

3. The Parish of Woodhall Spa

About Woodhall Spa

Woodhall Spa began as the result of one man's vision.

John Parkinson's dream was to open a coal mine, plant a forest and build a new town. In the process of looking for coal in 1821 he found the Spa water and by a quirk of fate it was this that was to prove his most lasting legacy.

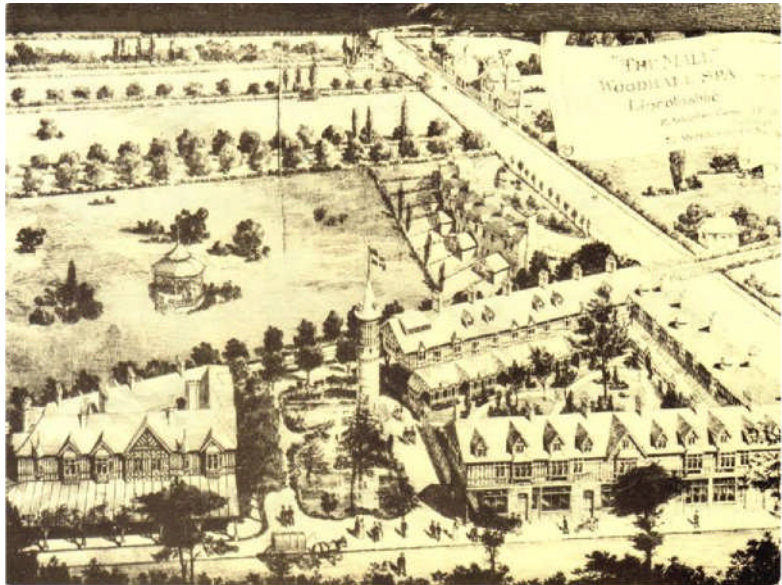
The extraordinary and colourful history of the development of the comparatively new community that is Woodhall Spa has ensured its enduring appeal as a social, recreational and leisure centre for Lincolnshire - and beyond. Each generation has stamped its own vision on the village and this Plan will help those of us who live here now to do the same.

To understand what makes Woodhall Spa 'tick' and define that special 'something' that has prompted East Lindsey District Council (ELDC) to describe the Spa as its 'Jewel in the Crown' it is necessary to understand more about how it was conceived and what shapes, and continues to influence, its development.

A Planned Community

Woodhall Spa is unique in Lincolnshire, having more in common in its history and ambience with Spa towns like Harrogate, than with the traditional market towns and rural villages of the county.

From the start, the architect commissioned to create the Spa, Richard Adolphus Cames, had a vision of his own - an elegant and spacious community in a woodland setting, with broad tree-lined avenues and large residential plots. This is still perceived as one of our greatest assets - 'the space is the place' is an often quoted observation. To achieve it, Mr Cames created a stringent set of design and planning guidelines, even specifying that Woodhall Spa should not have 'streets', a policy maintained today.



Cames' Vision - Woodhall Spa, a planned community

At the heart of this new community were the Pinewoods and Spa baths, now semiderelict, the luxurious Victoria

Hotel nearby, (the site of the

Coronation Hall) which burnt down on Easter Day 1920 and the Royal Hotel and Winter Gardens (where Royal Square is today), which was destroyed by a parachute aerial mine in 1943. There were many other smaller hotels and boarding houses to accommodate the visitors who flocked to take the waters, arriving at Woodhall Junction, which had direct links to London, and travelling into the second station in the centre of the Spa on the Horncastle branch line.

A Fashionable Spa Resort

In its Edwardian heyday, the cream of society, including royalty, visited Woodhall Spa. Accordingly the community enjoyed many more facilities than would normally be expected in a village of its size - still the case today. Distinguished guests at the Victoria Hotel would be seen in full evening dress strolling through woods hung with Chinese lanterns before dinner, there was even a regular visitor list printed.



The Victoria Hotel circa 1910

Although the Spa became a less fashionable destination after the First World War, the community continued to prosper in a quiet way as both as an elegant leisure destination and as a centre for healing. The internationally famous Golf Course was redesigned by Colonel S V Hotchkin MC and C K Hutchison in the 1920's and has since remained virtually unaltered. It is a world ranking Championship course and was recently voted the 'Best Inland Golf Course' by Golf World magazine. In 1995

it was purchased by the English Golf Union, who built their HQ in the grounds and added a second golf course.

The Jubilee Park and swimming pool were built and given to Woodhall Spa by Lady Weigall in 1935, a facility as far from the municipal baths of the time as it was possible to be. She also oversaw the conversion of her concert pavilion to the famous Kinema in the Woods. Visitors from all over the country came to take the waters, many staying at the Alexandra Hospital for this purpose, returning year after year. Bottles of Spa water were posted throughout the UK. Like other Spas, we also attracted a cosmopolitan mix of ex-colonial families, writers and artists, many of whom came to live here.

Woodhall Spa at War

During the Second World War the Spa took on the atmosphere of a garrison town, recording more air raid warnings than Lincoln. The streets rang to the sound of marching feet as regiments from across Britain disembarked at the Junction and marched down the Witham Road to billets in the large houses and hotels or the camps on Kirkby Lane. Armed guards surrounded The Pinewoods where Edwardian aristocrats used to walk and

where equipment and ammunition were now stored. Paratroopers went directly from the Spa to Arnhem and came directly back here from the battlefield. The

RAF used the Petwood Hotel as an officers' mess, most famously for the 617

'Dambuster' Squadron. At the end of the war, as the British troops left, thousands of Polish troops arrived, continuing the cosmopolitan experience.



Dambusters War Memorial

Through the next 30 years, Woodhall Spa evolved to its current role as a conference, leisure and social centre for the county and beyond, with its range of hotels, restaurants, shops, pubs and the many sporting, and social clubs. The Woodhall Spa Agricultural Show ran for more than 50 years, in

its heyday second only to the county show in popularity. As car use grew, cuts in the railways saw the Horncastle branch line, which ran through the centre of the Spa, close, followed by Woodhall Junction in 1970 when the Lincoln to Boston line along the River Witham was closed too.

Until 1974, Woodhall Spa had its own Urban District Council and remained very much in control of its own fate, determining the style and type of developments, maintaining its own tree-lined avenues and developing the park and other public spaces.

With local government re-organisation, the Urban District Council ceased to exist to be replaced by a Parish Council. While surrounding villages rejoiced in the new powers of parish councils, Woodhall Spa had the opposite experience. Planning control and the running of Jubilee Park, road and tree maintenance and other powers passed to the new District and County Councils, a loss keenly felt to this day.



Renovation of previous school dormitories

It was from the early 1970s that Woodhall Spa began to see a more concerted house building programme in its woodlands - Arnhem Way and Woodland Drive were built and houses were added to infill the existing avenues and roads. As pressure built with the housing boom of the 1980's, the need to protect the remaining woods and the special character and heritage of the Spa led to the creation of the Cottage Museum, the designation of the Conservation Area and the first Village Plan in 1988, with the help and support of a planning officer at the District Council.

The Village Plan, and its successor District Plan, has seen many old properties tastefully renovated and new developments in the centre of the Spa that have enhanced and enlivened the village.

New Pressures

Woodhall Spa has always thrived on a steady influx of new residents. However, the recent growth in the rate of house and flat construction, mostly in the executive category and promoted heavily in the south-east of England, is clearly seen by residents as a threat to the maintenance of a balanced, inclusive and sustainable community. It is also perceived as having the potential to destroy the essential design features and unique Spa resort ambience that has been at the heart of Woodhall Spa's enduring attraction.

The pressure on services, traffic issues and questions over the former Spa Baths and the future development of Jubilee Park have all added to the feeling of a village under threat, a feeling which is reflected in the high response rate to the Parish Plan Questionnaire and the attendance rate at public meetings on these issues over the last 18 months.

Some preconceptions need to be challenged; often Woodhall Spa is considered to be a wealthy village and although it is true that many are comfortable there are a large number who are not wealthy and could be penalized by this way of thinking. The parish needs as much help as the next including financial support for projects and investment to ensure future success.

This Parish Plan is Woodhall Spa's way of showing all those in a position to influence the development of our community what aspects we most value, what changes we would like to see and what we want to avoid. It highlights the shared responsibility of all agencies in helping us to achieve this blueprint for our future.

