to complete the Estate development."

She added that as a corporate member of the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, the company takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously and has a dedicated wildlife and conservation officer.

She said workers have been trained on the issue, while landscape and conservation work continues to be funded and maintenance staff are in regular attendance.

However, she said residents must also play their part.

"Hartford Hall Estate and its residents are, in fact, jointly responsible for the environmental upkeep of the Estate and residents are contractually obliged to make financial contributions. It is vital that this partnership of mutual responsibility is honoured by both parties," she said.

The company has recently altered the Estate's external lighting to address concerns about bats.