



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2011

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter for 2011.

Our next major event is the Civic Awards evening on Wednesday 9th November when you can find out which local developments have impressed the Awards Panel. Terry Betts explains the process on p2.

Planning issues have been very much in the news lately as the Localism Bill makes its way through Parliament. Will it give local people the power to shape their own communities, or will it be a green light to developers to override local interests? Civic Voice has been active in presenting the community view, as Andrew Sangster explains in his report on p5. The future of Panshanger Park is also under discussion now that gravel extraction is almost at an end and Barrie Goldsmith outlines the history of the site and the interests to be considered and reconciled on p6.

Hertford's museum goes from strength to strength, but will it be moving in a different direction under its new curator? Sue Jones interviews Richard de Peyer on p8.

October is the time when we plan next year's programme and we are asking for your suggestions and ideas. Our talks this year have been well attended and often thought provoking and we welcome suggestions for new topics or speakers. We also need to consider our next outing and summer event, and welcome your input - see p4.

We look forward to seeing you at the Awards Evening and other future events and to receiving your ideas for our programme for 2012.



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CIVIC SOCIETY AWARDS 2011

The final meeting of the Society in 2011 will take place from 7.45 p.m. on Wednesday 9th November. The meeting is for presentation of the Civic Society Awards. Please note that the meeting will take place in The Downshire Suite at The Castle, Hertford.

What are the detailed arrangements for the meeting?

There will be modest refreshments, wine and soft drinks available. Tickets will not be sold. There will be a collection plate into which Society members are asked to place donations to cover the cost of the refreshments and drinks. So that appropriate quantities of refreshments are provided please inform Terry Betts (01992 583643 / 07586 848030). The formal proceedings will begin at about 8.15 p.m. Following a presentation about the candidates that will have been considered for recognition, Certificates indicating full Award or degree of commendation will be presented to those involved in promoting, designing and building any schemes or projects chosen for recognition.

What are the Civic Society Awards?

The Civic Society Awards have been made since 1973. The purpose of the Awards is to give recognition to those who serve well the cause of improving the environment and amenities of Hertford and thus to encourage others who are in a position to improve the town to act responsibly. Any building or its environment which has been improved, or any new building, is eligible for entry. Improvement can include extensions, restoration, painting and landscaping.

There are three categories of recognition - a full Award, Highly Commended and Commended.

Awards were last made in 2007.

How are decisions made about the Awards?

Decisions are made by a Panel of Judges. The Committee of the Civic Society identifies a possible Chairman for the Panel of Judges and prominent citizens, members of the Civic Society Committee and members of the Society are invited to serve on the Panel.

The Panel Chairman for the 2011 Awards is Russ Craig.

The Panel of Judges are:

- Peter Brown - Peter and Susan Brown Ltd., St Andrew Street
- Jane Chaplin - Civic Society Member
- Sue Jones - Civic Society Committee Member
- Rod Lewis - Civic Society Member
- Peter Norman - Civic Society member
- Alan Nudds - Local Resident
- Jane Sartin - Town Council and Civic Society member

It is for the Panel to decide how to make decisions as to which schemes or projects merit recognition. One method used on earlier occasions was to score the schemes in relation to the following criteria:

Architectural merit

Suitability of Treatment

Sensitivity to surroundings

Significance in Townscape

Quality of Workmanship

Intrinsic Importance of the Work

What about the candidates for the Awards?

There are fifteen schemes and projects being examined

by the Panel of Judges. These involve a new public library, a restaurant, a theatre, a day centre, a sea cadet facility, residential extensions and new residential accommodation (town houses, terraced houses, cottages, maisonettes and elderly persons' flats with community facilities) The full list is :-

1. Two storey and single storey side extension and alterations, Westfield House, 54 West St.
2. Alterations, extensions and refurbishment of existing elderly person's flats and erection of 14 additional flats at Bircherley Court.
3. Replacement garden centre, retail and restaurant building at Riverside Garden Centre, Lower Hatfield Road.
4. Conversion to bar, restaurant and hotel (The Master's House) at 84-86 (1st and 2nd floors) and 88-96 Fore St.
5. Erection of 3 terraced houses at Arbon Court, 14a St Andrew Street.
6. Erection of 2 two bedroom cottages adjacent to 69 Port Hill.
7. Single storey end and first floor rear extensions at Warren Lodge, 38 Port Hill.

8. Residential accommodation at Balls Park.

9. Four bedroom town houses and 12 one and two bedroom affordable flats, landscaping and car parking provision in grounds of former Hertford County Hospital.

10. 10 two bedroom maisonettes, 6 two bed flats, public library and open space at Dolphin Yard, Bull Plain.

11. Extension and conversion of existing building to provide 5 flats and new detached building to provide 4 flats with associated landscaping and car parking at former St Andrew's Rectory, 43 North Road.

12. Refurbishment with extension to main entrance lobby area, new windows to riverside and new windows and roof atrium to "hexagon building", new lighting, riverside decking, railings and landscaping at Castle Hall, The Wash.

13. New two storey day centre with vehicular access from Stanstead Road on land at junction of Ware Road and Stanstead Road.

14. Part two / part three storey buildings to provide 55 older persons care flats, associated community facilities, car and mini-bus

parking and landscaping at Calton House, Calton Avenue.

15. 130 residential units and new sea cadet facility on former TXU site, Mead Lane.

Photographs of the 15 schemes and projects can be seen at

<http://tinyurl.com/6avs6nv>

Double click on each photograph to enlarge and find what it shows. It is also possible to run a photo gallery.

Terry Betts

PLANNING OUR PROGRAMME FOR 2012

The Committee is now in the process of planning activities for 2012 and we would like to hear from members about what you would like to see on the programme.

Traditionally we have had three types of events: evening talks, a whole-day summer outing and a summer social event. There have also been Civic Society Awards presentation evenings when there has been a sufficient number of building projects to provide a good choice.

Our talks have covered a wide range of topics, from the future of the planet to coal hole covers in our pavements,

and including the historic fabric of Hertford, the Council's Town Plan, local conservation issues, energy saving and the future of local newspapers. The following letter indicates one member's response to the programme:

"I am writing with reference to two recent Civic Society talks. One was on climate change, presented by a scientist who has worked in the Arctic and a lecturer at a London college, and the other was by the Optimum Population Trust, now known as Population Matters. Like most members I stayed to listen to both talks, finding them very informative. There was an important link between them on a matter impossible to escape. Here experts were raising awareness, which must be of concern to a huge majority, on the one vital global issue - the sustainability of our planet.

I recognise that Hertford Civic Society has many past achievements in conservation. I would like to express my full support to the Society if, in continuing its work, it can provide future platforms, and a programme in Hertford, to develop our awareness of this critical conservation issue."
Malcolm Booker

These two talks were well attended, so clearly there is substantial interest in energy and conservation issues. Are there other subjects you would like us to re-visit, or do you have ideas for topics we have not yet addressed?

Our annual outings are always popular and are booked up well in advance, but we need to think of new places to visit. For convenience they should be not more than two hours away by coach and it is useful if the town has an active civic society who can act as our hosts and guides. In recent years we have visited Wisbech, Ipswich, Faversham and Stamford, but which other towns might be suitable candidates?

Lastly, there is the summer event. Garden parties have been popular, but they depend on the availability of suitable gardens and parking and the goodwill of owners willing to risk an invasion! They also require a lot of organisation and work to manage the refreshments and a marquee, so if we want to continue with these, then we will be looking for volunteers to help. This year we tried something different by having a visit to the Forge Museum in Much Hadham, but although this was a fascinating evening, it was sadly

undersubscribed. We would like to hear from members why this event was not popular.

So, we ask you to get your thinking caps on and we look forward to receiving your suggestions for our programme of talks, annual outing and summer event. If you have some ideas, please contact Jill Eames or Malcolm Ramsay by the end of October.

PLANNING MATTERS

Former Police Station Site, Ware Road:

The Society supported in principle the application for new housing, a nursing home, an hotel and two retail units.

In our view there is a need for a budget hotel serving the town, particularly if tourism is to be encouraged. Ideally this should be close to the town centre within easy walking distance of the many restaurants; but, as the applicant subsequently demonstrated, there is at present no site that satisfies that criterion and has adequate parking space. At least the proposed site will serve both Hertford and Ware.

We had reservations about the ratio of apartments to houses on the grounds that there is already a large number of flats recently constructed, but these are not suitable for growing families.

We queried the allocation of parking spaces and the use of a staggered window layout on the Stansted Road elevation of the hotel. It also seemed to us that the two retail units were unlikely to be successful unless they were used to provide dining facilities for the hotel customers.

The application was refused permission by the Development Control Committee on the sole grounds that the sequential approach process for finding a suitable site for an hotel had not been properly conducted. When the applicant lodged an appeal the Council withdrew this objection, offering no evidence and with the aim of avoiding costs of representation. But the applicant continued with the appeal in order to avoid having to make another planning application, thus incurring a new set of fees.

The Society appeared at the informal inquiry which took the form of a discussion led by the Inspector. Our concern

about housing ratios was undermined by the Council not having objected on that aspect of the application and our concerns about the parking and the design of the hotel were brushed away by the applicant's consultants. Apart from density and visual impact, the principal concern of the two local councillors present and the Chairman of the Governors of Wheatcroft School was the proximity of the hotel to the school, because the access on to Stanstead Road would be shared and extra traffic would be generated. The Inspector rejected these arguments and has now confirmed acceptance of the appeal, awarding costs against the District Council on the grounds that it had 'behaved unreasonably'.

National Planning Policy Framework:

A draft version of this document was issued for public consultation in July with a response deadline of 17th October. Its purpose is to replace the many current planning policy documents by a much more concise guidance and to add detail to the provisions of the Localism Bill. Although the withdrawal of the prescriptive housing numbers in the soon to be defunct Regional Plans has generally been welcomed

CONTACTS

Terry Betts - Treasurer
24 Morgans Road
Hertford
SG13 8BS
☎ 01992 583643

Hilary Durbin - Vice Chairman
33 Fanshawe Street
Hertford
SG14 3AT
☎ 01992 587230

Jill Eames - Social Secretary
7 Pearman Drive
Dane End
Ware
SG12 0LW
☎ 01920 438088

Barrie Goldsmith
4 Fordwich Hill
Hertford
SG14 2BQ
☎ 01992 303272

Linda Haysey - Chairman
Roxford House
St Mary's Lane
Hertingfordbury
SG14 2LF
☎ 01992 582151

Sue Jones
9 Villiers Street
Hertford
SG13 7BW
01992 587949☎

amongst amenity organisations such as Civic Voice, National Trust and CPRE that the embodied presumption in favour of sustainable development will prove to be an open charter for developers. In addition, the Royal Town Planning Institute has refuted ministerial assertions that the current planning process is preventing the provision of new housing. Clearly the new legislation and guidance will introduce much uncertainty and confusion in the immediate future, and will pose difficult questions such as how is sustainability measured. The best way to download the document and to see the concerns being expressed, together with how to submit a response, is to visit the Civic Voice website, www.civicvoice.org.uk.

*- Former Coles shop,
Maidenhead Street*

We objected to a proposal to replace the existing shop front by a fully glazed façade parallel to the street line. We noted that all the other shops in the street, bar one, have solid stall boards at street level, and that this design should be repeated in the new front. The application has been rejected.

- 2 Fordwich Hill - update

The applicant sought to build a detached house in the garden, fronting onto Fordwich Rise. The Society objected on the grounds that the plot dimensions are inadequate resulting in the house being too close to the back edge of the pavement and, given the site is located close to one of the entrances to the estate, it creates a discordant visual impression on entry. The estate does not fall within the Conservation Area, but because the houses almost all display the distinctive architectural style of the period immediately before the Second World War, it is our view that the area is worthy of protection from developments which are in conflict with the general setting adopted in the original layout. The application was refused, but is now subject to written appeal.

Andrew Sangster

PANSHANGER ESTATE

To the west of Hertford between the B1000 and the A414 and as far west as Panshanger airfield lies a beautiful area of countryside. It is 400ha (1000 acres) in area, has the River Mimram running through it and a

CARING FOR HERTFORD

series of five lakes. It is a Site of Special Scientific Importance and a Grade 2* English Heritage listed park designed by Sir Humphrey Repton and Capability Brown.

Like so much land around Hertford it has been stripped of its sand and gravel, initially by Redland, more recently by Lafarge. They submitted an application in 1979, a public enquiry followed and the application was called-in by the then Secretary of State for the Environment. In 1980 permission was granted but after extraction the land was to become a Country Park, for the benefit of residents of Hertford and Welwyn Garden City. This was to compensate them for the lorry movements, rural disfigurement, noise and dust which we have all experienced so many times in our county. In 1999 a Master Plan for the future of the area was produced and in 2003 minutes show submissions by the public illustrating what they would like to see and experience. There was a 2005 revision.

The gravel has been nearly all exhausted but what has become of the proposed Country Park? A short circuit in the north-east corner of the area has been established but it seems that much of

estate will be mainly private access. There are fewer footpaths and bridleways in the new plan than before and how many of the lakes will we have access to? Meanwhile the B1000 has become more-and-more dangerous to walkers and cyclists with another fatality very recently. Could we have a route through Panshanger to help get us from Hertford to Welwyn Garden City? Could we have a north-south route too?

There is a liaison committee and I have been on a tour of the estate with them and I promise you it is beautiful and very interesting. However, there are fears that the area would be torched or trashed, that fishing would be disrupted by swimmers and pheasant shooting by walkers. The appropriate response is that the area would need to be adequately fenced and wardened, as it is now. The public could be allowed in between, say, 10am and dusk to allow some shooting. Longhorn cattle could be grazed, as on the Ashridge Estate, and they are good with people and dogs.

Currently we are having very little input to the debate about the future of Panshanger. Although I sent my comments to Lafarge and

CONTACTS

Malcolm Ramsay
Dunkirks Farm Southside
Queen Road
Hertford
SG13 8BJ
01992 500002 ☎

Jean Riddell - Membership
Secretary
30 Riversmeet
Hertford
SG14 1LE
01992 586092 ☎

Andrew Sangster - Planning
25 West Street
Hertford
SG13 8EX
01992 582594 ☎

Geoffrey Thornton
Whitacre
Port Hill
Hertford
SG14 3BJ
01992 582929 ☎

Richard Threlfall
18 Mangrove Road
Hertford
SG13 8AJ
01992 581601 ☎

Members of the Committee can also be contacted by e-mail via the Society's website at www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk

Bryan Hammond, the Chairman of the liaison committee, after the visit, there was no response and everything has now gone quiet. What do you think? Surely the original Country Park idea should be the starting point and we then could modify it to meet specific objectives such as to enhance the wildlife interest of the area or the needs of agriculture. The original promise of a proper park must not be allowed to lapse.

Barrie Goldsmith

HERTFORD MUSEUM'S NEW CURATOR



For Hertford Museum's new curator Richard de Peyer museums are first and foremost about communication - and despite having a "brand new museum

that's looking super and good community activity and a full-time learning officer", he says there is still more to offer the public. "Our collections are very big, as you would expect as they've been going since 1908, and I'm conscious that we have an obligation to make these more available to the public in suitable ways," he says. Although not all the items are appropriate for display, there are far more than can be seen in the museum; its archaeology collection, for instance, is possibly larger than that at Verulamium.

"One way is to have showcases that we could tour to non-traditional venues, such as banks, public houses or village halls," he says, "although this begs a lot of questions about security and quality. They would have to be high quality, not just a few objects of domestic life or from a particular village." These exhibitions would take "a slightly oblique approach", and be built around a theme, such as perceptions of colour or technological change, which would be thought provoking as well as informative.

"A second way could be an environmental and heritage centre with a range of the resources available at the

Seed Warehouse, which is so well located near the river and now has a decent outlook over the new flats and library," he suggests. It could be in the nature of a gateway to the Lee Valley and provide an introduction to archaeology and the environment. It would explain the early settlements, how they linked into the landscape and the river system and explain how the ecology of today developed over time. It could also be linked to other services such as archaeology and wildlife. It could be an eco-museum - what you see in front of you now and what it means. There would be exhibits, but also databases to consult. This, he says, would be "quite an ambitious complement to a traditional museum".

Thirdly, he would like to make the collections' records available on the museum website. "We already have the 360 degree tour of the galleries, but it would be good to make the databases available in people's homes. The technology for this is not difficult and we can do it, but it's a couple of years and £2,000 off!"

Mr de Peyer brings a wealth of experience to Hertford, having worked for organisations as varied as the

Wellcome Trust and the Embroiderers' Guild. He has been deputy director at the South West Area Museums Council, director of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society, director of the Silk Heritage Trust in Macclesfield, and has served on the Councils of both the Association of Independent Museums and the Museums Association, where he was a member of the Ethics Committee. This experience enables him to take a long-term view of museum development.

"There have been so many changes in how museums work over the last 20-30 years," he says. "For example, education is now much more important than it used to be. Here we have a great interest in primary education and holiday activities for the very young, evening walks and evening classes. Cambridge University has withdrawn from these but we will still do them. We may extend further and would like to try archaeology and more social history."

Digitisation is also an issue that is very pertinent to the future of museums, he thinks. "It's only since the 1970s that museums have been digitising their records and for photos only since the 1990s. Now we

need to think about how we use this. National museums have led the way but a lot of museums have still got to catch up with that."

But in difficult economic times there are more urgent challenges than spreading the benefits of learning or making good use of new technology. "Museums these days are cash-strapped," says Mr de Peyer. "There's dramatic change. Lots of local authorities are trying to put out their services. It's not happening so quickly with museums because there are often issues of public trusteeship, but the more aggressive are looking to put them into charities and trusts. This often involves charges. We're not intending to make charges at the moment because we have generous support from the Town Council."

Free museums have their advantages and disadvantages, he argues. On the plus side, people from all parts of the community can come in and feel positive about the museum because it's free, but the negative side is that it can also make them less critical about how taxpayers' money is being spent. If they are not thinking about whether what they see is value for money, they will

be less inclined to get involved in a debate about how a museum should operate and rely on whoever channels the museum's funds.

Larger museums are increasingly developing partnerships with businesses and becoming entrepreneurs in their own right. At the Silk Heritage Trust in Macclesfield Mr de Peyer was able to license textile designs to local manufacturers and in the South West to have a similar arrangement with publishers using items relating to Thomas Hardy. Such contracts can bring in thousands of pounds to a museum, though unfortunately Hertford's collections offer little scope for marketing saleable images, so entrepreneurial activity would have to be directed more towards the sale of services.

"I'm conscious that we need to be tied in more closely with the community and with Hertford's businesses, through traditional High Street stores, but also with Hertford's professionals, such as dentists, accountants and optometrists," he says. "We could invite them for out of hours visits and encourage them to adopt part of our operations, such as conservation or making documents more available.

Businesses would become stakeholders as well as onlookers. It would be wider than the current Friends of Hertford Museum operation.”

He is also looking at various forms of social interest and not-for-profit company, which can trade and apply for grants. “We could offer curatorial and education services and consultancy and any profit would go back into our operations,” he says.

Sue Jones

SUMMER EVENT REPORT

The Forge Museum at Much Hadham is full of surprises, starting with the garden, where we assembled for our summer event.

Hidden out of sight behind the museum, the garden is a mixture of flowers, fruit and vegetables, as cottage gardens would have been in the C19th. But it also features a granary (originally sited in Watford) mounted on staddlestones to protect the grain from rats, and a bee shelter dating from c.1800, which is one of only two in southern England. Bees are vulnerable to dampness and overheating, so the shelter has an intricate arrangement of compartments and doors

which can be opened up in different combinations to suit prevailing conditions.

Our guide for the evening was curator Cristina Harrison, who explained the history of the building, which was originally a farm and two adjoining cottages, dating back in part to the C16th. The forge was operated from 1811 by four generations of the Page family, the last working blacksmith being Charlie Page, who died in 1983 aged 91. His daughter Jean donated the forge to the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust in 1988 with the intention of turning it into a small museum in memory of her father.

Although a wealth of tools and equipment had survived, the buildings were in a poor state, and restoration took many years. The work included a new roof and a modern extension at the back, which now serves as a café. Now a working forge once again, the museum also has local artefacts dating from Roman times, when there was an important pottery works near here, through to the C20th. Exhibits also show that Much Hadham claims to be the birthplace of both the Tudor dynasty and bottled beer. Edmund Tudor, father of Henry VII, was

probably born here in the C15th and Andrew Nowell, C16th rector of St Andrews, is said to have invented a special container which could be placed in the river to keep his beer cool while fishing.

But the most remarkable, and unexpected, feature of the building was yet to come. Jean Page had long suspected that there might be something interesting on the walls of a room at the front of the complex because vague, ghostly outlines would sometimes appear. During the restoration work, painstaking removal of layer upon layer of paint revealed stunningly high quality C16th wall paintings; the ghostly outlines had been the result of later oil-based decorating paint reacting with copper in the original pigments underneath.

Yet this discovery only created another mystery. Why had such expensive craftsmanship been lavished on a building of only modest status? The clues were in the pictures themselves. One scene represented the Old Testament story of the Judgement of Solomon. The figures were all in C16th century dress and Solomon was very slim, had no facial hair and bore a remarkable resemblance to Elizabeth I. Other parts of the decoration

A WIDER VIEW

depicted Elizabeth's coat of arms and that of the Newce family, local Merchant Adventurers and bailiffs, who had used this building for official business. In 1578 Elizabeth made a royal progress through Hertfordshire. Could these wall paintings have been the attempt of an ambitious businessman to win the attention and favour of the monarch by comparing her to the wisest monarch of all time? Whatever their origin, these rare artefacts are now carefully preserved in conditions of closely controlled light and humidity.

Our fascinating evening ended with socialising over drinks and refreshments in the café.

Sue Jones

CIVIC VOICE UPDATE

Alcohol licensing -

This campaign to tackle anti-social behaviour caused by excessive alcohol consumption aims to give local communities a greater say in licensing decisions. In particular, the proposals would simplify the regulations, improve publicity for licensing applications, allow anyone with an interest in the quality of life in an

area to influence decisions (not just local residents) and require applicants to show how their alcohol licence would contribute to and not damage the area. The campaign is being led by *Open All Hours?*, a network of civic societies and residents' associations, and the Institute of Alcohol Studies, which campaigns for sensible alcohol consumption.

Broadband boxes -

Broadband is a benefit to citizens, but the infrastructure, or 'street cabinets' are often visually intrusive and poorly located. The 1.6 metre-high boxes do not require planning consent. Civic Voice is campaigning to improve the design and placing of the boxes, to have the infrastructure put underground in conservation areas and to give local communities a greater say in their location and appearance.

Further information at www.civicvoice.org.uk

COMMUNITY NOTICES

Are you a member of a not-for-profit organisation providing a service or activity for your local community? Hertford Civic Society

Committee has decided, as an experiment, to make space available in the newsletter for brief announcements from such organisations to publicise their activities.

Love to dance...? Come and join us. Dancing is a great way to get moving, have fun and meet new people. Classes run weekly and are delivered in a fun, friendly and relaxed atmosphere. You don't have to have any previous experience, all you need is enthusiasm! This exciting programme of dance will cover a variety of styles from Line to Latin and more. Come along for a free taster session. Refreshments will be provided. Every Wednesday at the Cowbridge Halls Hertford, 10am-12 noon, first session is FREE and £4 thereafter. No need to book, just turn up!

Please contact Clare Bellchambers, community dance manager, Saracens Sport Foundation, should you have any future questions. 01707 285 026 or email clarebellchambers@saracens.net.

PART A MEMBERSHIP FORM

I/We wish to become/continue as members of the Hertford Civic Society and

(a) enclose a cheque in the sum of £ being my/our subscription for 2010

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

(delete as appropriate)

FULL NAME (S)

CLASS OF MEMBERSHIP FULL PENSIONER JUNIOR CORPORATE

ADDRESS
(including postcode)

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

To renew your membership, please complete and send this form to:

Jean Riddell
Membership Secretary
30 Riversmeet
Hertford
SG14 1LE

Subscriptions are as follows:

Full membership

£9.00 per annum

Joint full membership at the same address

£14.00 per annum

Full membership with concessions

£5.00 per annum

Joint membership with concessions at the same address

£8.00 per annum

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

£11.00 per annum

Corporate membership

£20.00 per annum

Junior membership (under 18 years of age)

£5.00 per annum

PART B DECLARATION

NAME OF CHARITY Hertford Civic Society

I 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
(including postcode)

SIGNED

Date

PART C STANDING ORDER FORM

NAME OF YOUR BANK

BANK ADDRESS

SORT CODE

ACCOUNT NO

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
(including postcode)

SIGNED

DATED