



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2020-21

Welcome to the Winter 2020-21 Newsletter.

As with all other communities in the UK, the continuing experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has made profound, and on-going, differences to our behaviour, our ability to earn a living, socialise, exercise, gain education, obtain the goods and services we need and enjoy culture. At even the simplest level, whoever thought it would become compulsory to wear a mask to get into a bank?

As we go around Hertford, we see evidence of these changes. Queues for the Post Office, supermarkets and other services are now out in the street rather than in the building. Many shops are closed and may never re-open; some national chains, such as Edinburgh Woollen Mill, which were already struggling, were pushed into administration. The hospitality industry has been similarly hard hit with small businesses like Serendipity closing their café and moving to on-line delivery, while, as with shops, national chains such as Prezzo and Café Rouge have closed altogether. Many people will have lost their jobs or businesses for ever.

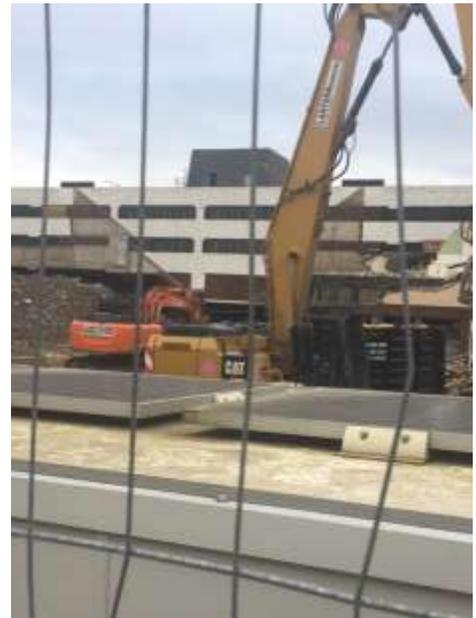
Culture and community events have also suffered. Exhibitions and films have been greatly restricted and live entertainments, such as concerts and the Christmas street fair, have been cancelled. Healthy exercise is also more difficult as team sports cannot take place, gyms and swimming pools have closed and walking and running are now very much individual or paired activities. Families and friends find it difficult or impossible to meet up, despite our open spaces, such as Hartham Common.

If office workers continue to work from home and we continue to do more of our shopping via the internet and home delivery, what is the future for the high street and town centres? Demolition work at Bircherley Green is well underway, (*see picture*) but how viable will Chase New Homes' plans be now that Premier Inns has decided not to build any new hotels and if retail no longer needs town centre floorspace?

This has implications for planning. Property owners already have scope for some change of use to existing buildings under permitted development rights but the Government is proposing sweeping changes to the whole structure of the planning laws (*see p13*) which would substantially affect local councils' planning powers and the ability of local communities to influence planning in their area. It will be very important that we keep abreast of these developments (*see Programme p2*).

There will be many difficulties in 2021, but we wish all our members a happy, and healthy, New Year.

Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity No 266111



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PROGRAMME 2021

We know that 2021 will also be challenging. What kind of programme can we organise? Clearly it will be online rather than face-to-face, for at least the first part of the year. However, we were pleased that so many of you really enjoyed our initial online talks: first, in November, on re-writing Pevsner's *Hertfordshire*; and then, in December, on the New River. That gives us the confidence to organise other virtual events, all on Zoom, for which we have a licence. And we also know that we can operate flexibly, keeping you informed through emails from Terry Betts. We will try to increase the number of talks during the winter, aiming for one a month if possible.

Looking ahead to the first few months of 2021, we have the following evening talks already organised:

Understanding the White Paper on Planning (Wednesday 20 January)

Richard Bullen, Chair of Hertfordshire CPRE, reviewed this controversial proposal assisted by expert planner, Alison Young, and members of the St Albans Civic Society. It might sound rather a specialist topic, but this event was a good way for to find out more about a measure which could have major effects on the built environment in Hertford and everywhere else in this country. This talk, and other recent events, are being recorded and are available on our website.

Hertford and slavery (Wednesday 24 February)

Historian Clare Gittings, who did a talk for us in 2019 on the dysfunctional Cowper family at Hertford Castle, returns with a topic that has present-day resonances. Does her title sound surprising? It's only too easy, when thinking about the large-scale slave trade and plantations linking Africa and the Americas, to see it as something remote from this country. However, the ownership of slaves in the West Indies was substantially in the hands of British people, including some living in Hertford and its surrounds. There were also increasingly vocal protests against slavery, again involving some people in the Hertford area. The full title of this illustrated talk is 'Hertford and slavery: black inhabitants, slave owners and abolitionists.' They are a complex cast of characters, as you can soon discover.

Wildlife on your doorstep: Hertford's nearest nature reserves (Wednesday 24 March)

Dave Willis, who works for Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, and covers the Kings Meads water meadows close to Hertford, will talk about the birds and other wildlife of this reserve. He will be joined by Jenny Rawson (Beane Marsh) and Jo Whittaker (Panshanger Park), so we will learn about the wildlife of all three places, and what the Trust is doing to protect, promote and foster understanding of them. One of our committee members (Hilary Durbin), who heard a similar talk a little while ago, described it as 'inspirational'.

AGM (date to be determined)

We didn't hold an AGM in 2020, but are keen to do so in 2021. While we are still working on the format of this event, we will make sure it happens, complete with some broader talk or discussion.

Other events

We hope to have other talks in 2021, still being discussed with their presenters. These might include:

- Building a 'passive house' (the ultimate in eco living) in Hertford and living in it, with virtual tour.
- Hertford's new theatre and how people will access it.

Please get in touch, if you think you have a good idea for a talk or any other event that might appeal to members. The talk on re-writing Pevsner's *Hertfordshire* happened because Celia Gould suggested it, after hearing a similar talk by the same presenter, James Bettley. Very sadly and unexpectedly, Celia did not live long enough to experience our recent event.

It is uncertain whether we will manage to have a party in 2021, or to have a day trip to Flag Fen Bronze-Age village or anywhere else. Similarly, it is unclear whether or at what point we might have any face-to-face talks, as opposed to Zoom ones.

Accessing Zoom talks

These talks, or at least those mentioned above, start formally at 8pm: please don't all leave it to the last minute to click on the relevant link: that adds to the complications for our member interface lead, Terry Betts. Terry is the person to contact well in advance if you need the link, or want to invite guests. His email:

betts.terry30@gmail.com

Malcolm Ramsay

SCENES OF HERTFORD DURING THE PANDEMIC

Pictures throughout this newsletter by Ian Nash, unless otherwise attributed



Charity shops have had to close, which will diminish their funds



Some small businesses have left the town centre and gone online

PLANNING MATTERS

A lot has happened since the Spring Newsletter

Hertingfordbury Retirement Village

We made a strong objection to this proposal for over 200 apartments in the Green Belt, where new buildings should be permitted only if there are very special circumstances. The narrow stretch of Green Belt between Hertingfordbury and Hertford performs an obvious and visually important role in separating the town from the village, and in providing a rural setting for the village conservation area. The applicant contended that there is an unmet need and demand for the type of retirement accommodation proposed, and that the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of land for housing. Even if both those propositions were true (which we doubt), the protection of Green Belt land from development is a key policy of the National Planning Policy Framework.

We challenged the applicant's claim that the proposal would be a 'residential institution', and as such escape the requirement under the District Plan to include affordable housing. In fact the proposed village, with its independently owned apartments, would not be an 'institution' but simply a number of ordinary dwellings, so under the Plan a percentage of them should be affordable.

In November the Council officers used their delegated powers to refuse permission. They found that the proposal would have had a very significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and would conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt because it would encroach into the countryside; there were no very special circumstances to justify it. The failure to include affordable housing was given as another Reason for Refusal.

Tamworth Road

The proposal for 11 houses and eight 4-storey blocks of flats, submitted in January 2019, is still



Coffee shops can no longer be places to meet and socialise



Post Office queues have moved out into the street

a live application, but in May this year the developers submitted an application for an entirely different scheme featuring a majority of three-storey townhouses. There is no date yet for the consideration of this application by the Council's Development Management Committee. We welcomed the reduction in the total number of dwellings proposed and the fact that the majority are now to be houses rather than flats. But we lodged an objection based on the lack of affordable housing, inadequate parking provision, and lack of balconies for the flats.

Although it is suggested that five flats, out of a total of 49 dwellings, might be designated for affordable home ownership, the application includes no firm commitment to any affordable housing. Five affordable units would be about 10% of the total, whereas the Council's policy aspiration is for 40%. It is for the developer to submit a viability report, available to the public, if the target for affordable housing is not to be met. We understand that the site has been in the ownership of the applicant for many years, so land acquisition costs will have no bearing on the viability of redevelopment. We therefore urged that, unless the full quota of affordable housing can be provided, the application should be refused as contrary to District Plan policy.

Secondly, the development should provide parking for residents at least to the standard set out in the Council's policy, and the parking spaces provided must be convenient and available. Whilst we support the aspirations of the County and District Councils to improve public transport, and conditions for walking and cycling, so that people can make commuting journeys and short journeys around the town without needing to use a car, it is a fallacy to suppose that less car use will necessarily lead to lower car ownership. Most of the parking proposed is in integral garages, often as tandem spaces one behind the other, an arrangement which is inconvenient because the front car has to be moved to let the back car out. Add in the fact that in the real world many people tend to use garages for storage rather than parking cars, and it is clear that there is likely to

be irregular parking within the site and more pressure on the limited space for parking in Tamworth Road itself.

'Tree Heritage' site, North Road

This is a 2.75 acre site in the Green Belt between Hertford and Waterford. In April there was an application for 3 houses and 3 bungalows. At present the land is used as a tree nursery and by a landscaping contractor, and for 'heritage reclamation' (architectural salvage). The applicant claimed that this makes the site 'previously-developed land', and therefore exempt from the normal prohibition of development in the Green Belt. We lodged a strong objection, arguing that this is a particularly valuable section of Green Belt, separating Hertford and Waterford, and that the 'developed land' exception does not apply because the Planning Act classifies nurseries as an agricultural use.

The April application was refused because of harm to the openness of the Green Belt, but the developer has now followed up with a new one reducing the number of dwellings to five, all of them bungalows. This does of course reduce the effect on the openness of the Green Belt, but we have reiterated our objection that any residential development of this site should be resisted in principle, because it is in the Green Belt, and is NOT previously-developed land. Unfortunately, despite our representations, officers judged that the site should be accepted as previously-developed, and in December permission was granted under delegated powers.

Hartham Leisure Centre

Following strong objections from the Society and others, the January meeting of the Development Management Committee declined to approve the proposed extension to the leisure centre and called for a total re-design. A new application was made in September. Visually the new design is a great improvement; the building responds well to its setting in the landscape, and incorporates measures which the Committee called for to

improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. Some trees will still be lost, but more will be planted. In December the Committee unanimously approved the application, so the way is now clear for work on this much-needed development to start.

41 Fanshawe St

The application for two new houses in the rear garden, reported in the last Newsletter, was refused back in March; at the end of September an appeal was lodged. We had objected on the grounds that, as this part of the conservation area is characterised by substantial houses with a street frontage on large, elongated plots, two smaller houses away from the street would be out of character and contrary to the established pattern of building in the vicinity. The new houses would have encroached on the area of green space between Fanshawe Street and Wellington Street. The appeal will be decided after a visit by an Inspector early in the New Year.

17 Highfield Road

In another part of the conservation area, the application for a detached house in the garden of 17 Highfield Road, was also refused. However, an appeal was lodged and an amended proposal submitted. The District Plan expects proposals in the conservation area to respect established building lines, layouts and patterns, and safeguard all aspects which contribute to the area's special interest and significance, including important views and green spaces. The wooded garden of No.17 makes a significant contribution to the appearance and feeling of the conservation area. The amended scheme did not rectify the shortcomings of the earlier proposal, we renewed our objection, and permission was again refused. Last month the appeal against the original scheme was dismissed. The impact of this development would have been felt in Morgans Road, where the existing houses are set back in deep front gardens, and the proposed house would have broken the relatively consistent building line at the most sensitive point.

Mangrove Road (Site allocated for Housing in the District Plan)

We were pleased to see that, in accordance with the District Plan, the applicant intends to leave the western part of the site, which is in the Green Belt and part of a Green Finger, undeveloped and available for public access. However, any area to which the public have access will need a certain amount of maintenance and supervision, for example to ensure that litter does not accumulate and that there are no dead or dying trees liable to be a danger to the public; a certain degree of woodland management would also be necessary in the longer term. No proposals for the maintenance of this public area are included in the application, nor any arrangements to ensure that the area remains available to the public in perpetuity.

We therefore urged the Council to grant permission only if the developer is willing to enter into a planning obligation to ensure that the undeveloped land remains available to the public in perpetuity (and is fully signed as public), and is maintained appropriately at no cost to the public purse. There would be great benefit in a public footpath link between this land and Valley Close, but we recognise that the creation of such a path outside the application site would require action by the Council and is not in the gift of the developer. We understand that the application will be considered by the Development Management Committee early in the New Year.

The Hertford Bell (formerly Duncombe Arms), Railway Street

We were alarmed when the timber stockade made of rough-hewn planks was built outside the front of the pub. The structure is totally inappropriate for a conservation area in the centre of a historic town so we were pleased when a planning application was submitted not showing the stockade. The application was approved subject to strict adherence with the submitted plans. As the enclosure/ seating area currently in place to the front of the pub is not built in accordance with the approved plans, the Council advised the

owner back in the Summer that once the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted it must be removed and replaced with what was approved. We must ensure that this matter is not forgotten.

The Corn Exchange

At our instigation the District Council formally designated the Exchange as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). This should help to ensure that the building remains available as a music venue, because ACV status can be a material consideration when the Council has to decide whether or not to grant planning permission for a change of use: there have been indications in the past of an interest in converting the building into apartments. In April we drew the Council's attention to the fact that substantial repairs were being carried out to the roof, apparently without the consent necessary because the building is Listed. A retrospective application for Listed Building Consent was made and in December consent was refused.

Power Turbine and Generator west of Hertford Theatre

As long ago as 2012 the Council decided to install a hydro-electric power turbine and generator on Castle Weir, next to the theatre. There were objections from the Environment Agency on flood control grounds, and the project lay in abeyance for years. The Council then drew up a modified proposal, and as part of the process they had to make a planning application. The application is in outline with no details about the appearance or siting of the plant and equipment, or the necessary building. This is a very sensitive location in the conservation area with a number of Listed buildings nearby, not to mention the theatre itself which is to be substantially remodelled and extended. So we submitted that a full application is needed to provide information on any installations that would have a visual or other impact. At the end of last year the Council's conservation officer made a similar observation, and the Environment Agency objected because no flood risk assessment had been made. Since then no further information has

been published, and the application is still not determined.

15 West Street

The proposal is described as an outbuilding with swimming pool incorporated, but the building would in fact include a living area, bedroom and bathroom facilities; it would require little work to make it into a completely separate dwelling in the future. The proposed structure is located in the conservation area immediately adjacent to the line of listed buildings at the eastern entry to West Street. As such it fails to respect the value and setting of these adjacent properties. It would sit within a walled area previously used as the kitchen garden, which in itself adds to the curtilage and setting of No.15.

It is understandable that the applicant wants to seek garaging for the household's cars but this could be done with a simple single-storey building replacing whatever passes for a garden shed currently. It does of course require access from the Gates site which is currently subject to redevelopment, but in this respect the application is premature until that redevelopment is approved.

We therefore urged the Council to refuse permission on grounds of impact on the conservation area and on the adjacent Listed buildings. Approval would set a precedent for similar applications in the conservation area. The application remains undecided.

Gates of Hertford site, Gascoyne Way

Unlike the earlier schemes for this site, the current application would retain the existing showroom building partly for residential and partly for commercial use, with a terrace of houses proposed at the rear of the site, backing on to Wallfields.

This is one of the first applications in Hertford to seek permission for the new Class E use, which includes a wide range of businesses providing services to visiting members of the public, including shops, cafés, restaurants (though not

bars or take-aways), financial, professional and medical services, and sport and fitness centres. In view of the existing houses and flats around the site, as well as the proposed residential units within the site, late-night opening of the Class E units to the public could have an adverse effect on residential amenity, particularly as the proposed parking areas would appear to be shared between the commercial and residential occupiers. Whilst supporting the proposal we therefore suggested a condition that the commercial premises shall not be open to the public between 10 pm and 7 am.

Neighbourhood Plans

The plans for Sele and Bengoe wards have been published for consultation.

In both cases we wrote to support the policies on Local Green Space and views. There are expected

to be objections from landowners to these policies which we believe are important not only to residents of the respective Neighbourhood Plan areas but to the people of Hertford as a whole. The Neighbourhood Plans within Hertford, unlike those for individual rural villages, are interdependent, and the pros and cons of their proposed policies should be assessed in the context of the whole town. The green spaces and views proposed for protection in the two plans have an amenity value which extends to those living well beyond the confines of the Bengoe and Sele wards.

We also suggested that some proposals for specific walking and cycling routes which have previously been investigated should be added to the general policies on cycling and walking.

Peter Norman

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY AWARDS 2020

Top award for visionary social housing

New social housing with a strong focus on community development in an attractive environment was the winning site, which will in due course receive a plaque as a very public award for excellence in a strong field of contenders at the final stage of this year's competition.



Picture by Mike Howarth

The Ridgeway housing on Sele Farm estate (left) was judged the best of 20 developments considered for this year's award, which celebrates the best in new or refurbished buildings since 2016. The judging was carried out by an independent panel under the guidance of Dr Lee Prosser, Curator of Historic Buildings at Historic Royal Palaces.

Panel members concluded that The Ridgeway houses and flats, planned and built by Network Homes, had a "strong identity", showing numerous signs of careful design, not least because both houses and flats were equally well constructed.

Judging by observed behaviour patterns, there were indications that a positive sense of community had begun to develop, which was particularly impressive given the very recent completion of work, in 2019. There had been a need to deliver relatively high-density housing, a need which had been cleverly met by positioning buildings of different types along a central ‘street’, which felt almost like a processional way, culminating in a taller but elegant apartment block.

The independent panel working under Dr Prosser’s guidance was a citizen jury, which made the final assessment, drawing on comments and suggestions from Civic Society members and the public. The panel comprised: Ben Crystall, East Herts District councillor for Hertford Bengoe; Karen Elmes, a built environment engagement specialist; Hilary Laidler, former Deputy Head at Cheshunt School; and Ian Nash, journalist and media consultant.

As well as making extensive site visits, the panel considered blog contributions to the website of Hertford Civic Society. Two sites favoured in the blog as first-choice options, reflected those of the panel: the relatively large, recently-completed Ridgeway housing and Ware Park Mill House (with its accompanying new houses).

Commendations for four other varied sites

Malcolm Ramsay, chair of Hertford Civic Society, was rapporteur for Dr Prosser and the panel, summarising their key observations. He noted:

“From an eclectic mixture of building types, four other sites deserved a commendation. These included, first, **Ware Park Mill House** (and, with it, two new houses nearby). Panel members appreciated the care taken over the Mill House and its surrounds - including the interpretive panel, for the benefit of people walking past on a footpath.



“However, some concerns were expressed over a large garage apparently under construction for one of the two new houses (the other has applied for permission for a carport). There was already a major cutting disfiguring the slope behind the intended garage. Nonetheless, the whole set of buildings looked delightful, particularly as seen from the popular towpath on the other side of the Lea. This had been a complex project, long in duration, where, for the Mill House, the architects were Kirby Cove, while other design and development were by Design Three Seven Ltd.



“The houses and flats in Tudor Way, Hutton Close and Welwyn Road were also commendable. Like the Ridgeway, they were planned and built by Network Homes, a large-scale provider of social housing. They helped to define and enhance the ‘centre’ of the Sele area. In particular, the curve of the Hutton Close housing was admired, while even the front of the building facing on to Welwyn Road had been well designed, with some landscaping/greenery.

“The conversion of **Media House** (Ware Road) into housing was also commended. While this was a fine renovation, slight doubts were expressed about the colour of the window frames: now grey/blue rather than the white of the Crittall windows as originally installed (and the comparable adjacent building has white window frames). A question was also raised as to whether more in the way of greenery/trees could have been planted in front of Media House.



Finally, the **Great Northern Works** were sufficiently honest and thoughtfully designed (architects: The Kevin Hinds Practice), within the constraints of a tricky site, to be commendable. This industrial set of buildings has transformed a site that was previously a wilderness, if not an eyesore. The scheme had been conceived by adjacent Ekins Builders Ltd, who unsurprisingly did the construction work themselves.”

New buildings in Hertford: final reflections

The panel noted that there had been plenty of new buildings to review, since the last Awards process in 2016. They included several substantial sets of buildings, some but not all of which had made it through the 'longlist' of 20 sites, to reach the final shortlist of 10 sites.

The 2020 process had placed a strong emphasis on the visual impact of the new buildings, not least on their surrounds. Perhaps inevitably, many of the buildings tended towards pastiche. More modern design was the exception rather than the rule.

The quality of this new construction varied. One group of buildings, not in the final shortlist, was much more poorly completed than the rest: the houses and flats bounded by Claud Hamilton Way, Mill Road and Mead Lane. The overall design of this set of buildings was not at fault, but at least 17 decorative panels have fallen off, leaving behind squiggly smears of whatever bonding agent was used, rather sparingly. These artificial stone panels vary in size, but are typically around a metre wide and 40 cm high; they would seriously harm anyone on whom they might fall. Additionally, there are signs of rot above at least two of the entrances. Tellingly, at this site, the houses have clearly been more carefully and expensively constructed than the apartments: a clear contrast with the new housing at the Ridgeway where, as noted above, the same good finishing standards are apparent for both houses and flats.

FINAL SHORTLIST (THE TOP TEN SITES)

- Edward House & Isabella Houses, Pegs Lane. SG13 8FQ
- Refurbishment of the White Horse, and new houses behind, Hertingfordbury. SG14 2LB
- Seven dwellings at 3 to 9 St John's Street. SG14 1RX
- Houses and flats at The Ridgeway, Sele Farm. SG14 2FQ
- Refurbishment of Mill House, and new houses, at Ware Park Mill. SG12 0EA
- Houses and flats in Tudor Way, Hutton Close and Welwyn Road, Sele Farm. SG14 2DN
- Conversion of Media House, Ware Road into apartments. SG13 7AB
- Business units at Great Northern Works, Hartham Lane. SG14 1QW
- Conversion of tower building at Hertford Brewery into seven apartments. SG14 1QN
- Comprehensive improvements to The Ridgeway Park. SG14 2JE

THE OTHER TEN SITES LONGLISTED BUT EXCLUDED FROM FINAL SHORTLIST

- Mutiny Close, off Ware Road. SG13 7AS
- Carriage Court complex, North Road. SG14 1LN
- Houses and flats in Claud Hamilton Way, Mill Road and Mead Lane. SG14 1SR
- Houses in the grounds of The Cedars, Bengoe Street/Duncombe Road. SG14 3ES
- Two houses at 52 Bullocks Lane. SG13 8BT
- Station Gate: Willmott Court & 93-97 Railway Street; Barker Court, Mill Road. SG14 1RP
- Flats over 10 Maidenhead Street. SG14 1DR
- 17 Ware Road: change from offices to residential, and refurbishment. SG13 7DZ
- Four dwellings at 62-68 St Andrew Street. SG14 1LT
- Maidenhead Street, Bull Plain and Salisbury Square: repaving, gates, etc. SG14 1DR

Malcolm Ramsay, Ian Nash

SCENES OF HERTFORD DURING THE PANDEMIC



We have needed to learn more self-control and to accept more detailed control by others



Exercise equipment is out of bounds

RECENT TALKS TO MEMBERS

Updating Pevsner's guides to the architecture of England

"Few counties are as interesting as Hertfordshire." This is praise indeed, coming from Nikolaus Pevsner, definitive authority since the mid-C20th on the merits of British architecture. He was author of 32 county guides to the buildings of England, published between 1951 (Cornwall) and 1974 (Staffordshire).

When it comes to the standard for authoritative guidebooks, Pevsner is to architecture what George Bradshaw is to railway timetables and Karl Baedeker to tourism. And as with train times and travel, buildings change and guides must be revised if they are to stay relevant.

An overview of many such essential changes in Hertfordshire was outlined by James Bettley, architectural historian and the new Pevsner, in a talk via Zoom to the November 2020 meeting of Hertfordshire Civic Society. His revised edition of *Hertfordshire (Pevsner Architectural Guide)*, was published last year.

In the first Hertfordshire edition, the seventh in the series, Pevsner noted the wealth of buildings in one of England's smallest counties, on London's doorstep. Ranging from the remains of the Roman city of Verulamium to the medieval abbey at St. Albans and the C17th Hatfield House, the richness and variety included many timber-framed and Georgian buildings in small towns, often preserved as part of the Garden City development.

And yet, Bettley pointed out, there were significant omissions. Despite the best efforts of Pevsner's researchers, he had a formidable challenge to visit every significant building. "It's easy to miss a place altogether," Bettley said. Wilstone Tring village, for example. "There is a church worth including and houses one would not want to lose." There was no mention either of Hexton village, on the north border of the county "... good of its kind with distinctive estate housing and fine gates to Hexton Manor".

There were further omissions around Hertford that revealed the constant need for a fresh eye, said Bettley. Mayflower Place by Charles Harrison Townsend was a good example. And the influence of the Cowper family can be seen at Birch Green - where they provided the primary school, decent estate cottages and the War Memorial. Roxford house was not in the first edition but included in the second by Bridget Cherry, first editor to cast a fresh eye in the 1970s.

Bettley suggested some omissions may have resulted from the sheer pace Pevsner set himself when making visits while working under guidance of research assistants. "His record was 19 parishes in one day in Warwickshire...19 churches and, perhaps, 40 other buildings."

Then there was the question of "revived" and new buildings - places Pevsner could have included. For example, the neglected Scott's Grotto in Ware had been derided for years until it was revived in the 1990s. Likewise the Gazebos on the River Lea at Ware. Cherry had mentioned Berkhamsted Town Hall as dilapidated in 1977. "It has now been nicely restored," said Bettley.

Often new discoveries relating to a building's surroundings and wider developments may call for a fuller reference. "Haileybury had a separate entry in previous editions. It is now very much expanded to take in new discoveries such as the Humphrey Repton landscape." Also, redrawn county borders and parish boundaries create new names, such as Hertford Heath. And, in some cases, buildings were relocated. The prime example in the county is Temple Bar, which was dismantled brick-by-brick from Theobalds Park and returned to London in Paternoster Square, St Paul's.

Reuse is a theme running through Bettley's edition of *Hertfordshire (Pevsner Architectural Guide)*, most typically where large estate houses are converted into apartments and flats. There was very often an interim stage. For example, Goldings first became a Barnardo's home, Balls Park was a teacher training college and the old workhouses in Bishops Stortford continued life as a

hospital. The Royal Masonic school, Bushey, was an enormous house requiring much work. In 1998 the buildings were rented out to the United States International University (Europe) until 2009 when Comer Homes redeveloped the site as Royal Connaught Park, with apartments and houses.

In his talk to the Hertford Civic Society, Bettley stressed his desire not to lose the tone and feel of the first guides and so kept original descriptions by Pevsner in footnotes.

He concluded his talk by describing his favourite structure. "In Hertfordshire, nothing has given me more pleasure than something that is not strictly a building but a maintained structure and that is the New River. It winds gently through the county and the loveliest spots. It crops up in unexpected places and is still doing the job it was designed to do 400 years ago," namely, to supply London with fresh water.

Bettley shares Pevsner's enthusiasm for the county, with its pretty villages set in rolling farmland, its church towers crowned with spires known as Hertfordshire spikes, and its commuter suburbs that are rich in housing styles from homely Arts and Crafts to radical Modernism. With expanded entries and new colour photography, this book is an essential work of reference for visitors and residents alike.

Ian Nash

A WIDER VIEW

Reforming the Planning System: The Government's White Paper

The White Paper proposes some very far-reaching changes without going into much detail about how they would work. As a result it has had a critical reception from local authorities, environmental groups, and professional bodies.

What is wrong with the present system?

Few would disagree that the present system for producing Local Plans is complicated, slow and difficult for people to engage with. During the long gestation period of a Plan there is no

certainty for landowners, developers or the public about what will be permitted. Even when there is an adopted Plan, as in East Herts, planning applications can take many months to deal with because the Plan doesn't set out design requirements in detail and leaves a great deal to the discretion of the Council in considering the details of a scheme.

The Government propose to streamline the system, mainly in support of their commitment to get more homes built faster. No more than thirty months would be allowed for Councils to get a Local Plan in place (the current East Herts Plan took eight years). Forecasting and quantifying housing need typically takes months of modelling work for each Plan area, so the Government propose that instead there would be a new nationally-determined housing requirement for each local authority that the authority would have to deliver. The requirement would be arrived at by a standard method using affordability and the extent of existing urban areas as indicators of the quantity of development to be planned for.

Would the new system create housing where it is needed?

Many critics have argued that this proposal would take away the right of each community to decide how much new housing should be built in their area, but the reality is that Councils already have to follow Government rules and population projections in working that out. The real flaw in the proposed method, as we pointed out in the Society's response to the consultation on the White Paper, is in using affordability as an indicator. Hertfordshire is a county where property is very expensive, and using affordability as an indicator of where more houses should be built to bring prices down would mean allocating a great deal of new housing to Hertfordshire and similar areas in the South East. By contrast parts of Lancashire, where houses are much cheaper, would not be required to add to their housing stock because affordability there is not a problem. Hence countryside would be lost in the South East while derelict sites in the North West remained unused, and the economy of the South East would

continue to overheat while other areas stagnate. What happened to the Government's 'levelling up' agenda? However, following concerns within the Conservative Party, it now seems that this formula may be amended.

Would it be easier for the public to understand?

The White Paper also proposes that Local Plans would be simplified, to identify land under three categories:

- growth areas suitable for substantial development (where outline approval for types of development specified in the Plan would be automatic);
- renewal areas suitable for some development;
- protected areas where development is restricted.

General policies for development management (for example on noise, privacy, overshadowing, bin storage, room and garage sizes, charging points, water efficiency and broadband) would be set nationally, so Local Plans would be much shorter, and focused on site and area-specific requirements for proposed development. To give local residents a genuine say in the design of new development, a core set of standards and requirements would be set out in design codes produced with the involvement of the local community.

Would it be practicable?

The problem with these ideas is that they propose a simplistic solution to a complex set of problems. Clearly each of the three land categories would have to be divided and sub-divided in the Local Plans. Most built-up areas would be included in 'Renewal areas', but the type and scale of renewal envisaged would vary from street to street, so site-specific requirements, appropriate uses and design codes would have to be worked out in granular detail. For growth areas, where the allocation in the Local Plan of land for substantial schemes (such as urban extensions involving thousands of houses) would carry with it outline planning approval, detailed masterplanning of the kind now under way for the

Gilston Garden Town would have to be done before the Plan was adopted. The professional bodies have all made it clear that a Plan which included allocations with automatic outline permission could not possibly be completed within thirty months.

Would it give the public more control over development in their area?

The White Paper's reforms are intended to make the planning process more democratic by putting a new emphasis on public engagement at the plan-making stage. All the data and forecasts which planners rely on would be made openly available and digitally accessible; visualisations and other digital approaches would make it easier for people to understand what is being proposed; and people would be able to feed their views into the system through social networks and via their phones. But for the planning application stage the White Paper takes a different approach. It says "we will streamline the opportunity for consultation at the planning application stage, because this adds delay to the process and allows a small minority of voices, some from the local area and often some not, to shape outcomes". It also urges the delegation of planning decisions to officers where the principle of development has been established, on the grounds that detailed matters should be principally a matter for professional planning judgment. Where proposals come forward which comply with pre-established principles of what good design looks like (informed by community preferences), the Government's intention is to expedite development. They also propose to widen and change the nature of permitted development, "so that it enables popular and replicable forms of development to be approved easily and quickly, helping to support 'gentle intensification' of our towns and cities, but in accordance with important design principles. If these changes were brought in, the opportunity for amenity groups and ordinary members of the public to have any say about developments when they become firm proposals, rather than just future plans, would be severely restricted. Depending on how the phrase

'detailed matters' is interpreted, Councillors too may be precluded from undertaking rigorous scrutiny. Even worse, the White Paper suggests, as an incentive for faster decision-making, that when a Council fails to decide an application within the statutory time limits the fee paid by the applicant should automatically be refunded, and that some types of application should be deemed to have permission if there has not been a timely decision.

There is a great deal more in the White Paper, much of it rather technical, such as replacing the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations with a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy. You can read the whole document at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf

Peter Norman

Civic Voice is also critical of the White Paper - See [Civic_Voice_response_FINAL_1.pdf](#)

Civic Voice is also opposing Government plans to extend permitted development rights. Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice, said: "The danger with deregulation is that it can often lead to unscrupulous landowners and developers exploiting loopholes, as we have seen with previous widening of permitted development rights, which the Government's own commissioned report concluded that permitted development rights create "worse quality residential environments". A limited list of prior approval matters may not necessarily secure a high quality residential environment or vibrant, diverse, and planned centres. We are also extremely concerned that unlike some of the recent changes to permitted development rights, this consultation proposes that the new right would apply in conservation areas." See www.civicvoice.org.uk

On a more cheerful note...



Despite the pandemic, the Secret Society of Yarn Bombers was still able to decorate Hertford's post boxes to raise money for charity, while traffic and parking restrictions in Fore Street provided the Mudlarks charity with the opportunity to set up some new planters.



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