Surrey's post-WW1 housing for the workers

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Surrey starts to build

As with most rural counties, Surrey did not have many slums that needed clearing, but it did have workers who lived in sub-standard housing and needed to be re-housed, and a low-earning agricultural workforce who needed homes. The Rural and Urban District Councils were contacted by the new government housing organisation and made aware of the options to build houses for the working classes. Many of the council minutes that have survived record an enthusiasm to take up the opportunity. An example is little Windlesham Rural District Council (centred on Bagshot). A sparsely populated borough, yet their Special Housing Committee immediately increased their existing plan from 12 houses to 24. This may not sound many, but was quite a commitment for the council and they immediately started negotiation with a local land owner to purchase some land at Guildford Road, Bagshot.

More typical was Woking Urban District Council, a relatively small but well populated district that was growing fast. It drew up plans to build a small estate of 42 houses in what is now called Old Woking. It soon added to this with developments in Horsell, Knaphill and Westfield, all within a few miles of the town centre. Altogether nearly 42 acres was purchased for the construction of 100 houses. This was much more in line with the Ministry of Reconstruction's hopes. The larger Guildford Rural District Council also had big plans but decided on 7 small developments totalling 85 houses, mainly in outlying parts. None of their schemes consisted of more than 18 houses. Dorking Urban District Council also decided on carrying out many small schemes spread across the whole District, along with 2 small estates near the town centre.

A common problem they all came up against was the cost to build the houses. Most authorities purchased land quickly, at their own cost, assuming that house construction would soon follow. The need to purchase land in anticipation was because of the inevitable protracted negotiations, as against house construction which was a simple matter of taking the cheapest quotation and getting going. Some authorities were to regret this enthusiasm to purchase land in advance of government consultations. The minutes of the housing committees for most authorities show that there was an assumption that the excess cost to build the houses, no matter how high, would be covered by the government without hassle. But the Ministry of Health (the authority from 1919) was not going to loan money for schemes that seemed excessively costly; and all were deemed to be excessively costly. This is well illustrated with an example from Caterham Urban District Council. They were initially planning to build just 6 houses and received tenders from builders that ranged from £1,460 down to £895 per house to build a house that would be worth, without land, about £400 at most. The council did eventually suceed in building houses but it took many years of negotiation with central government and in 1922 they took the plans off the assisted scheme and took over funding completely themselves, whilst selling some of the land to a developer.

Woking UDC approached the problem with a bit more pragmatism and negotiating skills. They designed functional boxes from the start and so had less funding problems that others (they also successfully raised money through Housing Bonds). Windlesham was one of those who gave up and some of the land was sold to a private developer and the rest given over to allotments. One authority that seemed to "just get on with it" and build the houses was Dorking. All the planned housing was built and all were more than just a "box with a lid", and are a credit to the council. There are no obvious clues in any of their historical records as to why they were so successful with their plans, but researchers get a distinct feeling that those in charge of housing knew exactly what they were doing. The differences between how Caterham and Dorking managed their house building are covered in more detail below.

Once the housing was being built, local people could apply for tenancy. The available minutes show a preference to local people who had a need, without any stated priority for ex-soldiers. All the tenants had references and all needed to pay the rent, which could be quite considerable, although it was for a new and well built home. Not all the tenants chosen turned out to be suitable and Guildford had a long running battle with a tenant whose sole income was a grant from the Guildford Commissioners that was noticebly less that the rent alone. The tenant was never evicted, probably for social and compassionate reasons, and he eventually solved Guildford's problem by sailing to Australia, although leaving behind the sizeable rent arrears.

Surrey examples - Housing

The examples below are for housing and have been chosen as each had different ideas of what to build, and on what scale. Most Surrey Districts had housing schemes but all would have encountered the same problems described below. Some councils had success with their plans and others did not. The following section covers the three Surrey smallholdings colonies created in 1921.

Woking Urban District Council

This borough has been chosen as an example as it built post-WW1 social housing very much in line with the vision of the Ministry of Reconstruction. The Council's Housing Committee were already planning to build 24 houses as a response to the growth of the town, but increased that to 76 in September 1917, provided public funds would be available. These commendable plans were in place well before any government announcement and suggests that the council were aware of plans to introduce housing subsidies, post WW1. They even expected another 180 houses would be built by private individuals or speculative builders. In April 1918 the council's surveyor was instructed to plan for a site at Old Woking (called the "Woking Village" site) at a tight 12 houses per acre with a total of 74 houses. By the end of 1918 this plan had been reduced to 52 houses on a smaller site but with all houses having provision for a bath (as per Tudor Walters' report). Eventually, 42 houses were built on a site of 5.26 acres, at 8 houses per acre. This sounds generous, but was typical for social housing at the time – decent gardens were seen as a corner-stone of working class housing design. The council made good progress but events were overtaken by the 1919 Act and its new method of subsidising. Woking UDC then hit a problem. Any government loans under the 1919 Housing Act were offered to smaller authorities where the total rateable value was under £200,000. Unfortunately, Woking's was above this level (£212,000) and so the Public Works Loan Commission would not lend the money to purchase the land and start the building. This left the council in a difficult position. They had already agreed to purchase the land and had sent tenders to builders. To their credit, the council did not abandon the scheme but looked to raise most of the capital by issuing Housing Bonds for local people to purchase. The bonds were for 7 years with a guaranteed income of 6%. The bonds issue was a success and the records show that many private individuals in Woking purchased small numbers of bonds. With the problem of the capital now sorted, the council could proceed with applying for the subsidy.

In anticipation of the 42 houses being built the council had already advertised the property for rent and 195 individuals requested an application form, of which 126 were returned. The demographic breakdown makes interesting reading:

63 applicants were ex-servicemen permanently engaged in work in the district
19 were other residents without a house
12 were residents already with a house
32 were from outside the district.

Returning to the problem of the subsidy, the estimated cost for the 3 types of house were around £1000 per house, above what the council wanted, and way above what the MoH (who were now in

control of housing subsidies) would tolerate. High building costs meant a larger debt over and above the 1d on the rate, and so a higher subsidy for the MoH. There then came protracted negotiations between the council, the builder (local builder W. G. Tarrant of Byfleet) and the MoH Housing Commissioner. Eventually a compromise was agreed between all parties whereby the builder was forced to reduce labour rates (in accordance with published government rates), the council reduced their specification for the housing, and the MoH agreeing to accept a higher-than-desirable construction estimate and therefore a higher subsidy than desired. The Ministry was starting to accept that building costs in the home counties were always going to be high – as they are to this day. Even so, the final bill for the 42 houses was £35,214; a unit cost of £838. This cost included roads, sewers, fences and loan costs, but did not include the cost of the land. The high costs are well illustrated by one tenant offering to buy his house a few years later for £400. His offer was turned down. The use of local builder Tarrant is an interesting one. He was a well-known, respected and prolific house builder in west Surrey and known more for his building of the up-market estates of St George's Hill, Weybridge, and Wentworth in Virginia Water.

Whilst the Woking Village site was being progressed, the council expanded their plans to include 24 houses at Gongers Lane (now Westfield Avenue), 30 houses at Kirby Road, Horsell, and 4 houses at Knaphill (Broadway/Sussex Rd). The construction estimates for these houses were also much higher than expected at between £913 and £1,071 per house. As with the Woking Village site, the prices were lowered by a combination of negotiation with various builders, and a reduction in adornments and fixtures. The construction was under way by October 1920 and the subsidies were agreed by the MoH. The average cost per house (excluding land) came out at: £1,191 for Gongers Lane; £1,159 for Kirby Road and £1,056 for Knaphill. These latter houses are mainly of the larger parlour-type whereas the Village houses are predominantly non-parlour.

Finally getting approval for the housing to be built was not the end of the problem for the council as regards the Westfield/Horsell/Knaphill housing. As the MoH were providing a subsidy they would set the minimum rent to protect their annual costs and ensure the subsidy did not increase because of a bigger deficit against the 1d in £ rate limit. This rent was set at a minimum of 15s 10¼d per week for the houses in Woking (more for the parlour-type houses). The council believed this to be "exceeding heavy" and requested that the ministry should agree to less. Eventually, after a problem with getting enough bricks delivered from the local brick yard in Knaphill, the houses were built and occupied. The Westfield and Knaphill sites were always planned to be expanded and more land was purchased. The Council wrote letters to the MoH imploring them to agree to subsidise more much-needed housing in Knaphill, but the Ministry refused. The negotiations came to a halt when subsidies were abandoned in 1921. The schemes were all resurrected under the 1923 and 1924 Housing Acts, including the much-needed expansion of the Knaphill scheme. The Westfield site was also considerably expanded over the next decade. The MoH finally agreed to a rent reduction across Woking in 1923 and the Woking Village tenants received a reduction of 1/6d per week, although Woking applied for a 2/6d per week reduction from the MoH. Rent reductions on the other sites soon followed.

The houses still stand, in many cases very much how they were built. They are clearly "council houses", with many having a plain "box with a roof" look, but have weathered well over the last 90 years and are a testament to the building standards that the council tried hard to maintain despite pressure on costs. The council continued building small pockets of housing using subsidies under the 1923/24 Housing Acts. This story of a determination to build the houses wanted, raise the capital to purchase land, fund the building, all whilst negotiating as much subsidy they could get from the government, was typical for all authorities around the country. Woking's problems with costs were exacerbated by the high material and labour costs – as they still are today.

From the 1950s map below it can be seen that the initial 4 sites are spread around the edges of the town. But even the Woking Village site is a short cycle/bus ride from the town centre. There was also local industrial employment in the Woking Village area.

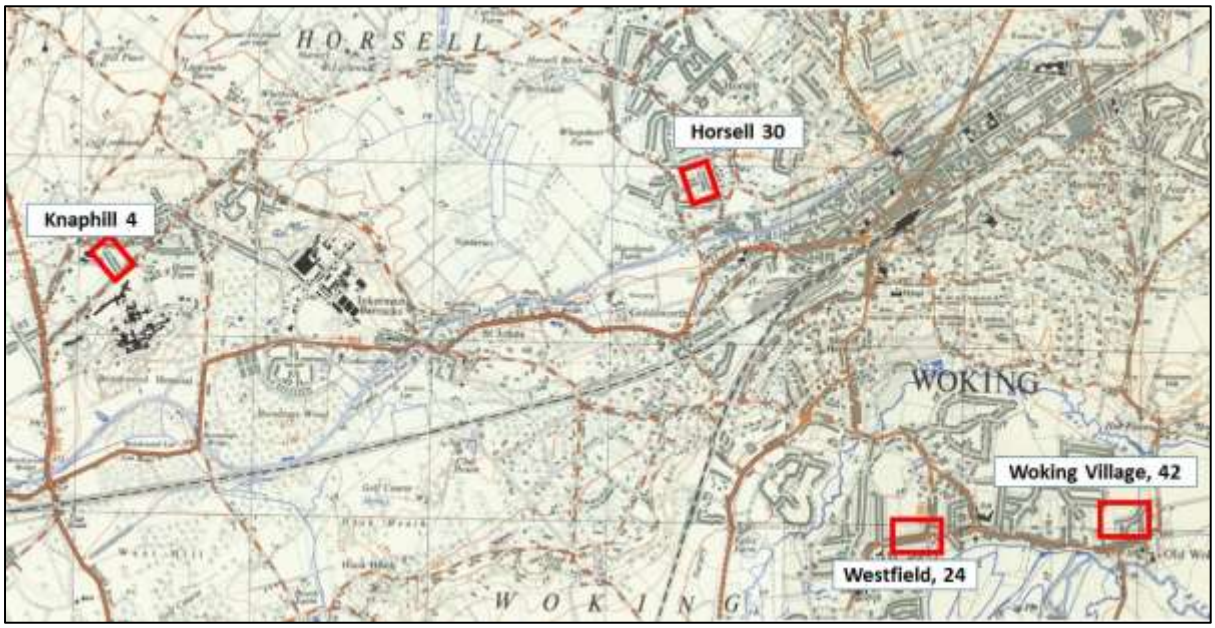

Figure 1: 1950s map showing location of Woking's housing schemes

The drawing below of one of Woking's proposed houses shows well the feature of a gable extending out the front at each end of the pair and a hipped roof on the main part of the building. The main reason for this is to save timber and bricks over having a plain gable roof, as originally advised in the Tudor Walters designs. The improvement to the looks of the house is incidental. What Woking actually built seems to have been interpreted slightly differently. The design has been simplified with the front door in a different location and lacking a window downstairs on the outside. The result is to upset the symmetry of the design. Note the brick arches over the windows in the smaller houses. This is a feature of most early houses built, but was soon replaced with a simple lintel, to reduce costs.

Figure 2 : "No. 2" Type house

When viewing the photographs below, note that a number of the properties are now in private hands and have been modified, in sympathy with the design in many cases, and so those photographed are a selection of houses that are very much as they were constructed. The four schemes have large public parks close by. The smallest of the Woking Village houses have been completely pebble-dashed in modern materials (by Woking BC) which has done nothing to improve their looks – not something that should have happened to a Tarrant house.

Figure 3: Kirby Road, Horsell

Figure 4: Westfield Road

Figure 5: Knaphill, parlour type

Figure 6: Knaphill, non-parlour, built 1924

Figure 7: Woking Village, parlour type

Figure 8: Woking Village non-parlour

Dorking Urban and Rural District Councils

Dorking's Urban District Council decided to build two housing developments in town centre, with the initial one totalling a commendable 80 houses (soon to be expanded by 22), and the Rural District Council built housing for agricultural workers in small pockets all over the District, comprising 84 houses in total. All of the latter are substantial buildings of considerable architectural merit that fits particularly well into the typical Surrey village where a simple "box with a roof" would look out of place.

The UDC's scheme was proposed on April 1920 on land acquired from Sondes Place and resulted in 80 houses in Nower Road. The development was continued in Marlborough and Beresford Roads, just south of the High Street. The Council raised £25,000 from private lenders at a generous 6½% pa, but did not resort to Housing Bonds. This sum enabled the land to be purchased. They applied for a loan from the PWLB for the construction of roads and sewers and another quite substantial one of £50,000 to fund the house building. The first of the Nower Road houses were ready for occupation in the spring of 1921 but required an increase in rents a year later to cover the outgoings from the Sinking Fund. It is pleasing to read in the council minutes that the number of applicants far exceeded the housing available and that local applicants only would be considered. The housing in Marlborough and Beresford Roads followed, using the Council's experiences and skills built up with the Nower Road scheme. The housing on Marlborough and Beresford Roads were added to under the later housing Acts.

The RDC's scheme to build small pockets of housing for agricultural workers all around the District was also completed quickly and efficiently. The Council borrowed the capital to purchase the land and build the housing. The calculated annual deficit was £3,380pa for which the rate payers would contribute £360pa via a 1d on the rates. The balance was covered by a subsidy from the MoH. There are no committee records indicating protracted discussions or efforts to reduce the cost of the housing.

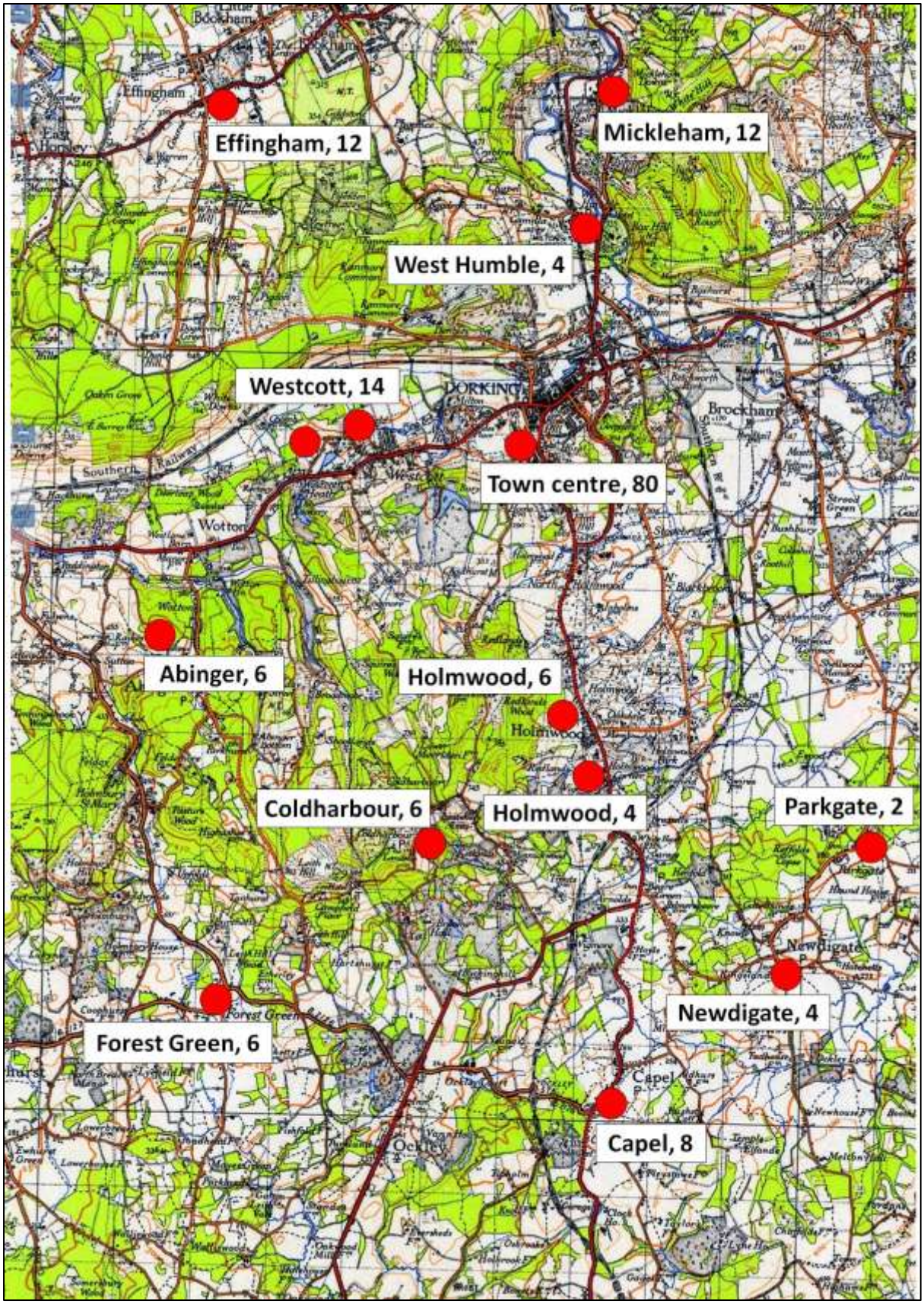

Figure 9: The distribution of Dorking's early housing

Nower Road today is still a quiet cul-de-sac. The houses comprise different styles but most seem well looked after with very few inappropriate "improvements". The different styles are mixed to replicate

a typical rural development rather than the more regimented garden estate. The only sign of cost-cutting is in the use of the bricks. The bricks on the front of the non-rendered houses are of a better quality than used on the sides or rear.

Figure 10: Nower Road. Three different styles. Built 1921

Figure 11: Nower Road. Functional and substantial

Figure 12: Nower Road. Cheaper bricks than on the front

The outlying schemes were built to house agricultural workers but are of a much higher standard than expected. One could almost accuse Dorking RDC of showing off. Some of the houses have views that would be the envy of many residents today. Below are examples.

Figure 13: The row of 12 houses in Mickleham, built 1923

Figure 14: The rear of one pair of Mickleham houses

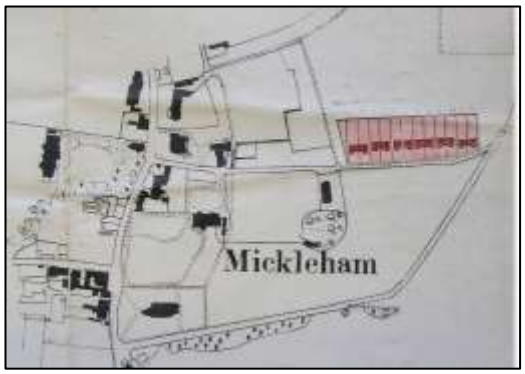

Figure 15: From the original plans

Figure 16: Effingham. Another example of a mix of styles

Figure 17: Effingham. Quality and style

Figure 18: From the original plans

There are just 4 houses in the West Humble scheme. They are very much as originally built but suffer now from facing the busy A24 dual carriageway between Dorking and Leatherhead, although this would have been a busy road when the houses were built. In compensation, the houses look onto Box Hill and there is a rail station close by.

Figure 19: West Humble. Same style as Figure 17

Figure 20: West Humble

Guildford Rural District Council

This example from Surrey falls between the Woking and Dorking schemes in its ambitions in that the outlying developments were all over the district, but on a larger scale than Dorking, but with few in close proximity to the town centre, unlike Woking.

The Housing Committee met regularly and produced excellent and detailed minutes. These minutes relate the usual problems of excessive tenders from builders although not so bad as in some Districts. Possibly, being a large District with a number of potential building opportunities, the local builders were being careful not to be seen to profiteer. It is noticeable that the tenders received from all the builders were suspiciously close to each other. One difference between Guildford and the other Districts investigated is the use made of the two main architects engaged, Messrs Norris and Gambier Parry. Both carried out most of the negotiations with the builders and the Housing Commissioner and it is clear from the minutes that any differences were dealt with professionally and relatively swiftly; the Housing Committee just reported on the negotiations. An example is with the quotations for the first three developments. These were for 12 houses in Artington, 12 in Compton, and 16 in Hurtmore. The initial quotes from 25th Nov 1919 were reduced in just 2 months, as per table below.

Site	Houses	Tender as at 25/11/19	Per house	New tender at 18/1/20	Per house
Artington	12	£12,373	£1,031	£9,936	£828
Compton	12	£12,447	£1,037	£10,153	£846
Hurtmore	16	£16,560	£1,035	£12,233	£765

Note that the proposed houses were planned to be of the parlour type and more than a "box with a roof". The more reasonable tenders enabled the rents to be estimated at an affordable 10/- per week for non-parlour houses and 12/6d for parlour houses. The rent of the smaller houses was finally agreed with the MoH at 9/- per week. When the loans to cover the costs were taken out the calculations, the final costs were closer to the former 1919 figure, although the loan would also cover expected maintenance costs and overheads.

Site	Houses	Site cost loan (80 years)	Building cost loan (60 years)	Building cost per house	Occupation started
Artington	12	£382	£12,433	£1,036	4/4/1921
Compton	12	£334	£12,829	£1,069	4/7/1921
Hurtmore	16	£72	£17,737	£1,108	19/2/1921

The next 5 developments progressed soon after the above three and showed a noticeable reduction in costs in just a short time between the two schemes.

Site	Houses	Site cost loan (80 years)	Building cost loan (60 years)	Building cost per house	Occupation started
Puttenham	10	£135	£9,734	£973	4/8/1921
Worplesdon	18	£464	£16,346	£908	24/10/1921
Wood Street	12	£460	£10,901	£908	31/10/1921
Burpham	6	£122	£5,369	£895	24/10/1921
Send Village	6	£153	£5,996	£1000	17/10/1921

On the 8th Feb 1921 (shortly after the first houses were being occupied) the Housing Committee recorded the contents of a letter to be sent to the MoH regarding rents. This is very informative and needs no further explanation.

"*That the Ministry of Health be informed that the committee are beginning to find that houses cannot be let to the class of person for whom they are intended, at a rent, plus rates, of more than 5/- weekly for non parlour and 6/- weekly for parlour houses, and to ask for any suggestions which the Ministry can make with reference to the matter*". The committee minutes have no record of any response from the MoH.

From April 1922 the committee persisted with requests to the MoH to reduce rents of the above 8 schemes by 33⅓% (which would have noticeably increased the annual MoH subsidies). The MoH agreed to a 6d/week reduction (about 5%) which was rejected. In October 1922 the committee finally agreed to a proposal from the MoH for the following weekly rents (which excluded rates and water charges). These are significant reductions on the rents originally agreed; typically 9/- for non-parlour and 12/6d for parlour.

Site	Type "A", non parlour	Type "B", parlour
Artington	5/-	11/-
Compton	7/-	10/-
Hurtmore	7/-	10/-
Worplesdon	7/-	10/-
Send	6/6d	9/6d
Burpham	6/6d	-
Wood Street	6/6d	10/-
Puttenham	6/-	-

Whilst these negotiations were proceeding, the council prepared for its last set of developments under the 1919 Housing Act. This was for 64 houses across 9 locations in the district. The tender chosen was from W. G. Tarrant of Byfleet. Despite the fact that Tarrant's were never going to be a cheap choice, their first tender response makes interesting comparison with earlier schemes listed above. The costs were between £810 and £870 per house, depending on type and location. The costs were definitely on a downward trend as labour and material prices started to come down. However, the tender was rejected by the MoH as still being too high. The architect renegotiated the prices based on a significant drop in labour and materials costs, but the schemes got caught up in the removal of subsidies in 1921 and all were abandoned in June 1921 and most of the purchased land was sold. Only two, Peaslake and Shere, were restarted in 1923 under the new Act, and just 3 more schemes were added. The table below shows that the 9 schemes planned in 1921 were reduced to 5 by 1923, but these were built with commendable speed once the 1923 subsidies were agreed. Note the considerable reduction in the cost to build when compared to earlier schemes. These later houses have smaller gardens than those built under the 1919 Act.

Site	Houses	Site cost loan (80 years)	Building cost loan (60 years)	Building cost per house	Occupation started
Peaslake, Fulvens Cottages	12	£432	£6,970	£580	13/10/1924
Ripley, Newark Lane	12	£228	£6,961	£580	13/10/1924
Send, Burnt Common	8	£165	£4,118	£515	3/5/1926
Shere, Pathfield Cottages	6	£167	£3,395	£566	13/10/1924
West Horsley, Fulkes Cottages	12	£260	£6,609	£700	8/12/1924

The Council then became prolific developers using the 1924 Housing Act and built across the District, but never more than 12 houses per scheme.

The map below (from the late 1930s) has the locations marked. Those in red are the houses built under the 1919 Act and those in blue were built under the 1923 Act. Note that only Artington could be considered to be in proximity to Guildford town centre for a working man, with all being located to benefit agricultural workers. The Burpham Lane cottages have been demolished and replaced by 3 very large multiple-occupancy houses that have an architectural style based on the demolished buildings, but without the understated neatness of the originals.

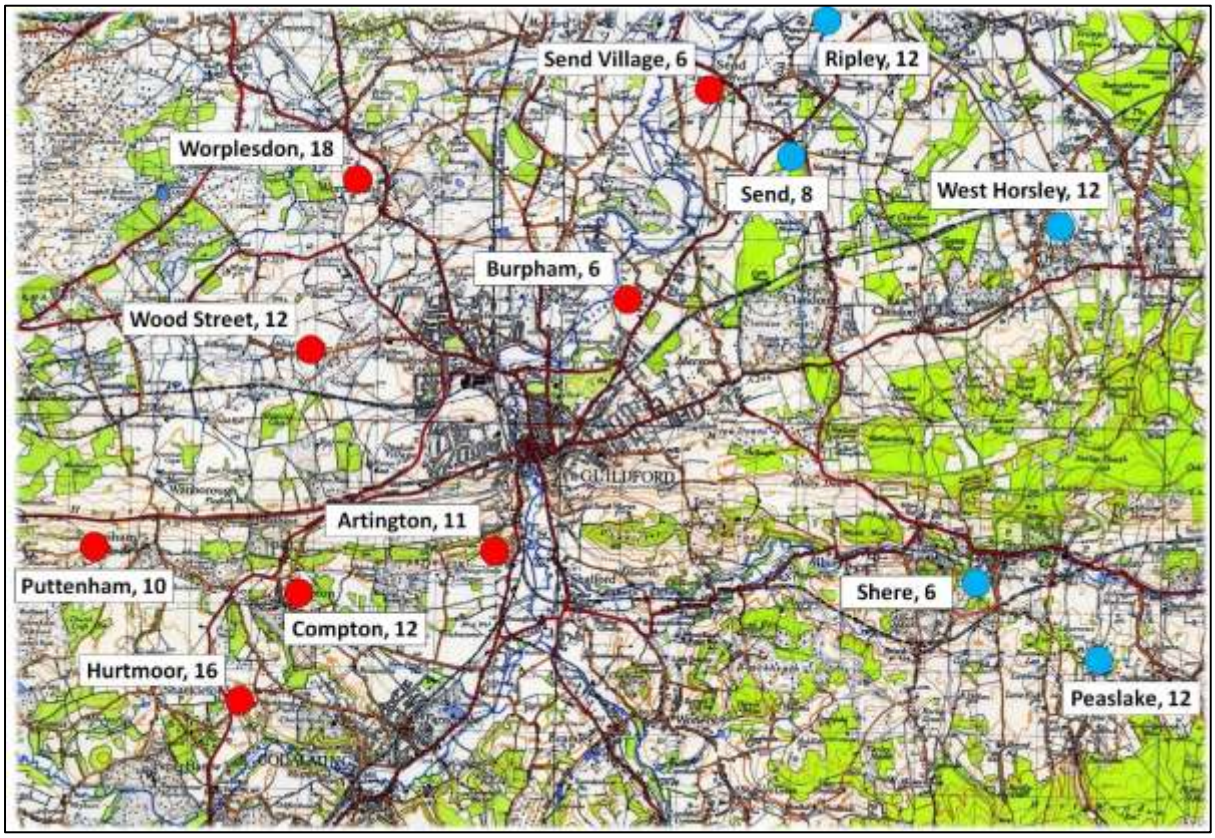

Figure 21: The Guildford schemes

The Compton scheme represents the idealised style of a small village community in that the houses were built round a small green (some of which, inevitably, is now a parking and turn-round space). The houses do not quite have the grandeur and flamboyance of those in Dorking, but still represent substantial houses for rural workers. All have good sized gardens.


Figure 22: Fowlerscroft Cottages, Compton, built 1921

The Hurtmore scheme consisted of 16 cottages in a very rural and isolated area. Their style is the same as in the mixture in Compton above. The council minutes have many entries for these cottages regarding rent arrears and other tenant problems. The rents were high for such a rural area and maybe the Council should have built smaller and plainer houses where the rents would have been lower. The

village now includes modern housing and benefits from being close to the A3 road and next to a golf course. Note the example in the photograph below is identical to the right-hand pair in the photograph above.

Figure 23: Hurtmore, built 1921

Burnt Common cottages in Send are similarly arranged around a small green but the houses are of a smaller and simpler design. These were built under the 1923 Act.

Figure 24: Burnt Common, Send

Figure 25: Burnt Common, Send

The 12 houses in West Horsley are also built under the 1923 Act and have the more simple design from that period.

Figure 26: Flukes Cottages, West Horsley

Figure 27: Flukes Cottages, West Horsley

Windlesham Rural District Council

In contrast to Woking and Dorking, Windlesham was a relatively small and sparsely populated area in north Surrey, with Bagshot as its main town. The council formed a Special Housing Committee in February 1919 in response to the 1919 Housing Act. The council had already seen a need for new housing for their workers but increased the numbers required from 12 to 24 as a result of the promise of financial assistance from the government.

In anticipation of the plan being approved, the council purchased some land on Guildford Road, Bagshot, just to the east of the town. Things did not go according to plan and the ambitious 24 houses were soon reduced to 10, but with the funding from a PWLB loan. The Special Housing Committee seemed to be out of their depth and inexperienced in both building housing and dealing with government officials. The quotes for building the houses were as excessive as with other councils and the protracted negotiations eventually petered out in May 1921. The purchased land was split with one portion sold to a developer for housing and the remaining used as allotments.

Caterham and Warlingham Urban District Council

Caterham nestles in the northern foothills of the North Downs, only 5 miles south of Croydon, and has a good railway connection with London. It was, at the time, home to a large Asylum (opened in 1870). This was another council with bold plans which suffered from excessive estimates for the construction, not helped in this case by protracted discussions with the Housing Commissioner over the suitability of the sites chosen. The differences between the council and the Commissioner became difficult to resolve and caused unnecessary delays.

The council had two sites suitable for the housing. One they called "The hill" and the other "The valley". The former was part of Queens Park Estate to the west of the town centre and the latter became the "Tillingbourne site" to the south. The "hill" site was ideal because the terrain made construction and drainage easy, which was not the case with the "Tillingbourne" site. Soon added to these sites were 4 acres on Banstead Road to the north of the town. By 1920 negotiations were taking place with the MoH over the amount of a loan and the subsidy. The Ministry would not agree to a loan for the Queens Park site because the council could not agree a fixed price with the land owner, but did agree to the Banstead Road site, despite the council wanting the first site in preference to the second. Eventually, by June 1920 the problems were sorted, loans agreed for purchase of the land and the plans for the sites approved. Construction of Homestead Road on the Queen's Park site was commenced. The council was under pressure from the MoH to obtain loans themselves for the house building and in June 1920 decided to issue Housing Bonds. The take up of the Bonds issue was good and in 5 months was at £7,270. The fund was boosted by an MoH promise to the Housing Committee of 50% of the proceeds of the sale of Savings Certificates.

The "Tillingbourne" site was then planned, despite known issues with the terrain which would cause difficulties with drainage. This site was at the very bottom of Godstone Road between what is now White Knobs Way and Tillingdown Lane. The council minutes of the 24th March 1921 indicate an unusual situation in that the Housing Commissioner would not *"….. authorise the Council to proceed with the work of the lay-out of this site until tenders had been obtained and building the houses commenced*". From this it seems the Council had to accept tenders and begin construction BEFORE the Commissioner would agree to subsidise the scheme. This is clearly a reversal of what should happen (and did happen) in other parts of Surrey. The problem was resolved when the Council sold the site to a local land owner, with the MoH's approval.

The Banstead Road site seems to have been put on hold early in 1921 whilst the other two sites were progressed. Following the preparation of the Homestead Road site the council issued tenders for the housing but hit the same problem as the other councils of excessively high quotations. The Housing

Commissioner estimated that a rent of not less than 17s 6d per week per house would be needed to provide sufficient income to maintain the subsidy at initial levels. This was far more than Caterham residents would be willing to pay for the housing proposed. The first quotations received for Homestead Road were for just 6 houses and the highest came out at £1,460/house whilst the cheapest was £895. Remember, this was for a house that would have a market value, including land, of no more than £400. The Housing Commissioner rejected even the cheapest quotation as being far in excess of the figure anticipated. The council were, like others in Surrey, stuck with land ready for housing but with no agreement on a subsidy to enable them to afford to build the housing. A potential solution was to offer the land to the Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB) because a number of applicants for the proposed housing worked at the asylum. The MAB initially declined, but eventually took over the Homestead Road site in February 1922. The rest of the site progressed with a re-issue of the tenders and these were much lower than before, indicating that the building trade was no longer able to charge what they wanted. In the end, the council realised it was not going to be able to agree a compromise with the Housing Commissioner and took the whole development off the assisted scheme under the 1919 Act and carried out the development themselves. The result of all the protracted negotiations with the Housing Commissioner was the erection of just 6 houses in the Court Road area (adjoining Homestead Road), not under the 1919 assisted scheme, and the sale of other lands to developers or the MAB. The Council did continue to plan and build houses using subsidies under the 1923/24 Housing Acts, but encouraged private builders to obtain the subsidies and build housing themselves rather than have the Council involved.

Surrey examples - Smallholdings

Surrey had purchased nearly 50 parcels of land prior to WW1 to rent out as a smallholding, or split into 2 or 3 smallholdings. Where a house was needed for the tenant, one was built. Existing housing and farm buildings were used wherever possible. Most of these schemes were on a relatively small scale of between 5 and 25 acres. Two larger schemes were the purchase of Leigh Place Farm in Leigh and Moor Lane and Howlands Farms in Woking. The tenants would have been local people who were farmers or sons or farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries had seen, during WW1, that farming could be more productive and devised a scheme to bring in “new blood” who would have a discipline and enthusiasm to succeed. Demobilised soldiers were seen as ideal candidates for these smallholdings. In Surrey, three parcels of farm land were purchased, on the free market. These were the 26 acres of Homewood Farm in Ripley; 314 acres comprising the Sheep and Wells Farms in Banstead, part of the Lambert Estate; and 317 acres of Little Woodcote Farm in Carshalton. The latter two are very close to each other. Adjoining the east edge of the Little Woodcote land was a pre-WW1 scheme called The Lemons. This was mainly parcels of land for rent by existing farmers and market gardeners.

The three schemes below are also described in the author’s paper for the Surrey in the Great War programme and can be viewed at >> http://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/farming-in-world-war-1-surreys-contribution

Homewood Farm, Ripley

The acquisition, in March 1920, was of 26 acres which was divided up into 20 smallholdings of 1 and 1.7 acres each. Even by pre-WW1 standards, these plots were small and would not have been able to sustain many crops or animals. Surrey C, unusually, did not purchase the land but paid £62 per annum rent.

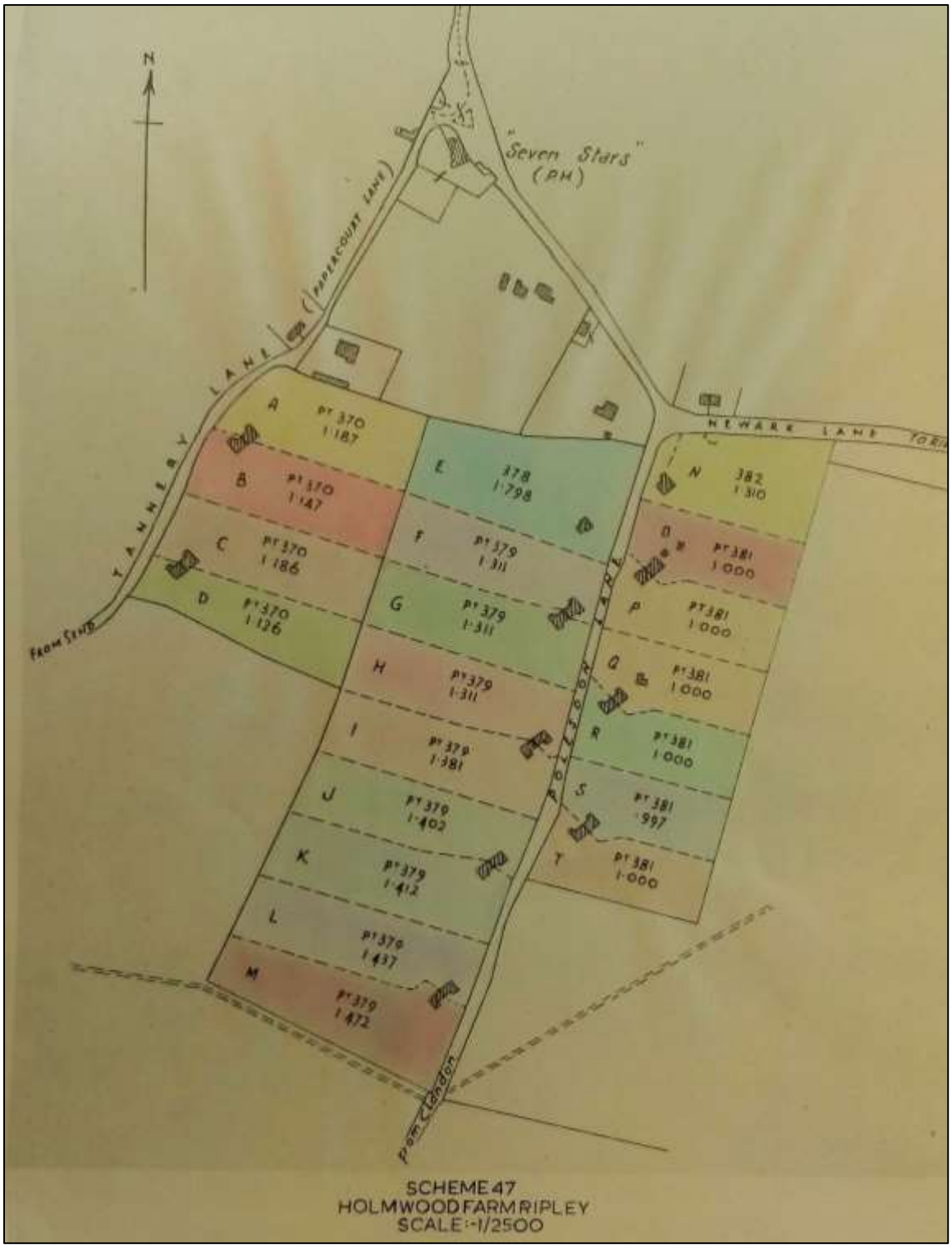

Figure 28: Holmwood Farm smallholdings plots

There were no existing houses that could be used and so Surrey CC went through the same process as the boroughs in obtaining quotes and accepted the quote from prestigious builder W G Tarrant. They built 4 pairs of Type A, 5 pairs of Type B and 1 of Type C and 1 of Type D. The cost came to £18,665 9s 6d. This averages out to approximately £933 per house, which matches the high costs encountered by the boroughs noted earlier in this paper. The results, however, were impressive and were typical of Tarrant houses across the county. The small size of the plots did create problems for the tenants in being able to make a living from them and the scheme can be considered more a Garden Estate, but with smallholdings rather than with gardens. The turnover of tenants in the early years was high, indicating the difficulties. Most plots had changed tenant at least once by 1924. The land is, even today, open and windswept with a pervading dampness from the nearby River Wey and its flood plain. It must have been a hard place to live in the winter, although the quality housing would have compensated somewhat. It is not possible to ascertain how many of the early tenants were ex-servicemen and how many not, but it is estimated that over 50% of the tenants would have been ex-soldiers. Most would have had experience of living and working in the countryside before the war (or during it in the Labour Corps) but it is known that some tenants had no previous experience of farming or agriculture. All the houses remain, now in private ownership, and have been modernised and extended; most, but not all, sympathetically. The picture to the right is the only pair that retain most of their original character and there are similarities to the housing built by Dorking District Council, described earlier. The sheer quality of their design and construction is clear, even today.

Figure 29: W G Tarrant-built housing at Holmwood Farm

Little Woodcote, Wallington

The Ripley scheme above was just to whet the appetite of the Surrey Agricultural Committee. Two of the other 4 smallholding schemes immediately post-WW1 were much larger. The County Council purchased Little Woodcote farm in the very south of the borough of Wallington in August 1919. They initially purchased 317 acres of land from the Scottish Provident Institution for £23,000. They also purchased the Clockhouse Farm and 23 acres of land to the south for £23,750, but decided against creating smallholdings and sold the farm buildings; just retaining some fields for rent as smallholdings (no houses) as part of Little Woodcote scheme.

Figure 30: Extent of Little Woodcote scheme

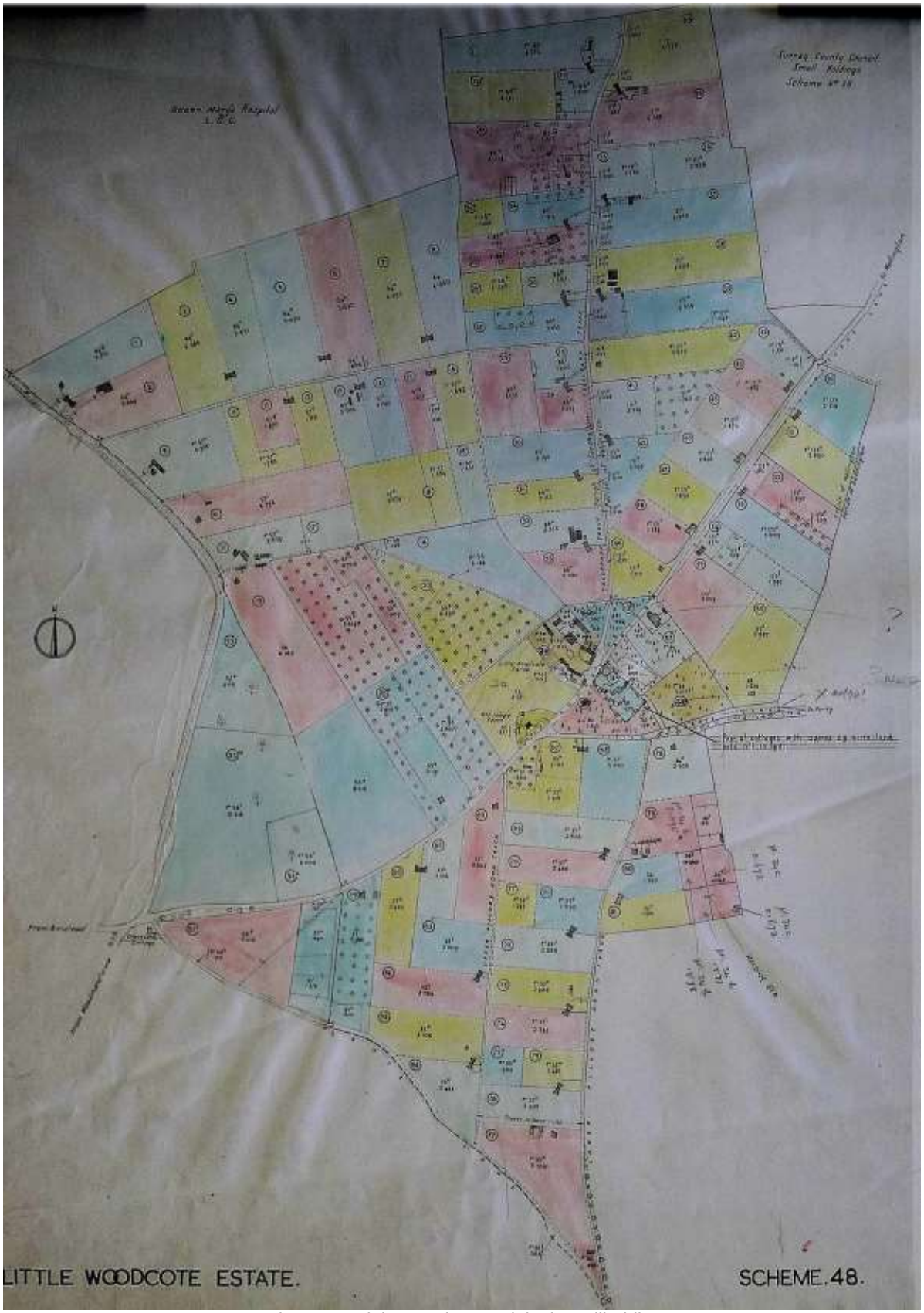

Figure 31: Little Woodcote, original smallholdings

As can be seen from the map above, the land was split up into 81 smallholdings of typical size of 3 acres. There were larger smallholdings and these had farm buildings erected for use by all smallholders. Houses were needed on most of the plots and it was decided to follow the Ripley scheme and have a pair of houses straddling two plots. The Surrey Agricultural Committee decided that they could not afford to pay for Tarrant houses and took a cheaper quote from Messrs Walter Jones & Sons of London for housing made from "Claire's Patent Interloc Construction" at £772 each. These were made of terracotta blocks that lock into each other and are larger than bricks. This method has the advantage of being hollow and so lighter than bricks and needing less skilled labour to build a wall. The outside of the walls are then rendered in a normal sand and cement mix. Progress was slow due to labour shortages (W G Tarrant finished their houses at Ripley on time and to budget). The costs overran and the Council agreed to an extra £8,000, bringing the final unit price to £875. The results were a disaster. Nearly all the houses were leaking through the walls within a year, some severely, following a wet period of weather. The Committee engaged a RIBA surveyor to produce a report and he condemned the method of construction as being unsuitable for houses that are particularly exposed to wind and rain – Little Woodcote smallholdings are on windswept hills. The final solution decided on was to clad 69 of the 77 houses in weatherboarding, although slate hanging was the surveyor's preferred solution. Today, this weatherboarding gives the housing a rustic look that is almost certainly a visual improvement on how they looked originally. Surrey CC had to pay the £8,500 for the weatherboarding as they felt unable to prosecute the builders due to the building works being monitored by Surrey CC's building inspectors at stages during construction. It seems that the problem was due to the unusual materials and method and a lack of understanding by all parties on the importance of the quality of the mortar used to bond the blocks. Not surprisingly, this method of house building was soon to disappear. The early tenants were more successful with their farming and many remained tenants for quite a number of years.

Figure 32: Pair of houses at Little Woodcote (2017)

Sheep and Well Farms, Banstead

This was the last of the 3 larger post WW1 schemes and, arguably, the most successful. 308 acres were purchased as part of the sale of the Lambert Estate in March 1920 for £13,000. There were few buildings that could be re-used. It was decided that the average size of the smallholdings needed to be larger to be cost-effective and the typical smallholding was 3-5 acres. However, 3 sizeable "farms" were also created.

Figure 33: Map of extent of Banstead smallholdings scheme

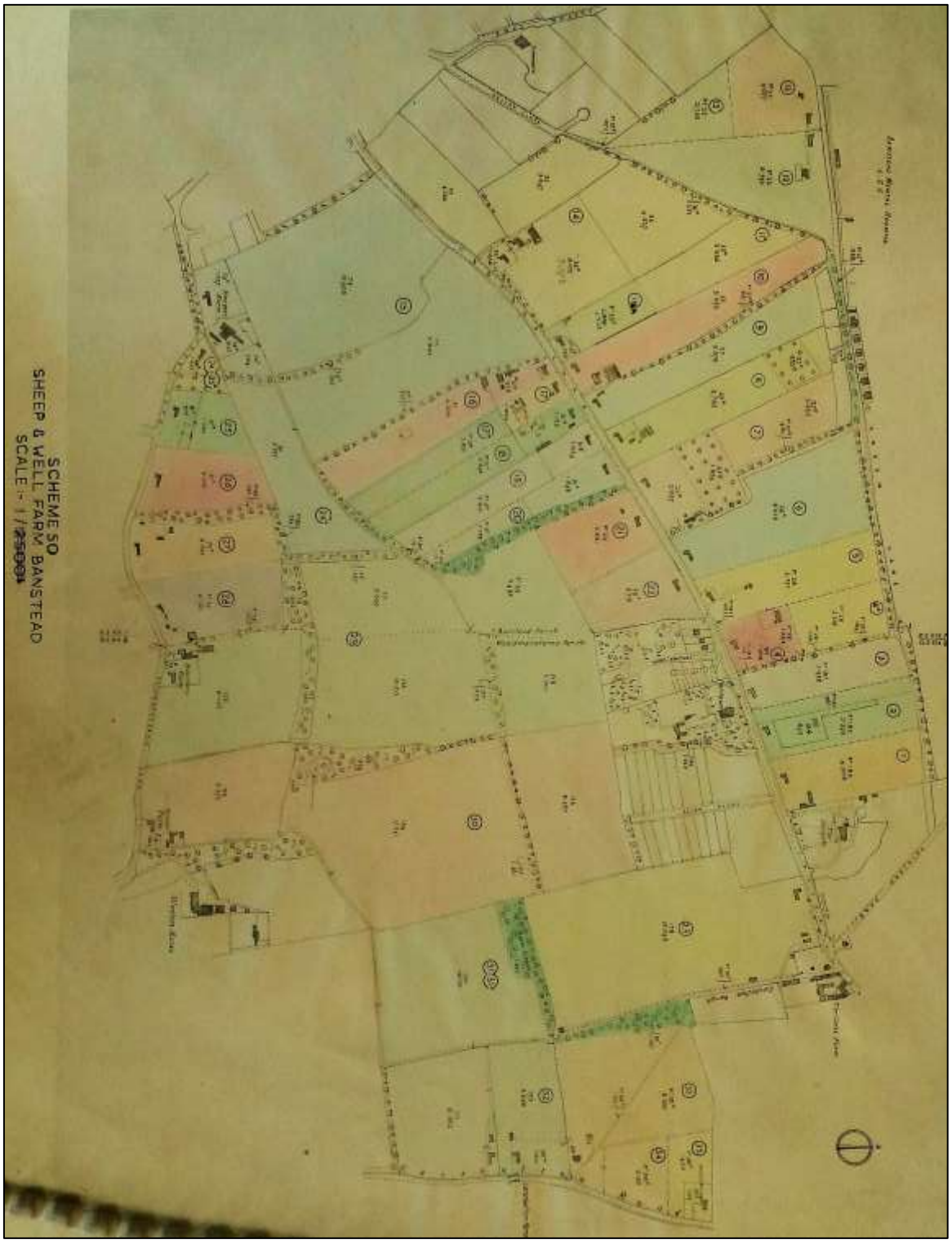

Figure 34: Banstead smallholdings plots

There were 35 smallholdings, with a 36th being split into 10 allotments. 33 bungalows were built and just one existing cottage renovated. Rather than build a pair of houses straddling 2 plots, each plot got a bungalow. They were conventionally built by W.H Brown (Leatherhead) Ltd for £1000 each and were of brick with rendering and with a fairly shallow slat roof. This scheme is the first time the author has come across the term "bungalow" when describing mass housing in Britain as it was usually to describe a timber structure near a coast (the word comes from India). W G Tarrant did build some timber farm buildings (on what became Hengest Farm). The early tenants complained of excess

condensation but this was found to be mainly from the internal plaster not having had time to dry out. The 9" solid external walls were not helping and both the internal plaster and external rendering were treated. This seemed to resolve the problems. The houses were fairly basic inside and always cold and did not get a proper hot water system until the 1940s. The bungalow in the picture below is one of the few where you can still visualise the original design. Even so, it has had an extension on one side. Most of the bungalows have, understandably, now been improved to bring them up to modern standards of insulation and efficiency.

Figure 35: Bungalow on Banstead smallholdings scheme (2017)

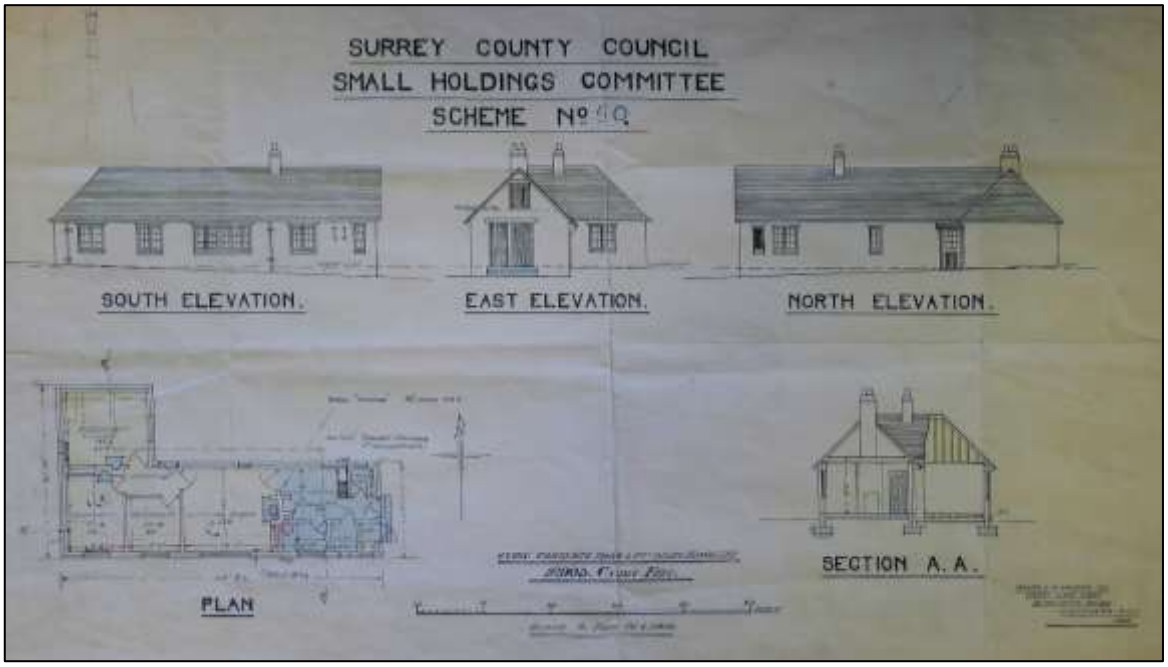

Figure 36: Plans of bungalow built on Banstead smallholdings

Many of the early tenants remained for many years although it must have been a struggle for most. Many of the smaller plots were used for poultry breeding and eggs whilst the largest smallholding, Hengest Farm, became a successful dairy.

Summary

Outside the large cities and industrialised areas the need for housing "Fit for Heroes" was never going to be a major one. From the evidence in Surrey, the need seemed to be mainly for agricultural workers. Despite being an industrialised country, Britain grew a lot of its own food and the need for this to continue was very apparent during WW1 when the German U-boats sank almost 5000 ships, many bringing food in (at one point in 1917 Britain has just 6 week's food in reserve). The increase in allotments and smallholdings after the war was also in reaction to the problem. It was also recognised that part of the recovery process for troops returning home was to give them an opportunity to have their own garden and an allotment, or work on the land by renting a smallholding.

In Surrey's case, the large size of the houses built after the War is a surprise – streets of terraced houses are no longer the standard. The proximity of the housing schemes to public parks and open spaces is also a pleasant surprise. The latter is in contrast to the big cities, London included, where "blocks" were still being constructed in built-up areas, although garden estates were being planned and built.

The smallholdings were a noble effort to bring disciplined and enthusiastic ex-servicemen into the farming industry. The schemes were successful although the size of the smallholdings became an issue and the minimum size had to be raised to over 3 acres to make the plots viable. The quality of housing built on them varied, and resulted in some poor housing due to efforts to keep the high construction costs down.

The assessment of the success of the Surrey schemes comes down to one thing – could the authority and the workers afford the housing? Costs immediately after the war were very high and it took 2 years for prices to come down both for materials and labour. Even where the schemes were approved and subsidised to a suitable level the rents that had to be charged were often beyond the means of those the housing was built for. As happened in London, the houses for the "working classes" were invariably rented by the artisan class, who could afford them. Maybe if the government had given priority to house building and not industry then the results might have been different.

But this is being critical of well-meaning Surrey councils and committees who all wanted to build houses for their workers, particularly if there was a promise of subsidies. The success or failure usually came down to the skill and expertise of the committee members who had to make the choices. Only after WW2 were the large council estates built by the local authorities.

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