

The 1972 'Future of the Manor' report

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In 21st Century Britain the problem of caring for an increasingly ageing population is everyday news. A solution currently being considered to face the challenges ahead is to build new community institutions, with properly constructed neighbourhoods assisting family members to help meet the care needs of their elderly relatives.

In 1972 just such an innovative proposal for Ewelme was mooted in a remarkable document found in George Cannon's archive. In 1972, a member of the Trust, Mr A. Garrard, submitted a report entitled '*The Future of the Manor*'. (The Trustees had bought the Manor in 1868 for £2,100, intending to set up a grammar school, but the project stalled as State education was then being progressed, so the property was let out).

In 1972 it was tenanted by an elderly lady Miss Gwendoline Watson, paying £210 per annum, who sub-let the grazing, and let Manor Cottage to Ron McKinnell. Mr Garrard believed, that due to Miss Watson's advanced age, the return of the Manor to the Trustees would not be long delayed - so he listed 5 options for its future. It could be offered for re-letting as it was; or it could be sold for a high price; or developed by the Trustees for housing; or acquired by the Local Authority for its housing; or used by the Trustees for extending the Almshouse. He recognised the danger to the village from the mass development of 10 acres of central building land - describing this as '*a speculator's dream but the Ewelme lover's nightmare*'. He then added that as the Trustees were committed to the preservation of the village, he did not believe '*that they could, with decency, sell this property to a developer.*'



The Manor

Mr Garrard's far-sighted proposal was to turn the whole site into a 'Retreat' for a community of pensioners of a mixed social background housed in a variety of accommodation. A gateway lodge would be built for a Porter, (preferably an ex-Warrant Officer), responsible for the security and maintenance of the grounds and for transporting the residents in a minibus. The Manor Cottage would house a Matron - and its gardens enlarged to provide allotments for the almsmen. On the grazing land would be built the Retreat itself, a low terrace building provided by the Trustees as an extension of the Cloisters to make up for the rooms lost in the planned modernisation (i.e. 5 dwellings). On the western end of the park would be built private residences of 3 or 4 bedrooms, let to selected families (including their children), '*with known interests in the welfare of the elderly*' and compiling some 20 people of mixed ages. A large house would be built beyond these, occupied by one of the Societies that cared for old people 'e.g. *Help the Aged.*' The acres could also accommodate a cluster of bungalows for married couples who were still active enough to care for themselves, until they needed to move into the Special Care house for simple nursing.

The Manor itself would house the Warden and be used as a community centre for residents of the Retreat, the Old Cloisters '*and perhaps, by invitation, some of the villagers*' to meet for talks, hobbies, films, music '*and alas Bingo*'. The park would also have a tennis court (for the use of the selected younger families); a Bowling Green and a 'Pétanque' court, '*the best of all games for the elderly*'.

Mr Garrard concluded his Utopian vision by writing – '*The picture seen by the visitor is one of constant, but slow-moving to-ing and fro-ing by the old and middle aged, enlivened from time to time by the children of the younger residents. As much a contented community as is possible, perhaps, but one where the pensioners live free from their soul-destroying anxiety for the future, in their confidence in the endless duration of the Trustees' Retreat.*'

For whatever reasons, the scheme was not adopted. The Trust subsequently built Suffolk House to replace the 5 dwellings lost in the modernisation of The Cloisters and The Manor was re-let. Nevertheless, it is tempting to ponder on the impact on the village if the Retreat had come into being.

Ewelme Village Archive