

From: Your Opinions, The Herts Advertiser, p.28, 15/2/2018

The Editor,

Following the piece in your issue of Feb 1 on the Sandridge Road Wastes, some explanation of their ownership, management and status may help your readers.

The estate (or manor) of Sandridge was part of the monastic lands owned by St Albans Abbey. In 1381, as a consequence of the Peasants Revolt, the right to rest livestock being brought to and from St Albans market was conceded either side of the stretch of road now between Boundary Road and the King William crossroads. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII the estate was sold, with the common rights still applying. It eventually came into the ownership of the Spencers, Princess Diana's family. The Sandridge Road Manorial Wastes, along with the common land of Bernards Heath, are owned to this day by the Spencers, but are managed by the City of St Albans for the benefit of its citizens, according to an agreement signed early last century.

The flowering trees along the Wastes, admired and valued by residents and visitors alike, were planted in 1935 to mark the Silver Jubilee of King George V. Planting trees on common land is not prohibited, within reason, but permanent structures, or 'works' as they are termed, including any hard crossings, have to be approved by the Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, according to section 38 of the Commons Act of 2006. In addition, there are local byelaws prohibiting parking on the Wastes. Access to property across common land is allowed, but the legal owner still has the right to make a charge, if they so wish, for crossing their land. The article stated, incorrectly, that the Wastes are commonly owned land. Most common land is in fact owned by someone and is not necessarily in common ownership, as might be imagined. However, historically, the local populace ('the commoners') had the free right to certain defined activities, grazing animals or collecting firewood, for instance.

In your issue of Feb 8 (Letters), Liz McCann jumps to the conclusion that Friends of Bernards Heath advocates the draconian action of denying the owners of properties on Sandridge Road access to the Public Highway across the Wastes. Not so. FoBH members have no wish to deny access. The concern is that, whether it be by poor choice or neglect, the spacious grassed verges have come, over recent years, to look like the proverbial dog's breakfast, being a mixture of tarmac, concrete, block paving and gravel. A consistent and limited choice of visually less intrusive crossover types would do much to enhance what is one of the principal gateways into our city.

Ms McCann also referred to neglect of the trees on the Wastes. It should be pointed out that trees do not live forever. In particular, trees selectively bred for their outstanding flowering abilities will not live as long as, say, oaks or yews. Those of the original, 1930's planting are 80 years old and replacement is to be expected. They are of considerable size now and responsibly, cannot be allowed to shed branches or fall at random as the result of decay.

The Friends of Bernards Heath exists to further public enjoyment of Bernards Heath, Sandridge Road Wastes and Beech Bottom Dyke and promote knowledge of their long history. We are concerned that they should not be absorbed carelessly and unthinkingly into a suburban landscape indistinguishable from many others.

Roger Miles Committee Member, FoBH (BernardsHeath.org)