



# NEWSLETTER

## *Autumn 2018*

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Newsletter.

Planning issues have been to the fore this year, both nationally and locally. Nationally, the Government has consulted on new rules for the National Planning Policy Framework, which will alter the terms on which local authorities draw up their District Plans, as Peter Norman explains. Locally, the Bengoe quarry inquiry will resume later this year, the Bircherley Green re-development work has begun and, of course, there are much smaller scale applications which can still have an effect on life in Hertford.

There have also been changes within the Society. Terry Betts retired as Chairman at the AGM and we would all wish to thank him for his dedicated and meticulous service to the Society over many years. His successor is Malcolm Ramsay, who has long experience as a Committee member and as our events organiser. He has a particular interest in transport matters, which will no doubt be an important issue for us in the future.

We have also had two very successful and enjoyable events this year. We were fortunate to have excellent weather for our visit to Sudbury, where we were hosted by members of the Sudbury Society and this will be described in the next Newsletter. Our summer party was also gloriously sunny and we would like to thank Linda and David Haysey for their generous hospitality in inviting us to their beautiful house and garden by the River Lea. We are also grateful to those members who put so much time, organisation and sheer hard work into the catering and provided us with a lovely meal.

Our Society could not run without the work of a range of people doing different things and we are very keen to see more of you involved in this way. As is fully explained on p2, we are particularly anxious to recruit a new membership secretary, but those of you with other talents and a willingness to serve the Society in other capacities, including the Committee, would be very welcome.

We have just recently heard the very sad news of the death of Ann Kirby, once Town Clerk and also a founder member of this Society. She was indeed a quintessential Hertford person to her very core. Anyone wanting to read something illuminating about her can access her transcript for Hertford's Oral History Group - you can almost hear her talking. Go to: [www.hertfordmuseum.org/oralhistory/view-transcript.php?id=50](http://www.hertfordmuseum.org/oralhistory/view-transcript.php?id=50).

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**PROGRAMME**

*Recording Hertford's oral history*

Lecture, 14 November 2018

Peter Ruffles and his collaborators in the Oral History Group (which the Civic Society helped to bring into being) will delight us with tales of bygone Hertford as recorded by the Group and its volunteers. This event will be at 8pm in the hall at the Roman Catholic church, St John's Street. Refreshments will be served from 7.45pm.

Malcolm Ramsay

**CAN YOU HELP? New Membership Secretary Needed!**

No Society with members could possibly function without a membership mastermind, to keep track of members and their contact details. For seven or eight years this important role has been assiduously carried out by Annette Robinson, but she is now looking to step down by the end of the year. More urgently than anything else, we need someone to replace her.

There are different ways in which the things Annette did could now be carried out. The core job involves maintaining a database of around 300 people, making updates as members join or depart, or as their contact details change (and, in collaboration with Treasurer John Bevan, to check that their subscriptions are being paid). We use an Excel database, but it is not essential to have any prior knowledge of this, providing there is a willingness to learn a very few basic procedures. We can provide support and coaching.

Ideally our membership person would also be willing to master a few extra procedures e.g. to generate lists (for emailing newsletters or hand delivering to members) but generating these lists could, if necessary, be done by other people. The job is meant to be a modest challenge to whoever volunteers for it, even if it does call for attention to detail. Might you be the kind of person who enjoys that sort of thing, and would like to help others run the Society? Your efforts would be much appreciated by the members and committee alike. (You could also join the Society's main committee if you wanted to, but this is certainly not essential, and Annette did not do this.) If you think you would be interested in this role, or want to talk about it, please contact Malcolm Ramsay and/or John Bevan - contact details p6.

## PLANNING MATTERS

### District Plan Modifications

*On 11 September, after this item was written, the Government issued a 'holding direction', which means that the Council cannot adopt the Plan until the Secretary of State has decided whether or not to 'call it in' for his own approval.*

Following the hearings into the District Plan, modifications intended to make the Plan 'sound' were put forward by the Council and the Inspector. There was a consultation period, and we submitted objections to two groups of modifications. They concern the proposed bypass and a proposal to make housing allocations more flexible.

#### *Hertford Bypass*

The submitted Plan says that during the Plan period "improvements to the A414 through Hertford will be required". The modifications change that to "provision of a Hertford bypass in combination with Sustainable Travel Town initiatives"; in other words the modifications would insert a proposal to build a bypass into the Plan.

We know that Members have differing views about a bypass and the Society as such does not have a settled view for or against. But a bypass would be a large and controversial project with far-reaching implications for the future of Hertford; it would be costly in financial and environmental terms, but those financial and environmental costs have not yet been quantified and the benefits of building a bypass have not been assessed. Possible alternative routes for the bypass have not been appraised. No analysis of possible alternatives to road-building has been published nor has a proposal made by independent public transport experts for a cross-County tramway been seriously evaluated.

Moreover the County's Transport Plan included as a possible benefit of any Hertford bypass that

it would enable the town to grow. Making a bypass part of the District Plan would therefore endorse the view that the growth of Hertford is desirable; but it is not self-evident that that is so, bearing in mind the areas of flood plain and Green Belt which surround the town. We have seen no evaluation of where or how far the town might expand, or any comparison between the merits of such an expansion and encouraging development to take place elsewhere instead.

For all these reasons we submitted that putting a Hertford bypass into the Plan as a firm proposal is not justified.

#### *Flexibility of Housing Allocations*

The modifications would add flexibility to the number of houses to be built on the proposed residential sites in Hertford by putting 'a minimum of' or 'at least' instead of 'approximately' or 'up to' before all the numbers specified.

We objected on the grounds that the proposed words introduce uncertainty, and could result in more homes being built than originally envisaged: other aspects of the Plan, particularly roads, schools, drainage etc, are tailored to the numbers originally proposed; if additional homes were built, extra infrastructure might be needed, but the extent of that need is not identified and the Plan does not make provision for it.

The Inspector's decisions on the proposed modifications are included in her report to the Council. She decided not to insert 'at least', inserting 'around' instead.

#### **Maidenhead Street**

As part of the Hertford Urban Design Strategy, proposals for traffic management and resurfacing in Maidenhead Street have been published. There was a consultation, though it was not well publicised and seemed to be aimed more at residents and businesses than people using the street as shoppers.

However we took the opportunity to respond, welcoming the proposal to prohibit the use of Maidenhead Street by vehicles during the day (10 am to 6 pm), though we were less sure about the idea of reversing the direction of flow, which could add to the number of vehicles passing through the Fore Street bottle-neck in the early morning. We also supported the proposal to resurface the street but emphasised that, because vehicles will be allowed to use it at certain times, the whole surface of the street must be paved in such a way that it can withstand the weight of moving and parked vehicles without damage; to minimise the risk, we suggested that a weight limit for delivery vehicles should be imposed. We also advocated the use of as few different materials as possible, since using a variety of materials makes any future repairs more difficult and expensive.

Whilst we supported the proposal for a raised table to enhance the signalised pedestrian crossing of The Wash, we drew attention to the unsatisfactory raised tables which exist in Hertford at present, particularly in Fore Street near the Salisbury and in Market Place. Unless designed, implemented and maintained with the greatest care these features can easily become a trip hazard and unsightly, as well as being uncomfortable for bus passengers.

In early April County Highways thanked us for our comments and promised to 'contact you shortly to engage in the formal consultation process'. We await developments.

### **Revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework**

The Government recently consulted on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). As well as setting out national policies, the NPPF lays down the rules about how local Councils must prepare District Plans. Since the NPPF came into force in 2012, Councils have had to calculate housing need in their area in order to decide how much land to allocate for residential use. But there has been no agreed

method of calculating that need, so to avoid arguments and delays the Government now proposes to introduce a standard method. Put simply, the new standard method starts with official population growth projections, but then adds an adjustment factor based on 'local affordability', the relationship between local house prices and earnings. The result is that the number of new homes to be planned for is higher in areas where house prices are higher, such as East Herts. The Government accepts that this 'market adjustment' could lead to a significant increase in the assessed housing need in some parts of the country.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England, to which we are affiliated, urged its supporters to object to this change, because it will mean yet more pressure on dwindling areas of countryside in the south-east, and do nothing to redistribute new housing to other parts of the country where much more open land is available. We therefore made a submission, emphasising that a local plan for East Herts, which proposes a rate of house-building already way above anything previously achieved in the area, is about to be adopted; but the proposed new method of calculating housing need will mean that yet more new houses per year will have to be planned for. Worse still, while the plan is being updated to incorporate the new method, vast swathes of the District not allocated for development in the newly-adopted plan would once again be vulnerable to opportunistic applications, and the Council would be under pressure to grant permissions on yet more greenfield and even Green Belt sites. Yet the number of houses actually built is very unlikely to increase, because house-builders are already reaching the limits of the rate at which they are willing or able to build sites out. *[See also p 12 of this Newsletter]*

The revised NPPF has now been published, without any change in response to the representations by the CPRE, ourselves and others.

### **Bengeo Quarry**

The inquiry into the appeal against the County's refusal to permit a new quarry off Wadesmill Road started in May; it has now been adjourned until October, to give the Stop Bengeo Quarry group the opportunity to produce evidence in response to the appellants' Health Impact Assessment, which was submitted just a few days before the proceedings began.

In addition to our written representations against the quarry (reported in the January Newsletter) a short oral statement was made to the inquiry. For years the Society has argued that Hertford has already contributed more than its fair share of the County's supply of gravel, and we drew attention to the history of mineral working around the town over the past fifty years or so. With the help of a map showing the many areas of land around the town which have been worked over the past few decades we pointed out that Hertford is ringed by past and present workings. Some have been restored, though not always fully, and are now of interest for nature conservation, but each one of them changed the natural landscape forever, and when in operation or during restoration resulted in lorry traffic, mud on the roads, dust, and damage to hedges, verges and road surfaces. The draft review of the Minerals Plan no longer includes the appeal site or any other area close to Hertford as a Preferred Area for mineral working.

### **9 The Avenue, Bengeo**

An appeal was made against the Council's refusal of permission for a new house set on the crest of a ridge on the edge of the Green Belt. We made a very short written submission to the Inspectorate, referring to one additional aspect not covered in our earlier letter to the Council, namely that Little Molewood, within which the site lies, is in multiple ownership and is not just in the control of the owners of the houses in The Avenue. If this appeal were allowed it would open the door for further development proposals

in the woodland, particularly from those owners of the woodland who do not also live in The Avenue. Such proposals, if permitted, would soon destroy the community value of this conspicuous escarpment woodland.

The appeal was decided on the basis of written representations and a site visit, and has been dismissed.

Peter Norman

On behalf of the Planning Subcommittee

### **What's happening at Bircherley Green?**

A Bircherley Green Stakeholder Liaison Forum has been set up chaired by John McHale from Wrenbridge (the developer). The first meeting was attended by Councillors and Officers from County, District and Town Councils including the Town Council's Town Centre Officer, representatives of the Civic Society, Folly Island Residents, Hertford Museum, the Hertford Club, retailers and businesses in Bull Plain, Railway Street and Fore Street. A spokesman for the Macular Society represented the concerns of those with poor eye sight.

The aim of the forum is to ensure good communication between stakeholders and the development team during the construction phase of the redevelopment.

In this context the redevelopment is divided into two phases. Phase 1 is the proposed hotel, restaurant and one retail unit and phase 2 is the rest of the redevelopment. Demolition of Phase 1 buildings was beginning on 20<sup>th</sup> August. This was expected to take 8 to 10 weeks to be followed by 4 weeks of archaeological investigations. The demolition contractor is Liston Group (01527 868900). Construction was expected to begin within 12 weeks from start of demolition. The main contractor will be McLaughlin and Harvey. Construction traffic will access and egress the site via Railway Street

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only. The Premier Inn hotel is expected to open in November / December 2019.

Within Phase 2 the tenant of one property will remain until October 2018. Demolition of Phase 2 buildings will begin only when that property is vacated. No new building within Phase 2 is expected to start until February / March 2019. The distribution of newsletters is planned and there will be a website devoted to details of the redevelopment as it proceeds.

Terry Betts



*View of demolition works from the car park and the delivery yard.  
Pictures - Ian Nash*

## Herts Orbital Transit: an East-West Tramway across Hertfordshire - a proposal by Reg Harman

The scope for a tramway from Watford Junction to Hatfield and possibly Hertford was first proposed in the late 1980s and examined by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) consultants in 1995 but no further action followed. I have now developed this into a possible cross Hertfordshire tramway, under the title of Herts Orbital Transit (HOT). Details of the proposed strategy and route appear in an article published in the journal TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT.

HOT would link Broxbourne to Watford via Hertford, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and St Albans, with high capacity electric trams running at frequent intervals, serving stops at key points, closely spaced within towns. It would use mostly existing railway branch lines at either end and the trackbeds of closed lines between the towns. It would run on road through the centres of Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and St Albans.

Following publication, I had some useful discussions with officers of HCC and the Local Economic Partnership (LEP). The Civic Society felt my proposal provided fresh food for thought and should be highlighted to HCC, given their focus on road building and busways. In June Malcolm Ramsay organised a meeting with senior HCC councillors and officers at which I gave a presentation. There was a friendly reception and interesting discussion about tramways and also about other transport issues.

HOT would create, across Hertfordshire's central belt major, significant changes in travel behaviour (HCC's top priority in its LTP4 transport policies). It would serve several key town centres and a string of local retail and business nodes, colleges and schools, and health and leisure sites. Along its 50 km route it would offer a large range of short and medium travel opportunities, many of them currently not possible without a car and some not good even with a car. It would enhance town centre access and local economic activities and improve the lifestyle of many people who don't have a car available.

The benefits apply right across central Hertfordshire and have real potential in Hertford. For example, residents from most areas could easily reach: Hertford town centre or St Albans for shopping; jobs at various sites in Hatfield and Welwyn GC; QE2 hospital; walking in the Lea Valley or around Cole Green; the list is long!

(cont)

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Members of the Committee can also be contacted by email via the Society's website at [www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)

*Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity  
No 266111*

Tramways have very low energy consumption for the number of passengers carried, and are electrically powered. They are also very attractive to people currently using cars, as world-wide experience has shown. So the proposed tramway, while increasing travel opportunities, would lead to reduced levels of car use and major improvement in local air quality.

The proposed tramway could also be extended to serve Hemel Hempstead, Harlow for the 'North of Harlow' development, or the massively expanding Buntingford.

I am well aware that developing and building the proposed tramway faces many serious challenges, especially in the British regime for local development in public transport. But the congestion and pollution from increasing road traffic also pose very severe problems for the quality of life in Hertford and other central Hertfordshire towns. The need to tackle this urgently is recognised by some bodies. Notably, Gascoyne Cecil Estates have also suggested modern transit as the way forward and are helping to support my proposal.

I would be happy to provide copies of this article to anyone interested and discuss it. Contact me on [01992] 422042, or email [reg.harman@ntlworld.com](mailto:reg.harman@ntlworld.com).

*Making use of  
Salisbury Square -  
sitting in the sun  
enjoying coffee and  
listening to live music  
- though the lorry  
does not enhance the  
scene!*

*Picture - Ian Nash*



### The Fountain

At the heart of Hertford, in Salisbury Square, there is a slightly neglected fountain. 'Confluence' celebrates the meeting of our four rivers: Lea, Beane, Rib and Mimram, while the arches echo those of nearby Shire Hall. It was created in the 1980s by a young William Pye, a sculptor who has since become an international star, winning competitions round the world. Here in Britain, one of his recent 'fountains' sits conspicuously as a large font in the nave of Salisbury Cathedral.

'Confluence' is this Society's major asset. We have yet to persuade either the Town or District Councils to take it under their wing (we continue to pay all maintenance and water bills). On Saturdays, when there is a market and Salisbury Square enjoys its most busy day of the week, it is sometimes turned off (less often now), and occasionally subjected to minor indignities: for instance, boxes from market stalls get dumped on it, while one of the stalls may be positioned directly alongside it. On one recent Saturday some cyclists parked their bikes not against it but right inside, on top of it.

There are plans to reduce the number of car parking spaces in Bull Plain, to make it more pedestrian friendly, which would also make it possible to have slightly more of the market there. This in turn would help to enhance Salisbury Square, by freeing up space around the



fountain. Perhaps there could be seating either at the edge of the fountain (by redesigning its base) or else facing it? And why shouldn't local people be able to enjoy their world-class fountain properly, not hemmed in too tightly by the stalls, on market day?

The fountain has the Civic Society as its sole parent and guardian, and we need to make the case for enhancing it as the key feature of Salisbury Square - which has itself become very much the focal point of the town now that Bircherley Green is set for redevelopment. Richard Threlfall and John Bevan do a lot to look after it, with regular help from a 'maintenance man'. Now that it has been in place for almost a quarter of a century, it requires some renovation, including re-patination of the metalwork, and repairs to the stonework. Ultimately, a fresh vision as to the future of the fountain is needed, from us and from potential partners whether in local government or in funding organisations (such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, which recently helped to restore and interpret murals in Colchester subways). If you have ideas, do please get in touch, whether through the Newsletter or by contacting Richard or John or your new Chairman, who wants the fountain to be the best possible feature at the heart of Hertford.

Malcolm Ramsay

### PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

#### **A river walk to discover with delight Elizabeth Hamilton - Mid-Herts CPRE**

The creation of the Lea Valley path with its meandering 58 miles of walks along and around the River Lea is too easily taken for granted. From the start and source of the river at Leagrave to its exit into the Thames beyond Bow, it passes through parts of Hertfordshire where some of the most beautiful countryside still endures, often quite close to towns.

While the forces of nature and geological change gave us the landscape, it was the determination of committed people that created the path we know and love. The story of its evolution and what the amenity offers today was imaginatively told to the March meeting of Hertford Civic Society by Elizabeth Hamilton of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

Her story took us back one million years to the time when the Thames flowed northwards through the Vale of St Albans and across Norfolk to the more recent 400,000 BCE when glaciation blocked its path, forcing it to turn southwards into a new channel. "The River Lea was what was left," she said. These glacial changes also brought the gravel from Wales and the West Midlands that characterise the valley with its abundance of chalk streams - "often fast-flowing and clear over gravel".

The environmental, scientific and cultural importance, in the face of threatened over-development and gravel extraction, was recognised by pressure groups since the late 1960s. The key years for action were 1971-93 when local organisations and authorities came together to protect the terrain. Civic societies played a key role, she said. "The Harpenden Society set up the Upper Lea Valley Group to restore features and create a riverside walkway." By the early 90s, "the whole of the route was worked out and waymarked." The Lea Valley Walk logo was a swan designed by the Upper Lea Group - now used along the entire 58-mile route.

Elizabeth's "tour" revealed so much detail about the crucial role the region of the Lea Valley path and park plays in nature conservation. For example, as the river meanders through Bedfordshire into Hertfordshire, it merges with chalk streams. "England has 80 per cent of the world's chalk streams and Hertfordshire has many of these," she said. "But that water also feeds the aquifers for the county's water. With housing increasing, there will be a battle:

whether the chalk streams can be saved is becoming a big issue.”

During her talk to Hertford Civic Society, Elizabeth took us on a “virtual walk” with numerous slides through scenes from the Batford nature reserve with its watercress beds and willows to Waltham Abbey and the gunpowder factory defended by the Beaufort Gun in World War II. She picked out many highlights on the way, such as the enhancement of the river at Luton Hoo and Brocket Park estates where great lakes were created as a backdrop. Overlooking Luton Hoo are the familiar figures of comedian and local resident Eric Morecambe and also of Capability Brown, who designed the park.

Elizabeth described how the route ranges across areas of natural beauty and through points of historic interest such as the Roman settlement and cemetery of Limbury, the magnificent Luton town hall and parish church, the largest in Bedfordshire, with its pillars of chalk and flint. And where the river route is inappropriate for walking, the path takes the old railway routes such as Luton, Dunstable and Welwyn opened by Brunel in 1866. En route, she took us past the substantially mediaeval St Helen’s Church in Wheathampstead with its ‘witch’s hat’ steeple, past Brocket Park and the old still-working mills of Lemsford and Mill Green.

The Lea has always been an important river for specific species of fish, such as the barbel, which thrives in its unique waters and grows up to 16lbs. “Isaac Walton used to fish along the Lea and this was his favourite fish,” she said. In fact, everything seems to excel in the environment of the Lea. The river and lake at Stanborough has the largest reed beds in Hertfordshire, attracting lots of water birds. Another mill at Hatfield House was one of the first to provide hydro-electric power.

The four miles from Welwyn Garden City to Hertford follow the disused railway line of the late 1850s (now Cole Green Way), which was meant to link with the line to Luton. Yet again,

however, she used this to illustrate how so many cultural, historic and architectural features of note have been preserved - not least as a leisure facility to improve the quality of life. On her virtual tour, we saw the unfolding of history and cultural life: past the statue of Samuel Stone in Hertford, the C17th Puritan minister who helped establish the American town of Hartford, Connecticut; past the riverside gazebos of Ware and past the 19 locks along the Lea, that John Smeaton, architect of Eddystone Lighthouse, was hired to improve and hence enhance trade routes to London.

One of the reasons Elizabeth chose to walk the Lea some years ago was, she said: “I had written an article for *Hertfordshire Life* and wanted new materials.” The result was more than a magazine article; it is a detailed overview of the valley and an enticement to anyone who hears her to get walking.

Further information at [www.visitleevalley.org.uk](http://www.visitleevalley.org.uk)

[https://www.ldwa.org.uk/ldp/members/show\\_path.php?path\\_name=Lea+Valley+Walk](https://www.ldwa.org.uk/ldp/members/show_path.php?path_name=Lea+Valley+Walk)

[https://www.luton.gov.uk/Transport\\_and\\_streets/Cycling%20and%20walking/Walking/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.luton.gov.uk/Transport_and_streets/Cycling%20and%20walking/Walking/Pages/default.aspx)

An online version of the OS mapping for the whole Lee Valley walk at <http://www.gps-routes.co.uk/routes/home.nsf/RoutesLinksWalks/lea-valley-walk-walking-route#>

Ian Nash

### Local Newspapers - the End of an Era?

Is there a future for printed local newspapers in the digital age? This was the subject of discussion after the AGM, led by Paul Winspear and supported by Anna Schlenker, Mike Howarth and Ian Nash.

Anna Schlenker, who runs websites for Hertford Carnival, the Workers’ Educational Association

and a twitterfeed, questioned whether we need print media at all since many people, especially the younger generation, increasingly prefer to get the news on their smartphones. Digital media can be rapidly updated, allows for quick reactions and discussions, doesn't need a shop, and doesn't require trees to be chopped down or paper to be recycled.

Mike Howarth, whose background is in radio and video and is currently working at University College London with students using their smartphones to report news, also thinks this is the future for journalism, though he did emphasise the importance of training students to be aware of relevance, journalistic quality and getting to know and understand the people involved in their stories.

Ian Nash was more cautious, pointing out that 'citizen journalism' is often associated with short attention spans and can encourage soundbites rather than analysis. Having worked for many years in local and national print news, he stressed the need for trained journalists with good shorthand and knowledge of such topics as libel law and public administration. They also need to be known and trusted by local people if they are to be really effective, he said.

There is no doubt that printed local media is increasingly under threat as fewer and fewer people buy copies. This has led to mergers into increasingly larger and fewer conglomerations of media companies to gain economies of scale, resulting in offices being closed and concentrated in fewer places and journalists being made redundant. Papers are becoming regional rather than local and can give less and less attention to specific towns, as Paul Winspear explained in his introduction to the discussion. Our own local paper the *Mercury*, for example, is published by Local World, a subsidiary company of Trinity Mirror PLC. It has closed its Hertford office and moved to Chelmsford and its reporting area now covers Hertford, Ware, surrounding villages and the Lea Valley down as far as Broxbourne. With fewer

journalists to cover ever larger areas, it becomes harder for them to have the detailed knowledge needed to hold local authorities and other powerful institutions and organisations to account. For instance, very few local papers now regularly send journalists to cover local council meetings, which used to be standard practice.

But despite all the difficulties, Paul Winspear, who once worked on the Hertford *Mercury* and is now editor of the *Bishop's Stortford Independent*, believes it is still possible to run an effective local paper. The *Independent* is owned by Edward Iliffe (who also launched the *Cambridge Independent* and whose family has a long history in media ownership) and was opened in the office of the old local paper.

This local presence makes them more accessible by members of the public, some of whom were so pleased to find they had their own local paper again that they brought in gifts of cake and champagne for Paul and his staff of three reporters and a part-time sports journalist. Unlike regional papers which rely on picking up stories that are already on the internet, the *Independent* concentrates only on news that is relevant to Bishop's Stortford and its sales are already beating those of the *Cambridge Independent*. It is true that the majority of customers are over fifty, but the journalists are working on stories that have relevance to younger people and younger people often start reading local papers in homes of older relatives.

Paul Winspear also believes that quality of production is important and the Bishop's Stortford *Independent* is printed on good quality paper and stitched. Above all, in an era of 'fake news' it is important for newspapers to be respected and to retain a voice of authority, he said.

See [www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk](http://www.bishopsstortfordindependent.co.uk)

Sue Jones

### A WIDER VIEW

#### Can We Meet our Housing Needs?

There is no prospect of delivering the Government's target of 300,000 homes per year unless local councils are given greater powers and resourced appropriately, Civic Voice warned earlier this year.

Speaking during a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies, Civic Voice President, Griff Rhys Jones warned that "the draft National Planning Policy Framework is so lacking in teeth to ensure that the policies will be delivered, and combined with under-resourced local councils, that we are very likely to end up with the wrong homes in the wrong places."

In the same vein, the Campaign to Protect Rural England warned that although 460,000 houses are being planned for land that will be released from the Green Belt, the percentage of 'affordable' homes built continues to fall. Last year 72% of homes built on greenfield land within the Green Belt were 'unaffordable' by the government's definition. This will increase to 78% of the homes that are planned for land that will be released from the Green Belt, they say.

In calling for a 'brownfield first' approach to tackling housing shortages, Tom Fyans, Director of Campaigns and Policy at the Campaign to Protect Rural England, said: 'We are being sold a lie by many developers. As they sell off and gobble up the Green Belt to build low density, unaffordable housing, young families go on struggling to afford a place to live. The affordable housing crisis must be addressed with increasing urgency, while acknowledging that far from providing the solution, building on the Green Belt only serves to entrench the issue.'

Alongside the issue of where houses should be built, Sir Oliver Letwin MP has conducted a Review on behalf of the Government into why

housing developments which have received permission are not being completed more quickly. Having examined some of the larger sites being developed in various parts of the country, he found that the median length of time for completion is 15.5 years.

He found no evidence of land banking by developers, nor serious shortages of building materials. There is possibly a shortage of bricklayers (about 90% of whom are self-employed), and he called on the Government to work with employers to tackle this by increasing training opportunities.

However, his key finding was that while there is no shortage of capital to finance housing to sell to owner occupiers or for buy-to-let, there is very little for housing association or other social housing projects.

His main conclusion is that developers are governed by commercial considerations and therefore housing is released onto the market only at a rate that will not depress local prices.

Read CPRE's Report at <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/green-belts/item/4931-state-of-the-green-belt-2018>

Read Sir Oliver Letwin's Report at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/718878/Build\\_Out\\_Review\\_Draft\\_Analysis.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718878/Build_Out_Review_Draft_Analysis.pdf)

Follow the work of Civic Voice's All Party Parliamentary Group at [www.civicvoice.org.uk](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk)

Sue Jones