



NEWSLETTER

Summer 2014

Welcome to the Summer edition of the Newsletter.

Hertford, like many other towns in the South-East, is facing major changes over the next few years as it comes under pressure to increase its housing, which could have significant consequences for our infrastructure, public services and the quality of our environment. East Herts Council has created a Draft District Plan which explains how they have allocated the areas, mostly on the western and northern sides of the town along B1000 and off Sacombe Road, where such expansion might happen. The process was explained to the Society by Councillor Mike Carver at two meetings, one in September 2012 and the second in March 2014 (supported on that occasion by two EHC officers), and we were able to ask questions. The Council's documents and an explanation of the process can be found at <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=29006>

Following the first meeting, we set up a working party of Society members to examine the Draft Plan in detail and report back to the Committee, who then responded to the Council's consultation. This stage of the process is now complete; the full response will be put up on our website and has been summarised for this newsletter. There will still be opportunities to argue for improvements to the Draft Plan however, so please let us have your thoughts by contacting the Editor, if you would like them considered for publication, or any member of the Committee.

The AGM saw some changes to the Committee and Officers. Barrie Goldsmith left the Committee and Linda Haysey stood down as Membership Secretary. Both have served for many years and we thank them for their efforts. We welcome Annette Robinson to replace Linda as Membership Secretary. Her contact details can be found in the usual place on p6-7 and on the revised membership form on p12.

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PROGRAMME

Our exciting sculpture of Alfred Russel Wallace reaching up to a bird of paradise is finished. All we have to do now is to get it fixed to the outside of Hertford Theatre. However, an unveiling ceremony is customary, and would help to involve the public as well as members of Hertford Civic Society. Having missed the date tentatively considered (31 May), we are currently looking for another suitable occasion, probably in September or October. Rodney Munday, the sculptor, will be coming to Hertford in mid November, to deliver the final lecture in our programme for 2014, so we certainly need the sculpture in place by then. Details of the lecture are given below.

The Has-Beane: the disappearing River Beane (lecture, Wednesday 15 October)

Dave Stimpson, who chairs the River Beane Preservation Association, will talk to us about the plight of this once revered trout stream, which the World Wildlife Fund now counts as endangered. He will probably be showing a film about the river and the successful efforts being made to enhance it. (This film is also due to be screened at

Hertford Theatre on 9 October.)

Commemorating Alfred Russel Wallace: the value of public art commissions (lecture, Wednesday 19 November)

Local sculptor Rodney Munday, who also works internationally, and has created the relief sculpture of Wallace destined for Hertford Theatre, will be talking to us about different ways of commissioning the arts, and specifically about his own experiences of interacting with funders, sponsors and interested members of the public. This should be a good opportunity not only to hear what he has to say but also to see pictures of more of his work.

Our enhanced lecture venue

This remains the church hall in St John's Street, the renovation of which has now been finished, complete with a new entrance. And we now have the added benefit of our own public address system. If you have comments or queries about this or any other aspect of the programme, please do not hesitate to contact Malcolm Ramsay.

PLANNING MATTERS

Site north of Hertford East Station:

An application last year for 136 flats and four houses was refused on grounds of loss of employment land and because too few parking spaces were included. Now Redrow Homes have come back with a revised proposal, reducing the number of flats to 103. 40% of the total would be ‘affordable’, which meets the Council’s target. Despite the theoretical loss of employment land (the site is vacant), we welcomed the revised scheme in principle because using land in the town centre to the full helps to reduce pressure for development in the Green Belt. With 120 spaces, the new scheme also overcomes the criticism that not enough parking would be provided.

But we repeated our concern about the relationship between the proposed apartments and the new link road which is to be built from Mill Road (near the station) to the point where Mead Lane meets Marshgate Drive. The new road is intended to take all the traffic for the Mead Lane industrial units, leaving Mill Road and Mead Lane west of Marshgate Drive as residential roads (except that Dicker Mill traffic would still

have to use Mill Road). This would obviously be an improvement for the existing properties in Mill Road and Mead Lane, and good for those of the proposed flats which would front on to those roads. But the flats next to the new link road do not appear to have been designed to take account of its existence. The link will be in frequent use by heavy vehicles going to and from an industrial area which is likely to generate more traffic in the future if regeneration of the area continues. Yet bedrooms and living rooms in the proposed flats are very close to the road and some have patios and balconies next to it. The Council’s own Environmental Health officers have advised that permission for these apartments should be refused, or that if permitted the windows should be fixed shut with mechanical ventilation. We have urged the Council not to grant permission on the application in its present form.

Redevelopment of Grehan’s Yard, Molewood Road:

In the Summer of 2012 permission was granted for terraced houses on this site. At the time we criticised the orientation of the houses because they would back on to the gardens of the existing houses in Molewood Road, so

that vehicle access and the parking of vehicles would be on the Beane Marsh side. The Marsh forms the town end of one of Hertford’s green fingers, and is therefore worthy of special consideration when dealing with planning applications on its boundary, so we suggested that it would be beneficial both to the appearance of the green finger and to the occupants of the new houses if the development were turned round so that the gardens faced the Marsh. We repeated this suggestion when a revised application was submitted recently for houses of a different (and much improved) design. However the Council officers maintained their view that the proposed orientation would provide for a better frontage and outlook by keeping the residential gardens and their domestic paraphernalia contained, and the revised application was approved with the houses facing the Marsh as previously agreed.

Progress Report on Items from Previous Newsletters:

- We submitted an objection in principle to the proposed retirement village at the former brickfields off **Cole Green Way**, because it would have swallowed up a large

swathe of Green Belt between Hertford and the village of Hertingfordbury. Councillors had a lot of objections before them when they considered the scheme, and it was unanimously refused.

- We made no objection to the proposal by Lafarge Tarmac to replace their unsightly and redundant maintenance buildings on **Sacombe Road** with eight houses, although this site too is in the Green Belt. The project had a lot of local support, as part of a package including a management scheme for Waterford Heath and the demolition of some other derelict barns. Officers recommended refusal, but the Council's Development Management Committee decided to grant permission. There is now a special feature about the development on the Council's website, extolling the energy efficiency of the houses, which will have photovoltaic panels on their roofs, be designed to harvest rainwater and be naturally heated, mainly through the sun.
- Turning to gravel working, the County Council followed their officers' advice to refuse an

application for a new quarry at **Broad Green, Bayford Lane**, to which we had objected.

- Riversmead have decided to appeal against the refusal of their proposal to build 3 three-storey blocks of flats on the space between the **Welwyn Road** (opposite Sele School) and the existing flats in Hutton Close. Our objections to the scheme will be forwarded to the Inspector who will decide the appeal after visiting the site.
- Following representations from ourselves and others about the dangerous conditions at **Rush Green roundabout** when cars are queuing to enter McDonalds, Andrew Stevenson, County Councillor for that area, commissioned a report from Hertfordshire Highways. He says he has been in discussion with the McDonalds owner "to try to agree an affordable and pragmatic improvement or set of improvements". Watch this space.
- The demolition of **Sovereign House** came a step nearer when the June meeting of the Council's

Development Management Committee granted permission for its replacement by two new blocks containing a total of 84 apartments - mostly flats but some on two floors. We had previously welcomed the principle of the scheme, but called for some units to be affordable and for more parking spaces to be provided than shown in the original plans. Councillors and officers shared our concerns and there were protracted negotiations with the developer on these and other issues. In the end the ratio of parking spaces to flats was improved, and six of the dwellings will be 'affordable' (shared ownership). Local members are to be congratulated for insisting that the developer's cost and value estimates were thoroughly investigated by an independent assessor before they accepted that to insist on more affordable units would have made the project non-viable.

Peter Norman

THE FUTURE OF WAITROSE

Waitrose is coming to the end of its lease in the Bircherley Green shopping centre and is planning a new store on the Van Hage site at Great Amwell, leaving open the possibility that the company may leave its town centre site in Hertford. The Society is very concerned about the knock-on effect this could have on the town centre and has sent the following letter to Waitrose's headquarters in Bracknell.

We, Hertford Civic Society, were pleased to hear that the District Council has decided to give up the lease on the multi-storey car park and bus station because we recognize that this would be a key step in redeveloping and reinvigorating the shopping centre. Commercial drive and enterprise are needed to bring this about and in the present circumstances only private funding is available for this purpose.

For many years the Society has defended the retail health of the town centre and even led the opposition at public inquiry to supermarket developments located outside the centre. Since the opening of Bircherley Green Waitrose has provided an excellent service to the town, in

particular it has been greatly appreciated by customers who shop on foot, by cycle or by public transport. Most importantly it has generated footfall needed by other shops in the centre.

We understand that negotiations are continuing with a view to Waitrose remaining as the anchor store, but in enlarged premises and with control over car parking for its customers. All supermarket chains want surface car parking attached to their stores but we know that the two-level parking at Waitrose in Welwyn Garden City does not deter customers. An extension of the Bircherley Green car park over the bus station would be a sensible compromise satisfying both shopping and public transport needs.

We urge all parties to these negotiations to bring them to a conclusion whereby Waitrose, as a quality supermarket, remains in upgraded premises in the shopping centre. Their presence is needed if a large element of their customer base is to continue to shop in the centre of Hertford and if the decline in the retail health of the town is to be arrested.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT DISTRICT PLAN

Hertford Civic Society wants the people of Hertford to be able to live in suitable accommodation in a healthy environment with access to good quality amenities and employment opportunities. We therefore support East Herts Council's aspiration to maintain the "high quality environment of East Herts" but we believe that this will require a more radical approach than that taken in its Draft Plan.

We need to make the best possible use of the space within the town for housing and employment, keep traffic growth to a minimum and preserve the character and environment of the town and its surroundings.

The Council should challenge the assumption that the District as a whole needs another 15,000 dwellings by 2031. This figure was based on past trends involving expansion around Stansted Airport which are no longer relevant. Where we do need new housing, we should concentrate on re-using brownfield sites within Hertford itself and developing good public transport, walking and cycle routes to discourage increased car use.

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Because of its position close to London and its rail links, Hertford is bound to have a high proportion of residents who are commuters, but we also need to find ways of providing affordable accommodation for sale and rent if the children of many of our residents are not to be forced out of the area. We also need a good balance of different types of accommodation to cater for families and elderly people as well as flats for commuters.

To this end, we need to consider not only the brownfield sites already offered but also new areas for development within Hertford, particularly under-used land at County Hall and sites of office buildings such as Stag House and the site of the telephone exchange. The older part of the County Hall building dates from the 1930s and is not ideally suited for employment/ office use. Rather than include it in an Employment Area, leaving the building and surrounding land unallocated (as at present) will provide flexibility for possible future conversion to residential use, as is happening with the adjacent and much more modern former office building Bentley House. Similarly, Leahoe House has

been vacant for some time following the relocation of previous occupants and is therefore no longer in employment use.

Consideration should also be given to the County Hall playing pitches and to whether the extent of car parking presently allocated to County Hall staff will be required in future. Over the period to 2030 the number of staff employed to carry out the current functions of the County Council may well be fewer than at present and the number employed in Hertford may well decline. The future staff parking requirement is uncertain and could be incorporated into a residential redevelopment on the land currently devoted to car parking and land adjacent to this.

Hertford already has high levels of air pollution due to traffic. Public Health statistics indicate that 6% of deaths in Hertfordshire are attributable to particulate air pollution, largely due to motor traffic, especially diesel vehicles. The figure for Hertford is likely to be higher. This is a further reason to avoid edge of town development which will inevitably encourage greater use of cars. Any developments planned for Hertford should, as far as possible, be

concentrated near the middle of the town rather than on its periphery, thus providing more sustainable solutions. In particular they should be within walking distance of the railway stations, the bus station and shopping facilities, and so be less likely to add to the traffic congestion in town.

Changing employment patterns mean that fewer sites are likely to be required for occupations such as manufacturing or engineering in the future. We are therefore in danger of becoming merely a dormitory for London unless we can develop new types of employment locally that can exploit our resources in, for example, the knowledge economy, the arts and our historic and natural environments. There could be some Council initiatives on supporting self-employment or small business start-ups, upgrading shabby areas such as Maidenhead Street or providing more attractive market facilities, for example.

Green spaces are important for our physical and mental health, for recreation and enjoyment. They are necessary to the preservation of our ecological diversity and the quality of our air and water. We therefore believe that the Green Belt should be

protected for these reasons and to preserve the individual character of the towns in our District from indiscriminate urban sprawl and coalescence with neighbouring settlements.

In particular, we object to the proposals for residential development to the west and north of the town.

There is current serious rush hour traffic congestion in Hertford (for example, crawling vehicle traffic on A414 and queuing on Welwyn Hill tailing back to Sele School in the evening and on Port Hill tailing back to Bengoe Street in the mornings). The proposed residential allocations would only exacerbate an already unacceptable situation because there would be limited opportunities for future residents of these proposed sites to use public transport provision as an alternative to the private car.

The Green Belt boundaries that would result from the proposed boundary alterations would not (in the cases of the proposed alterations north and south of Welwyn Road west of Hertford and west of B158 Wadesmill Road) have long term permanence and would not be capable of enduring beyond the Plan period. For example, the

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proposed boundary alteration west of B158 would cut a field in half and thus seems entirely arbitrary and unsatisfactory and creates a precedent for further extensions. Land at Sele and Hollybush schools should remain within the Green Belt, as should land to the south of B1000 to protect Panshanger Park and Blakemore Wood. We also consider that an existing permission for leisure development, (the proposed John Lloyd Tennis Centre) which was considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and was granted only because of exceptional circumstances, does not justify release of land from the Green Belt.

Panshanger Park is of great ecological and historic importance and should be regarded as a precious amenity for ourselves and for generations to come. If its biodiversity is to be maintained it needs a buffer zone to protect it from encroachment westwards from Hertford and eastwards from Welwyn Garden City. The River Mimram, which is the best chalk stream north of the Thames and a habitat rarer than tropical rain forest, should be included in the list of local rivers to ensure the protection it needs.

The Society's prime concern is Hertford but this does not preclude us from considering the effects of the Plan on the whole district as well as our immediate neighbourhood. The Plan considers the possibility of substantial developments of up to 3,000 houses north of Harlow and north-east of Ware which, if they were carried out, would lead to greatly increased traffic on A414. Given the difficulties of providing sufficient infrastructure, such as roads, water, sewerage, schools and health services, it seems unlikely that these will come to fruition within the timeframe of the Plan, but if these sites are not developed, the pressure returns to expand housing in Hertford and the villages. We need to take a broad view of the District in relation to its position relative to London and to the purpose of the Green Belt.

The Green Belt exists not only to protect green spaces but also, in our area, to prevent the uncontrolled expansion of London. Therefore, if land is needed in the longer term for housing, the Development Strategy should be reviewed to identify land beyond the Green Belt to create new

sustainable communities rather than piecemeal expansion of existing ones.

For example, Ashwell and Morden station on the North Herts/Cambridgeshire border has good rail access to London and could provide the focal point for the development of a 'sustainable' community of some size. In addition, although Watton at Stone is not beyond the Green Belt, the settlement itself is excluded from the Green Belt. There is no obvious reason why the Plan should not include more provision for residential development at this sustainable location with rail connections from a local station.

In summary, we ask the Council to challenge the size of the housing allocation and to consider alternative strategies and sites for development that will protect our towns, villages, important ecological sites and the Green Belt and discourage traffic growth.

PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

Hertford Priory - what did it actually look like?

When Chris Holdys chose the 'historic buildings' category for making a model as part of his A Level Art course, he probably did not anticipate that it would take over 260 hours and involve so much research, but the result is a stunning representation, shown to Society members at a talk on 26 February, of what Hertford Priory may have looked like.

What he calls his 'IKEA flat-pack priory' is made from thin sheets of wood meticulously painted with details of masonry and hundreds of roof tiles. The forty-six windows were cut individually by hand, which he says was "painful", and the assembled model contains lighting and a sound system to suggest an illuminated church with monks carrying out a service. The grounds are also shown, including a stretch of the River Lea represented by clear resin. The whole model is contained in a glass case about one and a half metres square.

Apart from the skill required to make this remarkable model, it was no easy task to decide what the priory

actually looked like. Considering that it was a significant ecclesiastical building that would have dominated the eastern edge of Hertford, there is remarkably little evidence for its appearance.

It was built in the late C11th as a daughter priory of St Albans Abbey by Ralph de Limesi, a nephew of William the Conqueror. The nave of the church alone was nearly ninety feet long and the chancel and east end would have extended still further. Yet all that Chris Holdys had to go on were a few tiles in Hertford Museum excavated from Mitre Court 23 years ago; some details from the Latin records; a floor plan drawn up following an archaeological dig of part of the site in the late C19th showing the nave and part of the transepts; a fragment of the Priory seal in the British Museum; and a speculative drawing, almost certainly inaccurate, made by a Mrs Julia Skrebels following the C19th dig.

Why is there so little evidence? Its position so close to a town would have made it a prime target for recycling of building materials following the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII when it came into the possession of Sir Anthony

Denny, one of the King's Privy Councillors. There has also been frequent redevelopment. A much smaller church was built in the C17th to serve the parish of St John's but this fell into disrepair and the parish was soon amalgamated with All Saints. By the C19th it had passed through many owners and been a farm and then a timber yard before the present street pattern was laid out. The present Roman Catholic church was built in the mid C19, along with a school, where we now hold our meetings and which was moved to St Joseph's in North Road, and a small convent, now converted into flats.

Of necessity, therefore, Chris Holdys' model involved a good deal of guesswork. He had to estimate the height of the building from the size of the floor plan and the curved apses at the east end he based on those at St Leonard's church and an earlier layout of St Alban's Abbey. There must have been a cloister, but he has not included it because there is no evidence to suggest where it was. Nor is there any evidence for roofing materials, so he chose earthenware tiles as most likely in this area.

But this should not detract from his achievement in

making this remarkable reconstruction of one of the most important buildings of medieval Hertford.

Sue Jones

Further information:

Hertford Museum

History Of Hertford by

Dr.F.M.Page

A History and Guide of The

Catholic Church of The

Immaculate Conception and

St. Joseph, Hertford available

from Hertford Catholic Church

The Book Of Hertford by Cyril

Heath

University of London & History

of Parliament Trust at

<http://www.british>

[history.ac.uk/report.aspx?co](http://www.british)

[mpid=37959](http://www.british)

<http://www.heritagegateway>

[.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Sing](http://www.heritagegateway)

[le.aspx?uid=MHT2994&resourc](http://www.heritagegateway)

[eID=1008](http://www.heritagegateway) for archaeological

details

Panshanger Park

Our AGM was followed by a three-hander presentation on the progress made on Panshanger Park. Richard Threlfall began by reminding us that the Friends of Panshanger Park had been set up to campaign for the enforcement of Lafarge Tarmac's legal obligation, established in 1982 after a public inquiry and still not completely fulfilled, to open up the gravel workings as a

country park. The eastern end was opened on March 31 this year, but this is only a small fraction of the estate and there is still a long way to go.

Barrie Goldsmith then explained the importance of the estate for wildlife. The area near the car park alone has over 100 species of flowering plants in an area of ancient woodland. The osier beds which have existed since the time of Humphrey Repton are rich in birds and invertebrates. Other important habitats include the veteran trees, the lakes (including those created by gravel-digging) support many birds and the whole area is inhabited by birds of prey. Part of the Park could even be designated in the future as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) but this is by no means certain. An important area of acid soil has already been lost to ploughing and birds of prey and other animals could be threatened by the development of housing too close to the Park as they need to hunt beyond the Park boundaries.

Access is also an issue. The new 'kissing gates' will exclude motor cycles but they also prevent users of mobility vehicles, bikes and buggies from getting in. In addition, there is a lot of barbed wire fencing, often at child head height; grazing animals need protection, but people using the park should not be unnecessarily corralled. This led to discussion from the floor about control of dogs in terms of dog mess, protection of animals and making sure that young children are not frightened away from enjoying the countryside.

Kissing gates - protection for the Park or a barrier to access?



Kate Harwood of the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust then described the complicated history of the design of the estate from the early C18th when the Cowper family's main house was at Cole Green. Some early landscaping centring on this house was carried out by Capability Brown to include formal avenues of trees, a ha-ha, a menagerie and a second-hand temple from another country house.

By the late C18th century they had decided to move to the top of the hill, first extending and then completely replacing the Elizabethan farmhouse with a much bigger mansion, completed in 1810. In 1799 Humphrey Repton was called in to re-landscape the park to focus on the new house, and produced one of his famous 'Red Books' which expounded in extravagant terms on the possibilities of the estate and provided 'before and after' watercolour illustrations, often painted by his daughters. The landscaping was in the 'picturesque' style, which, while involving considerable earth-moving, watercourse management and clearing and planting of trees, aimed to create a series of views that would look as natural as possible.

The C19th saw an expansion to the house and its adjoining facilities to include formal gardens, a dairy, a heated orangery, tennis courts and even a skittle alley. Water was raised from the river to supply the house and an electricity generator installed. But by the 1950s the estate was in decay; there were no direct heirs and parcels of land had already been sold off. The remaining core of the estate was sold for gravel extraction and the house demolished.

For the future, the management of Panshanger as a country park could bring important benefits to people and wildlife. Much of Repton's landscaping survives, the Orangery and parts of the formal gardens could be restored (despite their

present poor condition) and used as a visitor centre and the land could support a rich natural environment. Everything depends on the continuing negotiations between Lafarge Tarmac and Hertfordshire County Council and the crucial role of the Friends of Panshanger Park.

Sue Jones

Further information at www.friendsofpanshangerpark.co.uk

New facilities for visitors have been provided, such as benches and information boards



To apply for or renew membership of Hertford Civic Society, please complete and send this form to:

Annette Robinson, 11 Norman Avenue, Bishop's Stortford, Herts, CM23 4HL. Tel. 01279 833242

Existing members need submit the form only if their details have changed, e.g. new address

Subscriptions, per annum, are as follows:

Full membership £9.00

Full joint membership at the same address £14.00

Full membership with concessions £5.00

Full joint membership with concessions at the same address £8.00

Joint membership (one full and one concession) at the same address £11.00

Corporate membership £20.00

Junior membership (under 18 years of age) £5.00

PART A MEMBERSHIP FORM

I/We wish to become/remain members of Hertford Civic Society and

(a) enclose a cheque for the sum of £_____being my/our subscription for 2014

(b) wish to pay by standing order and enclose my completed standing order form (delete as appropriate)

FULL NAME(S) _____

CLASS OF MEMBERSHIP (please circle) FULL CONCESSION CORPORATE JUNIOR

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____ TELEPHONE _____

EMAIL _____

Your personal details will be held on a computer and used to help run the Society as a membership organisation, to include the collection of subscriptions and delivery of a newsletter. Your details will be kept secure, in compliance with data protection principles, and will not be given to third parties. The committee may write to or email you from time to time, with news of interest to members, to find out your views, or to ask for participation in Society activities. If you do not want your details to be held on computer, tell us, but be aware that it may then not be practical to provide you with full membership services.

PART B GIFT AID DECLARATION

NAME OF CHARITY - Hertford Civic Society. Registered charity No. 266111. I pay tax at the standard rate and wish the above named charity to treat as a Gift Aid donation all subscriptions I have paid since 6 April 2000 (if applicable) and all subsequent donations until further notice.

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____ SIGNED _____ DATE _____

PART C STANDING ORDER FORM

NAME OF YOUR BANK _____

BANK ADDRESS _____

SORT CODE _____ ACCOUNT NUMBER _____

Pay to the account of:

Hertford Civic Society at Barclays Bank, 12 Market Street, Hertford SG14 1BA; sort code 20-20-37; account no 40475807 on receipt of this order and on each 1 January thereafter, the sum of £_____

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____ SIGNED _____ DATE _____