



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2017

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Newsletter.

Hertford is facing many changes that will affect its long term future as different levels of the planning process proceed, and in this edition we have tried to elucidate the technical issues as well as the big picture. Central and local government and communities all have a part to play in this process. In addition, there are always proposals from business, which can range from supermarkets to quarrying to the care of a country park. The challenge will be to make a coherent and constructive set of plans to meet the challenges our town will encounter when facing what will inevitably be conflicting interests of housing needs, commercial development and caring for the environment.

The proposals for complete redevelopment of **Bircherley Green** have now been before East Hertfordshire Council and their decision is laid out on p2. The **District Plan** is at the Examination stage and the procedure and issues are explained on p6. **Neighbourhood Plans** are still being formulated and this process is detailed on p8.

Have a look at our "new" website, at the same place as the old. Let John Bevan know what you think of it. You should find more Civic Society news there, often with background papers too long for the Newsletter.

On a personal note for our members, Terry Betts writes: It is my very sad duty to record the death of Hilary Anderson. At her funeral, her husband Norman referred to the fact that Hilary had an additional gene - a volunteering gene. Hertford Civic Society must be forever grateful for this unusual feature of Hilary.

She will be remembered for many contributions to the work of the Civic Society and other Hertford organisations. An appreciation of Hilary written in the Society Newsletter must highlight the fact that for more years than we can remember Members would not have received their copies of the Society Newsletter were it not for the work of Hilary and Norman in tirelessly distributing the appropriate number of copies to the deliverer volunteers who put those copies through members' letterboxes. Aside from providing a crucial link in that chain, Hilary is a huge loss to many in all sorts of ways.

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PROGRAMME

McMullens: your family, your brewery and your beers

Lecture, 15 November 2017

Fergus McMullen, Production & Sales Director, and sixth generation family brewer, has very kindly agreed to talk to us about his great passions: his family, the independent brewing company (there are not many of these left, of such age and size) and his beers.

This should be a delightful event, with many different aspects, and there will certainly be time for discussion of such topics as pubs and the way we drink now. It will be fun, your talks organiser can assure you, having heard Fergus McMullen run similar events a couple of times in recent years.

Malcolm Ramsay

BIRCHERLEY GREEN

An application for the redevelopment of Bircherley Green was submitted back in February.

Comments submitted on behalf of the Civic Society at that time can be studied on the new website. We urged the Council to reject the application in its, then current, form.

Early in the Summer, the developers submitted amendments to the application. In commenting on those amendments on behalf of the Society, with the exception of the redesign of the pedestrian link between the bus station and the Mall, we said that the changes proposed did not respond significantly to our earlier criticisms. We made some additional comments (again to be found on the web site) about the proposed servicing arrangements and the proposals for the riverside. We urged the Council not to accept the amended proposals.

Sadly, the Council’s Development Management Committee meeting on 11 October resolved to grant permission subject to signing of a legal agreement and compliance with a long list of planning conditions (yet to be finalised in detail).

Peter Norman, addressing the Committee on behalf of the Society, said *“Redevelopment of Bircherley Green presents a great opportunity, but these proposals do not fully grasp that opportunity. We urge you not to ask yourselves “Is this scheme acceptable? Will it do?” Ask instead “Is this the best we can do for Hertford?” We submit that it’s not.”*

However, the Vice Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Michael Freeman, suggested that little purpose would be served in seeking a state of perfection while Bircherley Green continued “*to languish in a sorry 1970s state reminiscent of a couple of New Towns not a million miles from here.*” He stated that “*the town needs the rejuvenation that this application will bring.*” Cllr Suzanne Rutland-Barsby, similarly, described the proposals as replacing a “*run down 1970s scheme that offers no enhancement to the Conservation Area whatever*”, while Cllr Jeff Jones referred to the existing centre as a “*bit of an eyesore*”.

A spokesman for the applicant said that “*if the scheme were not delivered, the only alternative would be limited refurbishment and extension of leases.*”

The list of planning conditions includes a condition requiring the submission and approval of a site-wide phasing plan. The reason for this condition is “in order to ensure that the approved development takes place in its entirety”. Cllr Bob Deering described this condition as “*critical*” because “*it must be right that the entirety of this project is developed and not just the hotel.*”

The permission will not be issued until the applicants and the Council have entered into the legal agreement. The required legal agreement will include commitments by the developer to make a variety of financial contributions. It will also include clauses relating to the submission of a further planning application to enable the provision as part of the development of a health service facility “if the necessary commitments are given by the health services providers. This will require the developers to maintain a dialogue with health service providers to pursue the necessary agreements and leases within a period of three months from the date of a planning permission and to lodge the further

planning application required within a period of 4 months.”

The Civic Society will be keeping a watchful eye on how the permission is implemented and the various agreements and conditions complied with. A lot of things could go wrong, or be allowed to go wrong, unless the Council are very vigilant. We may need to campaign to make the developers do what they say they will do.

Terry Betts and Peter Norman

OTHER PLANNING MATTERS

Retirement Community

Plans to build a retirement village on the former brickfields beyond the railway, west of Hertford Town Football Club, were first put forward in 2012. The site is in the Green Belt. Now, after several withdrawals or refusals, there is to be a Public Inquiry into the Council’s failure to decide the latest application. Originally the appeal was to be dealt with in writing. We have already put in one submission, dealing mostly with Green Belt objections, and have prepared another, emphasising the damage to one of Hertford’s Green Fingers. Once we have seen the evidence from the developer and the Council we may decide to ask to speak at the inquiry, which begins on 16 January.

Aldi

Before commenting on Aldi’s application to build a supermarket on the *Which?* site in Gascoyne Way we asked all members with a known email address for their thoughts, and tried to reflect them in our response to the Council. We believe many people in Hertford would welcome an additional supermarket, now that Waitrose has left; therefore we did not object to the Aldi application but drew attention to some shortcomings. For example the applicants falsely claim that the site is well served by bus, whereas the reality is that very few buses apart from those to and from Sele Farm serve the

nearest stops (in St Andrew Street), so bus access to the site is very poor. With no Waitrose, the only supermarket with acceptable bus access will be Tesco, and it is a sad indictment of the planning system that the many residents of Hertford who rely on public transport should be so badly let down. There is no easy solution, but we urged the Council to work with the applicant and bus operators to see what can be done.

To limit light pollution affecting West Street, we suggested that the materials used in the elevation facing the Meads should be light-absorbent and any glass in that elevation non-reflective. We also asked for the timings of deliveries to be strictly controlled in order to reduce noise nuisance to nearby residents in the early morning and late at night. Lastly, we said that full details of the proposed refurbishment of the existing underpass should be required, and any necessary Planning Agreement concerning work on the underpass concluded, before permission is granted.

9 The Avenue, Bengoe

Our objection to this proposal for a new house set on the crest of a ridge on the edge of the Green Belt was reported in the last Newsletter. At that time the Council's decision was awaited. The application has since been refused.

31 Chambers Street

We objected to a revised proposal for a new building comprising nine flats on this site. Despite the address, the proposed building would have been a significant addition to the street scene in Port Hill. It would have been to the same eaves-height as its mid-nineteenth century neighbour in Port Hill, but with three storeys rather than two. We submitted that this would have resulted in an uneasy and contrived relationship between the two buildings, and that a building of three storeys near the apex of the bridge would be over-development. Officers

decided to refuse the application on design grounds and because of insufficient parking.

12 Maidenhead Street

The owners of this café applied to make various external and internal alterations. These raised no concerns, except that the proposals included a new shop front to be glazed almost to pavement level, with a stall riser below the glazing no more than a few centimetres deep. We reminded the Council that a fresh appraisal of the Conservation Area was completed only recently, and that the appraisal highlights the importance of seeking improvements to shop fronts in Maidenhead Street whenever the opportunity arises. Units glazed to ground level tend to have a bland appearance and we therefore urged officers not to grant permission for the submitted design, but to insist that a substantial solid panel be provided between the glazed area and the street. The application was refused on grounds of poor design inappropriate to the Conservation Area.

10 Maidenhead Street

In the meantime the former Ashley's china shop next door at No.10 had become an eyesore. Maidenhead Street should be one of Hertford's most attractive streets, and is also of course an area where a lot of public money is due to be spent on resurfacing and other improvement works. There seems little point in taking steps to control the detail of proposed new shopfronts, when the street is marred by premises which are completely derelict. We therefore approached both officers and Members of the District and Town Councils to find out what was happening: when the former proprietor retired, there was some activity on the Ashley's site for a while and the shop front was removed, but since then the building has lain derelict, boarded up in a makeshift way, and with no indication that it is to let or for sale.

We received a reply from Cllr Bob Deering, who is Chair of the group that is looking at Maidenhead Street. The group comprises officers and Members from each of the three layers of local government, the other Members being Cllrs Jane Sartin and Peter Ruffles. Cllr Deering agreed that the former Ashley's is a serious issue, but since the building is privately owned could offer no easy solution. However, he assured us that officers were working on the problem, and on 26 July the Planning Enforcement Manager served a 'Section 215 notice' on the property. Section 215 of the Planning Act enables a local authority to serve a notice requiring an owner to 'remedy the condition' of land the condition of which is adversely affecting the amenity of an area. In this case the notice requires the replacement of the current hoarding with a new one to enclose the whole of the open frontage of the premises, and this is then to be painted black. It takes 28 days to come into effect, and the owners then have 30 days to complete the work. All credit to the Council for doing what they can, but this problem illustrates how difficult it will be to bring about a comprehensive improvement of the town centre so long as key buildings are owned by people who are either unable or unwilling to play their part.

Richard Hale Sports Hall

An application was made by Richard Hale School to build a new sports hall. A letter was drafted on behalf of the Society, setting out our reservations about the use of transparent cladding for the higher level of the hall; the Design and Access Statement submitted with the application had described the result as, "at night the façade glows from the internal light and creates the impression that the roof is floating." We suggested that, whilst a building drawing attention to itself in this way might be acceptable in the midst of a large University or College campus, a more muted appearance would be desirable close to a residential area.

In addition, the extent to which the hall would be used by the public outside school hours was unclear. The Highway Authority had made no objection to the scheme based on an assumption of no public use, but correspondence between the Headmaster and Sport England contemplated some public use from the start, growing in the course of time. In the end, no representation was submitted on behalf of the Society because the application was withdrawn. A revised application has now been made, for a much less assertive building on the corner of the site next to the mini-roundabout. This time the application makes it quite clear that there would be no use by the public out of school hours, so there should be no cause for concern on the grounds of traffic, access or potential disturbance to nearby residents.

Quarry at Wadesmill Road

An appeal has been made against the County Council's refusal to permit a new quarry off Wadesmill Road. At the same time a fresh application has been submitted. The applicants are now proposing to extract less gravel, and to confine works to the area designated for mineral working in the adopted Minerals Plan. However the proposals still conflict with the Minerals Plan in several important ways and we have therefore renewed our objection.

Peter Norman.

DISTRICT PLAN

The Society made several objections to the new District Plan which East Herts Council submitted to the Secretary of State in April 2017. This plan is currently the subject of an Examination in Public by a Planning Inspector. The Inspector is charged with deciding whether the Plan is "(a) positively prepared - based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements; (b) justified - the most appropriate strategy when considered

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against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence; (c) effective - deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working; (d) consistent with national policy - able to achieve sustainable development in accordance with national planning policies.”

The Examination hearings are taking place in two stages. The first stage hearings concerned with strategic issues began on 3 October. The second stage concerned with allocations and topic policies starts on 7 November. The hearings are open to the public but only organisations and individuals that submitted comments / objections to the Submission version will be speaking. Peter Norman is the main spokesperson on behalf of the Society.

The Inspector has listed Matters and Issues for discussion. Those relevant to the objections made on behalf of the Society are -

Has the Plan been positively prepared and is it justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the overall provision for housing? How have local policy considerations been taken into account in reaching a final housing requirement figure?

The Civic Society’s case, here, is that the Plan is unsound because the quantum of development proposed is so high that national and local air quality standards cannot be met. In other words, local air quality policy considerations have not been sufficiently taken into account in reaching a final housing requirement figure.

What options were considered for the distribution of housing? When and how were these options considered?

The Plan claims to be based on a number of Guiding Principles. Guiding Principle 7 (To acknowledge that the capacity for the market towns and villages to grow is constrained by the existing capacity and future potential of these settlements, and therefore the provision of large-scale strategic development will be required, both within this Plan period and beyond) was amended at a very late stage of Plan preparation.

The Civic Society’s argument is that this Principle is still weak and that the Plan displays no long-term vision in considering options such as new settlements for the distribution of housing.

Has the Plan been positively prepared and is it justified, effective

and consistent with national policy to release land from the Green Belt? What is the link between the amount of land released from the Green Belt and the housing requirement, the need to direct development to sustainable locations and the localised need for housing?

Where is the evidence that this broadly justifies the amount of land to be released? Where can it be demonstrated that the Council has examined fully all other reasonable options? Are there exceptional circumstances to justify the Plan's alterations to the existing adopted GB boundaries?

The Civic Society's strategic objection is that protection of the Green Belt is not included in the Plan's strategic objectives and, therefore, Green Belt protection was given insufficient weight when considering the housing requirement and options for the distribution of housing. By failing to include the protection of the Green Belt as a strategic objective or as part of the Plan's 'Vision for East Herts in 2033', and by describing the Green Belt as simply 'a valued resource for many residents', the Plan completely fails to accord due weight to national policy for its protection.

Although, as noted above, our objections about proposals for Hertford are based partly on strategic points, we were advised by the Inspector that it would be best for us to make those points as part of our case about the Hertford proposals rather than in the strategic sessions, which have been dominated by highly technical and statistical arguments. The session specifically about Hertford is on Tuesday 7 November, beginning at 2 p.m. The issues listed by the Inspector for discussion at that session are:

What is the basis for planning to accommodate 950 new homes over the plan period in Hertford?

How and why was the planned level chosen ahead of other options? Is the site selection methodology robust and transparent?

Is the Plan sound in its choice of sites to be removed from the Green Belt?

Would the criteria set out in HERT3 be sufficient to protect the local environment, in particular Panshanger Park?

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*Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity
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Would the employment sites in HERT6 be the most suitable sites; would they deliver the right amount of employment land to meet the identified need?

Are the allocated sites appropriate and deliverable, having regard to the provision of the necessary infrastructure and facilities, and taking account of environmental constraints?

Under these headings we will be able to amplify our objections to the proposed housing sites in the Green Belt north of Bengoe and west of Thieves Lane, and to the designation of Pegs Lane as an employment area. The topic of Air Quality will be dealt with from 2 p.m. on Thursday 9 November. The Hearings before the Inspector are being held in the Council Chamber at Wallfields, Hertford. Attendance by Society members will be welcome.

Terry Betts and Peter Norman

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

The Winter 2016-2017 edition of the Newsletter contained a report about progress on a Sele Neighbourhood Area Plan (SNAP). This also noted that preliminary discussions had taken place about the preparation of a Bengoe Neighbourhood Area Plan.

A Neighbourhood Plan sets out planning policies for the development and the use of land in a local area. Once adopted by East Herts Council, a Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory documentation that is used to determine planning applications. Sele and Bengoe Electoral Wards have each now been designated by East Herts Council as neighbourhood plan areas. Government Planning Guidance states that “In a designated neighbourhood area which contains all or part of the administrative area of a town council, the

town council is responsible for neighbourhood planning”.

From mid-January 2017, a Hertford Town Council Project Officer, Maria Icanu, was in post “expected to be heavily involved in SNAP.” The Town Council has also retained Jacqueline Veater, a Planning Consultant, to advise on neighbourhood planning.

A **Sele Neighbourhood Plan** Survey was carried out between October 2016 and February 2017. There were 146 survey responses from residents of the Sele Electoral Ward (the area to be covered by the proposed Plan).

The Key Findings from the Survey were

- Overall most Sele Ward residents like their area and consider that it has improved over the last five years
- Lack of community spaces, crime and antisocial behaviour are damaging to community spirit
- Satisfaction with transport is generally low
- There is concern about the state of footpaths and footways, infrequent buses and pollution, lack of parking spaces, speeding traffic and roads used for rat running
- The amount and condition of green spaces in the Ward and nearby areas - comments showed people’s interest in preserving these
- Local shops and educational provision relatively satisfactory
- Relative dissatisfaction with employment opportunities and leisure facilities
- Need for more playgrounds, extended medical facilities and job skills training
- Residents concerned that the new housing development proposed in the Submitted East Herts District Plan will

have a negative effect on traffic, public services and green space.

- There is dissatisfaction with the affordability of houses in the Ward.

In March, a Draft Community Action Plan was produced “capturing the activities that the Sele Community would like to undertake that cannot be included in the statutory Neighbourhood Plan.” The Draft Action Plan concludes with “What will be Done” - 17 “Strategic Aims” with related “Tasks” and identifies “Who will lead” for each “Task”. An example “Task” is to “Deliver additional programmes of information and participatory activities to educate children and young people in crime prevention.” Organisations and groups identified to “Lead” are Hertford Town Council, East Herts District Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Herts Constabulary, Herts Learning Partnership, Herts Local Enterprise Council, bus operators, Sele Schools, charitable organisations, the Community Steering Group preparing the Neighbourhood Plan and members of the Sele Ward community.

Between March and July 2017, a group of volunteers analysed the survey results, gathered additional data and considered directions. Reg Harman, a member of the Society, contributed to a housing and transport Working Group.

A Public Consultation Exhibition attended by about 50 people was held on 18 July and the information was also displayed at the Network Homes Sele Farm Fun Day on 22 July. Comment was invited on Draft Objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Network Homes (NH) own and manage 20,000 homes across London, Hertfordshire and the South East. This includes homes on the Sele Farm estate formerly owned and managed by Riversmead Housing Association. NH aims to develop 1,000 new homes a year. NH work in

partnership with local authorities, developers and communities to build, develop and regenerate homes.

The exhibition material included an announcement about Network Homes (NH) involvement in future residential development at the rear of Bentley Road and Perret Gardens (identified in the Submitted East Herts District Plan).

Architects PCKO (who worked on the nearby Ridgeway redevelopment) have carried out initial feasibility work for NH. The target date for submission of a planning application is December 2017. The “New Business” section of NH “have been working to try and secure the site from the current owners (London and Regional Properties) once planning permission is granted”. NH “will also look at how the site could be integrated with current NH housing stock and try to create pedestrian and vehicular links”. The suggested mix of tenure would be private 210, shared ownership 84 and “affordable rent” 56. If permission were granted by September 2018, completion of first new housing units might be achieved by 2020.

Bengeo Area Neighbourhood Plan will relate to Bengeo Electoral Ward which extends (from the core of Bengeo) into the Town Centre as far as the river Lea (including both sides of St Andrew Street) and the north side of North Road as far as the railway station. The Plan Area also includes tracts of countryside - the area between the B158, the River Lea, the A10 Bypass and the A602 and the area between the B158 and the Hertford to Stevenage railway line north as far as and including St John’s Wood and southern edge of Rickneys Quarry.

A web-site has been set up - lovebengeo.org.uk. If you live within this plan area you are encouraged to access the web site and respond to the feedback link (survey) on the Home Page.

Plan preparation got off to a flying start with a public meeting held on 24 June attended by over 100 people. A Steering Group is holding monthly meetings. These meetings have thus far been attended by Local Councillors, Town Council Officers, representatives of Molewood Residents Association (which has existed for about 50 years), Lower Bengoe Residents Association, Great Molewood Residents Association, Watermill Estate Residents Association and other local residents. One business person attended a recent meeting and there are plans to increase business involvement.

Working Groups set up to discuss and research different topics held initial meetings at the end of September. Each Group will develop a “Vision” for their topic. The Working Groups are concerned with “Business”, “Culture and Community”, “Natural Environment and Green Spaces”, “Transport and Traffic” and “Housing and Development”. Further volunteers are sought to join these Groups.

The Business Group will be building on existing planning policies (contained in the Hertford Town Centre Urban Design Strategy and the Hertford Conservation Area Review) relating to the parts of Bengoe ward in and near the Town Centre (particularly St Andrew Street). The Natural Environment and Green Spaces Group is pulling together objectives including Protecting Wildlife, Landscape and Rights of Way. Discussions of the Transport and Traffic Groups have centred around making Bengoe a safer travel area. It is planned to involve Folly Island and Lower Bengoe residents in developing policy and action plans for parking and traffic in those areas. The Housing and Development Group has discussed infill development issues and the East Herts. District Plan proposed housing allocations. The Culture and Community Group has discussed the proposed Art Quarter and the concept of a “Creative Hub”.

Terry Betts

PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

The Future of Panshanger Park

Panshanger Park is a wonderful local resource for heritage, health and the environment. Its Grade II* Listed status reflects the significance of its landscaping and it is enjoyed by walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders and naturalists. The Mimram, one of the best chalk streams in the country, flows through the Park, which is also home to ancient trees and a wide range of plants and wildlife, offers educational resources, and is potentially part of a Green Corridor that could stretch from Hertford to St Albans.

The future transformation of a gravel extraction site into a Country Park was a condition of approval by the Minister for its then owners, Redland, and Hertfordshire County Council back in 1982, and the Friends of Panshanger Park are part of HCC’s Strategic Advisory Group, so you might be forgiven for thinking the job is almost done. But far from it, as FPP chairman, Gary O’Leary, and Hertfordshire Gardens Trust conservation officer, Kate Harwood, explained in their talk to HCS members.

The terms of the agreement are taking far too long to put into effect, in the view of FPP, although present owners Tarmac have now submitted a management plan. There are still areas of the Park that should have been opened up to the public and, despite having 75,000 visitors a year, there is only one car park, no toilets or disabled access, too few access points, and the quality of the footpaths could be improved.

Many of the heritage features need attention if they are to survive. The Panshanger Oak has been well looked after, but there are many other old trees that need a care plan. Parts of ‘Capability’ Brown’s landscape could be restored with the introduction of inert material, as well as an avenue dating from 1704, if more recent

trees and shrubs were removed. The orangery has fallen into decay and urgently needs a development plan to give it a use, along with the stables and conservatory, that could earn money for the maintenance of the Park. Similarly, the barn and vegetable store could be given a new use for visitors and the C19 water wheels used to raise water for use in the house could be restored. The forest school is a valuable educational resource and very popular with local primary school children, but also needs some improvements.

On the positive side, Tarmac have agreed to abandon plans to excavate gravel from the Broadwater, which would have irreparably damaged what Pevsner described as Humphrey Repton's "most perfect landscape", and have stated that extraction will end in November 2017. This should allow the west end of Park to become available. However, a new approval will allow import of clean spoil for infilling and landscape re-grading near Cole Green over the next 10 years.

In addition to the management of the Park itself, there are also external threats, particularly from the possible growth in housing on its boundaries, which could disturb wildlife. Specifically, development is likely to spread westwards from Sele Farm and eastwards from Welwyn Garden City, along Birchall Lane. Development on the latter site would also cut through the route of the proposed Wildlife Corridor from Hertford to St Albans. The future of Panshanger Park is, therefore, still very much a work in progress and will need continued monitoring and support.

Further information at
<http://friendsofpanshangerpark.co.uk/>

Sue Jones

Civic Society AGM talk by Kevin Fitzgerald

While the East of England Regional Plan under Labour caused a stir, the Coalition and Tory Governments have gone to greater extremes according to Kevin Fitzgerald, Director of CPRE Hertfordshire. He painted a dystopic view of a rural England crushed under the weight of urban development in a presentation to the Hertford Civic Society April meeting.

The National Plan policy document insists that "only in exceptional circumstances" could councils review Green Belt. And yet all but one of the ten local authorities in the East of England were looking to take out big chunks of Green Belt, "None have tried to demonstrate exceptional circumstances," Fitzgerald said.

When the Regional Plan proposed 83,200 houses within 21 years, it provoked considerable protest. Now the proposal is for 91,400 within 15 years and the self-same elected representatives who had protested against the Labour plans - including Hertford and Welwyn MPs Mark Prisk and Grant Schapps - were silent.

"We are campaigning to reduce that," Fitzgerald said. "We contest those numbers." The housing White Paper was coming up with a methodology to deal with plans but so far, the numbers were much too high.

"The character of Hertfordshire is not like other counties; there are no big cities such as Norwich. We have nice towns separated by some of the nicest countryside in the country and it is important to prevent the towns coalescing." In the White Paper, however, words such as "special" and "exceptional" circumstances no longer appeared. Instead, it said that if the effort was made and could not be achieved, then they could allow development in the Green Belt.

Fitzgerald cited a range of questionable developments, from Stevenage and Harlow North

to a mooted “Garden City” for Ashwell, which was less a true garden city and more a dormitory commuter town for London and Cambridge. “We have got to carry on fighting as the plan comes to fruition and moves to wider public examination where we can put our case across.”

The Civic Society needed to make sure it had a seat at the table so that it could put its case in public, he said. Citing the extent of potential erosion, he said: “The Luton Plan goes into the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.” The issue had now gone to the next level, Natural England, the government’s adviser for the natural environment in England, charged with helping to protect England’s nature and landscapes for people to enjoy; “so it will hopefully stop Luton spilling over into Hertfordshire. It would also lead to the loss of villages and destroy the rural environment.”

He further warned: “At the moment, we stand to lose an awful lot of countryside and just become another London suburb, another John Betjeman’s Metroland. Hertsmere has had to increase the number of houses provided and, situated on the edge of the capital, is becoming another North London suburb.

“Without the Green Belt of the 1930s, London would now stretch from Brighton to Northampton. Indeed, some argue for the scrapping of the Green Belt and see the countryside as wasted space.

“We say every acre we have now is important and more precious. Hertfordshire is a spider’s web of footpaths. Get out there and use it; use it and encourage others to use it. It’s not a Sixties tower block that can be ripped down. When it’s gone, it’s gone and it’s terribly important to fight for that.

“We actually need regeneration of (brown field) land. In Harlow, there are acres of nothingness in the town, whilst they would take away nice countryside in Gilston. There is space in the

town where work and space is available and they should be building on that.”

Studies by Oxford University suggested there were more dwellings in England than there were households. “They say we need 300,000 a year and point back to the Fifties but that was replacement for bombed-out buildings, not new stock. Office for National Statistics figures back the Oxford study.”

He also raised the issue of affordability in his presentation to HCS. “There are 850 houses planned for the Shredded Wheat site in Welwyn Garden City but only 50 are affordable where 30% should be.”

Fitzgerald also accused the Government of cynicism in the way it had outlined objectives. “The Government says there are no targets as such but its ‘requirements’ are as good as. The pressure on the authorities is enormous as we are required by government to build 13,000 houses.

“Most of our authorities have a growth agenda of their own. They also want to encourage more people to live in the area. We are caught between Government pressure and authorities wanting more people. Who can we turn to? We need to increase the pressure.”

Barrie Goldsmith, speaking from the floor, said the Green Corridor was a unique chain of estates including Panshanger Park, with wildlife, a rare chalk stream and many other key issues of Special Scientific Interest. “Yet our planners were not aware of that. They could be working with economic planners to put a monetary value on it in order to help protect it.”

Fitzgerald replied that this was “really valuable information” that would assist the CPRE in its campaigning.

Ian Nash