



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2021

Welcome to the Spring edition of our Newsletter.



Cherry blossom against dark clouds - good or bad omen?

The country has been through grim times during the Covid-19 pandemic. The successful start to the vaccine programme is a cause for optimism, but, just as the dark clouds threaten the cherry blossom on Folly Island, variants of the virus could endanger our efforts to open up society again, so it is yet not possible to make plans for activities in the future.

For the time being, our meetings will continue via Zoom, including the AGM (for both 2019 and 2020) on 21 April. AGM papers for 2019 were published in the Spring 2020 Newsletter, available on the website, Archive section. You will receive guidance via email on accessing this meeting, as with our previous talks recently. The papers for the meeting are contained in this Newsletter. As well as the usual reports, we are also proposing changes to the Society's Constitution,

as laid out in these papers, with explanations for the proposed changes.

We wish all our members well over the coming months - please take care and stay safe!

Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity No 266111

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PROGRAMME

As mentioned in the committee's report for 2020, we currently have a rolling programme of Zoom talks. Members are alerted through emails. The next two talks are:

- The rebuilding of Hartham Leisure Centre, on 21 April, by architect Martin Lindus. He will provide a general introduction to his plans and vision for the rebuilding of the leisure centre, and will then focus on sustainable construction - where he is aiming to attain the 'excellent' grade in the relevant building code (BREEAM).
- That event on 21 April will begin with our AGM, covering the last two years.
- The next talk, on 26 May, will be hosted by the team involved in the rebuilding of Hertford Theatre - including project manager Tamara Jarvis and Theatre Director Rhys Thomas. As well as a presentation by the Theatre team, there is plenty to discuss, including such issues as the different kinds of events for different audiences, old and young; and how people are to access the venue.

After those two talks, we will need to have fresh ideas for a range of circumstances. As ever, your ideas or suggestions are very welcome.

Malcolm Ramsay

PLANNING MATTERS

41 Fanshawe St

The appeal against the Council's refusal of two new houses in the rear garden has been dismissed. The Inspector largely agreed with our objection that two houses away from the street would have been contrary to the established pattern of building in this part of the conservation area, which is characterised by substantial houses with a street frontage on large, elongated plots. He also considered that the new houses would have had an overbearing effect on the houses in Wellington Street.

'Glamping' at Foxholes Farm

We have lodged a strong objection to this proposal to use about 1½ hectares of Green Belt land between Hertford and Hertford Heath as a 'glamping' site. The twelve 'glamping' pods or tents which would be positioned on the land would each contain a bath and food preparation area along with a flushing toilet, so they would not be insubstantial. The openness of the Green Belt would therefore be reduced, contrary to national policy and the District Plan. Although the application mentions the possibility of fishing in the small lake round which the 'glamping' units would sit, it is clear that they are not designed to be anglers' shelters but for short-term residential use akin to holiday cottages. Although it is claimed that individual pods and tents would be temporary or moveable, if permission were granted on this application it would authorise up to twelve to be stationed on the site at any time. The Green Belt around Hertford is fragile, and vulnerable to 'death by a thousand cuts'. There appear to be no very special circumstances to justify this proposed departure from policy.

Expo House, Mead Lane

Expo House is a two-storey office block in an industrial area. The applicants proposed to use their 'permitted development' rights to convert it into six flats. The proposed flats would have been single-aspect, with their only outlook over a service yard used by car repair firms. There would have been no balconies or outdoor amenity space and mechanical ventilation would have been needed because of the noise from adjacent businesses. We therefore objected, on the grounds that the flats would have provided a poor standard of accommodation, as well as resulting in the loss of employment floorspace.

Unfortunately, on these office-to-residential permitted development applications the Council can only consider certain limited aspects: transport and highways impacts, contamination, noise, flooding and natural light. We urged that approval should be withheld because (i) external

noise could be mitigated only by the unsatisfactory means of keeping windows shut and using mechanical ventilation, and (ii) pedestrian access to the block would be inconvenient and potentially hazardous. The application was refused on the grounds of insufficient natural daylight, and because the proposed blocking up of the rear windows to prevent noise would itself require planning permission, as the permitted development right only covers change of use.

Tamworth Road

The Council's Development Management Committee resolved to grant permission for the redevelopment of the Hertford Mill site at their February meeting. We had objected to this proposal for 49 dwellings, including 17 flats, on the grounds of lack of affordable housing, inadequate parking provision, and lack of balconies for the flats.

On parking the developer made a last-minute commitment to contribute £20,000 towards the setting up of a residents' parking zone on Tamworth Road; the new residents will not have access to tickets for the zone, so their vehicles will not add to the existing parking problems in the road. For affordable housing the Council's policy aspiration is for 40%. We urged that unless the full quota of affordable housing could be provided the application should be refused as contrary to District Plan policy. However, based on an independently validated viability appraisal the officers recommended - and Members accepted - a single 3 bedroomed house for affordable rent plus £350,000 towards affordable housing elsewhere in the District.

It is concerning that, contrary to formal Practice Guidance issued by the Government, East Herts does not normally make viability assessments publicly available. The reason for the publicity requirement is so that Councillors and the public can see, and possibly question, the assumptions built into the assessments. In this case, information made available only on the day of the meeting revealed that, although the officers' report described the existing buildings as beyond

their design life and unsuitable for long term employment uses, a relatively high existing use value for the site had been assumed - and this despite the fact that when the site was marketed no interest had been expressed in it for employment use. If the true (low) value of the land in its existing use had been built into the calculation, the viability assessment would have shown far more profit in the development scheme, to enable more affordable housing to be provided.

The permission will not be issued until a legal agreement has been completed. In addition to affordable housing and the residents' parking zone, it will provide for contributions by the developer to a variety of Council services, including a total of nearly £500,000 towards nursery, primary and secondary education, and £35,000 for medical (GP) services.

'Tree Heritage' site, North Road

In the last Newsletter we reported that in December permission was granted for five bungalows on this Green Belt site. There is now a fresh application, with three of the five dwellings now to have first-floor accommodation within the roof. In the meantime, the developer has appealed against the refusal of the original application for three houses and three bungalows. The objection which we submitted will be forwarded to the Inspector but, whatever the decision, the December permission will be unaffected.

15 West Street

Some revised plans have been submitted for this application, reported in the last Newsletter, which remains undecided. The revisions do not affect our earlier objection on grounds of impact on the conservation area and on the adjacent listed buildings. The proposed structure, located immediately adjacent to the line of listed buildings at the eastern entry to West Street, 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.

In any event the new building would require access from the Gates site which is currently subject to redevelopment, and in this respect the application is premature unless and until that redevelopment is approved.

Gates of Hertford site, Gascoyne Way

The current application for this site 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. Subject to a point about the opening hours of the commercial uses, we have supported the proposal. However, under the latest Use Classes Regulations, permission for commercial use (Class E) would allow not only offices but also a wide range of businesses including shops, cafés, restaurants, financial, professional and medical services, and sport and fitness centres. The Highway Authority (Herts CC) are adamant that access to and from the site from Gascoyne Way for the large number of vehicles which some of these uses would generate would be unsafe. The applicants have therefore amended the scheme, and are now proposing to restrict the commercial use to offices.

Dimsdale Yard, rear of Pizza Express, Fore Street

There is no objection in principle to this proposal to replace an existing dilapidated bin store with a combined bin store and live-work accommodation. However, the application site includes four existing parking spaces at present available to Pizza Express staff. Although all these spaces are to be retained, it is not clear whether it is proposed to make any available to occupants of the proposed live-work unit. In accordance with current parking standards one space should be provided, so we suggested that one of the four spaces should be reserved specifically for use by the occupants as a condition of planning consent.

In his delegated decision the Planning Officer noted our comments, but in view of the County Council's policy to encourage public transport, walking and cycling and reduce reliance on cars he

considered that in this town centre location a car free development with cycle provision is acceptable. That may be so, but not providing a parking space does not prevent future occupiers from choosing to own a car, and cannot guarantee that the development will remain 'car free'.

AGM PAPERS

Minutes of AGM 2018

The AGM was held on April 24, 2018 in the hall of the Church of the Immaculate Conception and St Joseph, St John's Street.

Apologies were received from Judith Fawcett, Peter Ruffles, Hilary and Tom Laidler.

The Committee's and Treasurer's Reports were received and accepted with no further questions. Malcolm Ramsay was unanimously re-elected as Chair. The members of the Committee were unanimously re-elected and Milena Nuti joined the Committee.

Report of the Committee for 2020

Pandemic rages

For Hertford Civic Society, as for individual members, 2020 was dominated by the Covid-19 crisis, at least from March onwards. In January 2020 we were still able to hold a face-to-face talk, open to the public, in the Roman Catholic church hall, on developing Hertford as a sustainable travel town. It was the first and last of its kind, for us, in 2020.

From March onwards, everything seemed to stop. The AGM was cancelled; the committee ceased to meet for several months, relying instead on email communication; the Newsletter was only issued in digital format. In the summer, when the first wave of the pandemic had ended, a breathing space was gained, and we started to get going again, though still only digitally, or very cautiously.

2020 wasn't all Covid-related for us. The committee has been strengthened by the arrival of two co-optees (Margaret Anthony and Anna Stanton), while Milena Nuti has taken on the role

of Vice Chair. She also has got us launched on Twitter, under the 'handle' @CivicHertford. Members with Twitter accounts may wish to follow us: we will then follow them back. The main aim is to publicise our activities, and share items of interest, including elements of our website.

Awards process 2020

Initial plans had been laid for this late in 2019, with Peter Norman compiling an unusually lengthy list for the period since the previous process, in 2016. Hertford has certainly witnessed a huge amount of building activity in the last few years.

The awards support team, which involved Milena Nuti and Malcolm Ramsay as well as Peter Norman, was determined to press ahead, even if everything had to be done on a socially-distanced basis. The team was also keen to innovate: in particular, to carry out the process on a more digital footing, with greater participation by the membership. This was all a learning process, carried out in a hurry: how long would we have before the dreaded second wave? We'll do it all a little more expertly next time round.

A full crew was mustered to do the judging: five volunteers and an independent Chair, Dr Lee Prosser (Buildings Curator, Historic Royal Palaces). The five judges were Councillor Ben Crystall, Karen Elmes, Celia Gould, Hilary Laidler and Ian Nash. Very sadly, Celia Gould died unexpectedly during the process (not from Covid). Mike Howarth took photos of all 20 sites on the 'longlist', put them on the website, and kept it up to date.

When the final shortlist was reviewed, a clear winner emerged: the Ridgeway social housing project, as created by Network Homes. Some of us went on a visit to the housing scheme in 2019, when it was on the point of completion: the care with which it had been designed was very apparent. Network Homes was also the winner in the 2016 awards process, for Calton Court, likewise in Sele. To top those successes, Network Homes secured another award in 2020: a commendation, for 35 affordable homes at Tudor

Way and Welwyn Road, again in Sele Farm, and adjacent to Calton Court.

Three other buildings, all very contrasting, also secured commendations in 2020. These were:

- Ware Park Mill House (visible across the Lea from Hertford-Ware towpath)
- Media House, Ware Road (former Mercury offices - near Madford Retail Park)
- Great Northern Works (opposite Hertford Brewery)

Two of those three sites, the Mill House and Media House, were also highly rated by various bloggers. The awards panel was aware of this, though it's fair to say that its members went through a thorough collective process, in two stages, with socially-distanced meetings held in the garden of Hilary Laidler, before arriving at their final unanimous conclusions.

The new Aldi supermarket, on the A414, was insufficiently complete to be included in the 2020 awards process - and its roadside landscaping still needs to be done.

Zoom talks launched

As the second pandemic wave/lockdown loomed, Hertford Civic Society initiated Zoom talks. We aimed for a monthly sequence across at least the winter of 2020-21. Terry Betts signed up as Zoom-master (additional support by Mike Howarth). Our first such event, in November 2019, was one originally scheduled as a talk in our usual church hall: 'Revising Pevsner's Hertfordshire', by James Bettley. In December, Helen Gibson gave us her history of the New River, and over the first three months of 2021 we had talks on the White Paper on planning; on 'Hertford and slavery'; and on 'Hertford's nearest nature reserves'.

All of these online events had plenty of participants: if anything, more people took part than at the church hall events. Typically, 60 households, or perhaps 90 people, enjoyed these events. In time of pandemic there really is

enhanced interest in the only kind of event that is still possible.

Bircherley Green and other key planning events

Finally, the hole in the heart of Hertford is starting to look less forlorn. At a crucial meeting, held on Zoom in June, of East Herts Council's Development Management Committee, our representative (Peter Norman), was able to speak to Councillors about the Bircherley Green development. We deplored the fact that the developer was unwilling to make any contribution to towards infrastructure, or provide any affordable housing. Several Councillors expressed the same view. Planning permission was granted, but the legal agreement which accompanies it does include a provision that the viability of the scheme be re-assessed post-completion, and for contributions to be made depending on its profitability. By the end of the year, demolition of most of the remaining Bircherley Green buildings (not the car park) was getting under way. The new development is likely to be called Leaside Wharf.

The Corn Exchange has continued to be of concern to the Society. However, in March, East Herts Council formally designated the Corn Exchange as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), in response to an application made by the Society in 2019. ACV status can be factor when deciding whether to grant planning permission for a change of use, so this should help ensure the building remains available as a music venue. There have in the past been indications of an interest in converting the building into apartments.

At the edge of the town centre, plans for the rebuilding of Hartham Leisure Centre were also approved in 2020. Interestingly, the EHC planning committee actually rejected the designs first proposed by EHC, as being very unlovely, and distinctly unsustainable. A fresh commission has gone to more promising architects (Saunders Boston).

Even more remarkably and expensively, plans for the rebuilding of Hertford Theatre were still being

taken forward during 2020, though planning permission was not given until March 2021.

With a new leisure centre, a new town centre development and probably a new theatre all on their way, Hertford is potentially doing well, is it not?

Finally, still on the subject of our planning activities, a wide range of other actions has been carried out. During the year, 15 representations were made to East Herts Council about planning applications. On a wider canvass, responses were submitted to two government consultations: first on proposed new rights which would allow almost any commercial premises to be converted to residential without needing planning permission; and secondly on a proposed root and branch reform of the planning system. [Update: preparation of a response to the County Council's consultation Growth and Transport Plan for East Herts, on which we started work in 2020, was completed in March 2021.]

Malcolm Ramsay, on behalf of the Committee

Treasurer's report for 2020

Subscription income from members reduced by 3%. Several other changes reflected in the accounts are caused by the impact of the pandemic and lockdown. The coach trip was cancelled and no garden party arranged. Deposit account interest rates fell. Our expenses reduced since most newsletters were emailed, and not printed or posted, and members' meetings previously held in the RC church hall were later replaced by very popular remote Zoom meetings.

We ran the Awards process more economically in 2020 than last in 2016, with most of the 2020 cost being for making the commemorative plaques. The exceptional anticipated cost of repairing the fountain now seems very likely to have been contained to the levels reported, at least in the short term. Although at the time of writing in mid-March 2021 it is not yet operating normally, it has been briefly tested and found satisfactory.

John Bevan

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2020

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
<u>Income</u>		
Subscriptions and Donations	1,723	1,777
Surplus or (Deficit) on Social		
Coach Visit		(25)
Garden Party	-	315 290

Sale of Publications	3	-
Interest on Deposit Account	185	553
Recovery of Gift Aid Tax	225	525
	-----	-----
	2,136	3,145
<u>Less Society Expenses</u>		
Newsletter	267	540
General Meetings & Lectures	98	245
Public Liability Insurance	359	359
Maintenance of Society	-	-
Depreciation of Society	133	133
Other Expenses	51	288
Subscriptions and Donations	501	454
Civic Awards	388	-
Civic Activities		
Salisbury Square Fountain	620	1,839
Town Centre Meeting	-	154
	-----	-----
	2,417	4,012
	-----	-----
Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	(281)	(867)
	=====	=====

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2020

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
SOCIETY EQUIPMENT,		
At cost	1,397	1,397
Less Depreciation	1,364	1,231
	----- 33	----- 166
CURRENT ASSETS		
Sundry Debtors & Prepayments	938	574
Cash at Bank, in Charities Deposit Fund and in Hand	88,478	88,712
	----- 89,416	----- 89,286
Less CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Sundry Creditors	994	716
	----- 88,422	----- 88,570
NET ASSETS	----- 88,455	----- 88,736
	=====	=====
ACCUMULATED FUND		
Balance as at 1st January 2019	88,736	89,603
Less Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	(281)	(867)
MEMBERS' FUNDS, as above	----- 88,455	----- 88,736
	=====	=====

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

I have examined the books and vouchers of HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY and, with the information and explanations received, report that the Balance Sheet and annexed Income and Expenditure Account accord therewith.

T.A.Busby

Election of Officers

The following are standing for election:

Chair: *Malcolm Ramsay* - Involved in Civic Society since 1980s. Organised Sustrans study for local cycle routes in 1990s. Has particular interests in transport and architecture. Events organiser since 2011; Chair since 2018 and charity trustee. Facilitated awards process in 2020. Professionally, Malcolm has research skills: with Sue Jones, interviewed stall holders in 2018, and compiled a report for members and East Herts Council.

Vice-Chair: *Milena Nuti* - Acting Vice Chair; member of Hertford Civic Society since September 2019; background in policy development relating to Education and Planning; former local councillor (London Borough of Camden); academic and editor by professional training; Chair of Governors of local Hertford primary school.

Honorary Treasurer: *John Bevan* - Treasurer for 3 years, charity trustee, member for longer than he can remember. Retired, used to work freelance in security and computing. Interests include recreational walking and cycling, nature, climate change, politics, France, architecture.

Committee Members:

Margaret Anthony - Margaret Anthony is a teacher and lives on the edge of Hertford. She is interested in shaping the town and is involved in the newly-formed design codes group of Hertford Civic Society.

Terry Betts - Long term member of Society and Committee. Former Treasurer and Immediate Past Chairman, Charity Trustee.

Hilary Durbin - Long term member of Hertford Civic Society. Employed in NHS - now retired and maintain contact with NHS as a member of my GP surgery Patient Participation Group. Particularly interested in safety of pedestrians - actively campaigning with others to get 3 pedestrian crossings installed in Hertford. Campaigned to retain the Hertford to Stevenage Rail link and would like to see better bus services. Chair of Lower Bengeo Residents Assn. Support protection of the environment both locally and nationally.

Michael Howarth - Joined the Society in 2018. Principal interests: the built environment, geography and nature from a career in education broadcasting; video, stills, online media and website promotion for the society.

Sue Jones - Former secondary school teacher and freelance journalist specialising in adult and further education. Newsletter editor.

Peter Norman - Moved to Hertford from Putney in 1984. Joined the Society in the 'nineties and the committee in 2012, following retirement. Worked in town and country planning for 44 years, the last 25 of them as an Inspector.

Andrew Sangster - Member since the foundation of the society; past Secretary and Chairman, current member of the Committee. Principal interest: All planning matters. Other involvement: Hertford Heritage Trail and Green Fingers Report.

Anna Stanton - Although a relative newcomer, I have keen shared interests in keeping Hertford a desirable town to live in. My profession as an architectural interior designer for over 25 years, and a University lecturer, fuels my principal interests in architecture, sustainability and the environment.

Richard Threlfall - Founder member, Architect - retired, involved with Salisbury Square fountain since the competition, spokesman for Panshanger Park, family nearby in Hertford.

Changes to our Constitution

Why is the committee recommending updates to the Society's long standing 1972 constitution?

The updates are to give a fuller picture of the Society's activities and responsibilities, to ensure that our present modus operandi is fully compliant with the constitution, and to make other detailed corrections. The updates are:

1. To facilitate possible future grant applications, and to comply fully with Charity Commission requirements.

2. To present a fuller picture of the Society's activities, by expanding the Objects accordingly.
3. To record the Society's current responsibility for the Salisbury Square fountain - added to the Objects.
4. To state how trustees, as required by the Charity Commission, are appointed.
5. To remove reference to the old position of Secretary. The 1972 constitution required the Society to have a Secretary, yet there has not been one for over 10 years. The Society ought to do what the constitution requires. The communications role of Secretary is performed now by several committee and other members, in an efficient way more relevant in an electronic age.
6. To replace the word "district" which since 1972 has taken on a new meaning as a council area.
7. To replace the word "audit" by the term "independently reviewed". An audit must be carried out by a professionally qualified auditor. We are too small for the Audit Commission to require such an audit.
8. To remove subscription rates which are stated elsewhere i.e. on the membership application form. So should rates be changed in future the constitution would not also need to be changed.
9. To remove reference to a Minister of Education and Science with duties which used to extend to charities.
10. To no longer require that nominations for officer and committee members must always be in writing.
11. To ensure the words "shall" and "should" are used carefully, with the former stating what the Society must do.
12. To retain useful flexibility in the way the Society may be run or operated, provided it is within the terms of the constitution. So we may

choose to have a Newsletter editor, say, or usually to nominate officers in writing in advance of an AGM, without stating so in the constitution.

The resultant changes are highlighted in red. Taken together they are relatively small in scope, leaving the constitution largely unchanged. As the Audit Commission had accepted our old constitution, we hope that with the changes recommended here it will be accepted by the Charity Commission, following its hoped-for approval by members.

John Bevan, Treasurer

Constitution as adopted and amended at the Annual General Meeting 25th April 1972 and ...

NAME: The name of the Society shall be the Hertford Civic Society.

OBJECTS: The objects of the Society shall be to promote and encourage the following objects by charitable means but not otherwise:

- (a) To encourage high standards of architecture and town planning and promote principles of good design (including sustainability) in and around Hertford;
- (b) To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the town, its natural environment, its amenities, and its surroundings;
- (c) To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity, infrastructure including transport, or historic interest;
- (d) To pursue these ends and enable civic participation by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures and promotion of schemes of a charitable nature;
- (e) To own, operate, and maintain the Salisbury Square fountain until such time as another suitable organisation takes over these duties.

MEMBERSHIP: Membership shall be open to all who are interested in the aims of the Society. Membership shall lapse if the subscription is unpaid six months after it is due. Firms and companies in professions, trade or commerce may be admitted as corporate Members.

Organisations concerned with the protection of amenities, Residents' Associations and similar bodies may be admitted as Affiliated Members.

Every member shall be entitled to one vote at a General Meeting: a person voting on behalf of a Corporate or Affiliated member must first be authorised in writing to do so. Individuals who are members of organisations affiliated members may attend at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: The subscriptions **should be published in the Membership Application form and shall be approved at a General Meeting.**

Subscriptions shall be payable on joining and on each 1st January thereafter.

MEETINGS: An Annual General Meeting shall be held in or about **March** of each year to receive the Executive Committee's report and **independently reviewed** accounts and to elect officers and members of the Committee, and 14 days notice of such meetings shall be given. The Committee shall decide when ordinary meetings of the Society shall be held and shall give at least 7 days notice of such meetings to all members. Special General Meetings of the Society shall be held at the written request of 25 or more members. Fourteen days notice of such meetings shall be given to members accompanied by a brief statement of its purpose. The accidental omission to give notice of a meeting or the non-receipt of notice of a meeting by any person entitled to receive notice shall not invalidate the proceedings of that meeting. Twenty members personally present shall constitute a quorum for a meeting of the Society. If a quorum is not present at any meeting of the Society or the Executive Committee that meeting shall be adjourned to such place and time within one calendar month as the Chairman of that meeting shall decide and the members

present at such adjourned meeting shall constitute a quorum.

OFFICERS: Nominations for the election of officers shall be made seven days before the Annual General Meeting. Such nominations shall be **in writing**-supported by a seconder and the consent of the proposed nominee must first have been obtained **in writing**. The election of officers shall be completed prior to the election of further Committee members. The officers of the Society shall consist of:

Chair**man**

Vice Chair**man**

Honorary Secretary

Honorary Treasurer

All of whom shall relinquish their office every year and shall be eligible for re-election at the Annual General Meeting. The office of Chair**man** shall not be held for more than 3 consecutive years unless at a meeting in the fourth or any succeeding year the Chair**man** is re-elected by a two-thirds majority of members present. A President and Vice Presidents may also be elected at a General Meeting of the Society, for periods to be decided at such a meeting.

COMMITTEE: The Executive Committee shall consist of the Officers and not more than 16 further members. The Executive Committee shall have power to fill vacancies in the Committee and in the Officers. The Committee shall have the power to co-opt further members (who shall attend in an advisory and non-voting capacity). The President and Vice Presidents may attend meetings of the Executive Committee but may not vote at such meetings. The members of the Executive Committee shall relinquish their office every year and shall be eligible for re-election at the Annual General Meeting. Nominations for election to the Executive Committee shall be made at or before the Annual General Meeting. They must be **in writing**, supported by a seconder and the consent of the nominee must first have been obtained **in writing**. If the nominations

exceed the number of vacancies, the matter shall be put to the vote at the Annual General Meeting. The Executive Committee shall be responsible for running the affairs of the Society, and may take decisions on its behalf. A quorum for meetings of the Executive Committee shall consist of 5 members.

TRUSTEES: The Executive Committee shall appoint three members of the Society, normally including the Chair and Hon Treasurer, to act as Trustees to be held responsible for all actions of the Society by the Charity Commission.

APPEALS: The Executive Committee shall have power to make appeals, solicit donations and canvass monies for carrying out the objects of the Society.

EXPENSES OF ADMINISTRATION: The Executive Committee shall have power to make appeals, solicit donations and canvass monies for carrying out the objects of the Society.

INVESTMENT: All monies at any time belonging to the Society and not required for immediate application for its objectives shall be invested by the Executive Committee upon such investments, securities or property as it may think fit, but so that monies subject or representing property subject to the jurisdiction of the Charity Commissioners ~~ers or the Minister of Education and Science~~ shall only be invested in such securities as may for the time being be prescribed by law.

BORROWING: The Executive Committee may borrow for the objects of the Society such monies at such rate of interest and in such manner as it may think fit, subject to the approval of a General Meeting of the Society.

AMENDMENTS: The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority of members present at any meeting provided that 14 days notice of the proposed amendment has been sent to all members, and providing that nothing herein contained shall authorise any amendment permitting the expenditure of funds of the Society on any object which is not charitable in object.

WINDING UP: In the event of the winding up of the Society the available funds of the Society shall be transferred to such one or more charitable bodies having objects similar or reasonably similar to those herein before declared as may be chosen by the Executive Committee and approved by the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales.

PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

Planning White Paper: What is at stake?

The Government's latest planning White Paper has too many uncertainties and dubious proposals that fail to guarantee high standards of housing and must be challenged at every stage, according to Richard Bullen, Chair of CPRE Hertfordshire.

His concerns, outlined in a talk to the January Zoom meeting of Hertford Civic Society, include proposed cuts in public consultation, inadequate design codes to limit unacceptable, poor criteria governing the provision of affordable housing and potential erosion of greenfield protection planning.

Already, he insisted, the Covid-19 pandemic meant the paper was potentially out of date. Before the pandemic, the focus was on living in the town centres. But since then, attitudes have changed towards living in rural areas, he said. "It is not clear how rural areas will be protected. There is also lack of clarity on issues such as what the nature of planning permission is."

Opportunities for consultation and appeals are to be reduced by the Government in order to speed-up planning. However, there were big contradictions in insisting there will be consultation while expecting opponents to get in with their objections before such plans are published or even knowing what good design means, he argued.

Capacity for local authorities to object to unreasonable planning demands had already been

curtailed, he said. Cuts to the size and staffing of local authority planning departments over the past ten years had reduced skills and resources available for planning oversight and for challenging developers legally.

Design codes would ensure high development standards, the White Paper argues. While most large cities including Manchester, Bristol and Nottingham have Design Codes that builders and developers should adhere to, he said, beyond this, there were serious problems. For example, audits showed developers of greenfield sites falling short, with many not interested in effective development. "It is imperative that good design codes are in place before anything is done or you won't get good development. We have to make sure our authorities have them and are using them...or we will get slums frankly."

The Government says there will be a "Government default" design code for those who fail to produce their own. "But this will not work," Richard Bullen insisted. "We know the code for Nottingham will not be the same as for East Herts."

On sustainable development, the duty to co-operate (across LA boundaries) will be abolished. "Why?" he asked. "It's fundamental to good planning." He is concerned that with slimmed down planning rushed through, democratic consultation will not be fully operative. "We need to know that the community element will be carried out."

Housing criteria, on which plans would be approved, were also questionable since the Government is insisting on using the 2014 data on housing need, rather than the more up-to-date 2018 figures. This means reduced demand will not show up and could be ignored. "So, it will be a hard task to explain to inspectors and we will finish up with more houses than we need."

He is also concerned that issues identified in previous detailed studies of planning needs have been disregarded. For example, the Letwin Review of 2018 showed how developers, intent on high-as-possible profits, slowed down building

programmes, after planning was agreed, so that the prices would not be compromised by existing buildings in the area. Affordability also became an issue with the uplift of land values over that time.

Moreover, with the relaxation of greenfield development there was a continuing need to take account of climate change, he said. "Some 850 hectares of greenspace absorbs 400 tonnes of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases a year. So, we are lobbying for this; they must not get away with it."

Another area of contention, undermining conservation and other protected areas, is over permitted rights development, where people will have the right to erect two additional floors to their property whether detached or semi-detached. Also, if any property, retail or otherwise, remains empty for six months it can be developed and something else put in its place. "That means closed shops would go for good."

The weakness of local authorities opposing developers was revealed in the issue of affordable housing. One developer argued its criteria showed a limit of 40%. The LA using the same criteria showed a far higher proportion was viable, but, unable to afford a legal challenge, failed to oppose it. In the end, just six out of 80 (7.5%) came in the affordable category.

He was concerned that, generally, "standards here are much lower than anywhere else in Europe. The Parker-Morris standards were stopped by Margaret Thatcher, so dwellings can be very small indeed."

(See also Civic Voice report p16)

Ian Nash

The New River and Hugh Myddleton

The New River just east of Hertford is much-loved by the ramblers and health-walk groups. From the Gauge House at its start, off the River Lea, to the strangely incongruous castle in Stoke Newington, its 42 miles offer a remarkable range of attractive landscapes, nature reserves and occasional historical buildings. But the most significant feature is the river itself, as Helen Gibson from East Herts Archaeological Society described in a talk to Hertford Civic Society.

“In fact, it is not a river but an artificial water course to take fresh water to London in the time of Queen Elizabeth I. An Act of Parliament passed in 1602 provided the legislation, a year before the Queen died,” she said.

It began a period of extraordinarily inventive engineering financed by Hugh Myddleton, vehement opposition from landowners - weakened by the sanction of King James I, who took a 50% share in the enterprise - and the creation of a watercourse that prefigured the explosion of canals across Britain.

“The New River had to flow gently, without rushing, making it level at a 100-foot or 30-metre contour all the way to London, dropping no more than five inches every mile. Although it was originally 42 miles, it was about 20 miles as the crow flies.”

Myddleton himself was an intriguing character; a Welsh-born goldsmith and banker, his thinking about the need for a fresh water supply developed while working as a goldsmith in London’s Cheapside where haphazard supplies cost 2p a can from a nearby conduit, or could be delivered by the barrel, having been pumped up from the Thames. He financed the mining of so much

gold for the Royal Mint, he was made a baronet; he was also appointed Royal Jeweller to King James I.

People took some convincing about the idea of water on tap. “They were very disquieted by the idea of water coming straight to the house,” Helen Gibson said. Despite this, landowner resistance to allowing the New River to cross their property, reluctance to permit the extraction of water from the River Lea and the complex engineering and surveying challenges, the entire water course was constructed within the decade. “They got it going by 1612 - an absolute miracle.” Abundant water to the home was paid for by annual subscription and the New River has remained a major supplier of water to London for 400 years.

The River Lea had been used for centuries to power flour mills and transport goods, so levels of water had to be maintained through close monitoring of extraction rates. Two gauge houses were constructed on the Lea near the start of the New River to regulate extraction and flow. Quality control was also the by-word from the start; there was a house every mile with a man keeping an eye on the River to keep clean water going and deter vandalism.

By late 1600s it was a money-making enterprise, though the Royals saw none of it. James died long before then and his son Charles had sold the shares back. But the Royal patronage had boosted the impetus for a considerable public good.

Helen Gibson’s talk highlighted the importance of contributions of notable families including the Abel Smiths and the key contributions of others, including Captain Edmund Colthurst who instigated the scheme

and surveyed the route from Chadwell Spring to London by 1602. Her presentation made it clear that, while Myddleton was the visionary and main financier, the achievement was a collective effort.

Once the river was operational, it still required new visionaries to sustain and improve performance. For example, at the finishing point - the Round Pond in Islington - engineers needed to raise the water level in the reservoir in order to maintain the flow. They achieved this with a horse engine. “But it was not successful until Bolton and Watt came along with their improvement - the double-acting rotative engine.” And as was the style of the age, the engine was disguised by building a castle round it. “That castle can still be seen today, as a climbing centre and café for kids.” Also, while signs of the New River and its reservoir may have been built over and much of it lost to view in London, the man has left his mark and name in Clerkenwell, with places including Myddleton Square and Myddleton Passage.

Words and pictures by Ian Nash



By the C18, a channel had been cut back into the River Lea to supplement the supply from Chadwell Spring. A controlled amount of water was allowed through the Marble Gauge. The picture on the left shows the view upstream along this channel.

On the right, we can see the much larger mid-C19 Gauge House built directly on the bank of the Lea Navigation.

Further information at [New River \(London\) - Wikipedia](#) and various internet sites for information on walks and places to visit along the route.

A WIDER VIEW The Planning White Paper

Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice, said: "Whilst we warmly welcome the National Model Design Code and its aims for good community engagement within the local design code/guide process, we are more concerned with the wider reforms to community participation in the planning system. We know that civic societies add value to the planning process. Civic societies still remain the best route into the planning process for serious community involvement and engagement - and that role needs to be recognised somewhere."

In particular, widening permitted development rights will weaken the ability of local authorities to take a planned approach to town centre development. Community involvement in working up Local Design Codes is welcome, but local communities should not be excluded from commenting on individual planning applications once a Design Code has been adopted. "The Planning Bill is expected to come before Parliament this autumn. The planning system as we know it is changing, we must make the case and show the role that civic societies and community groups can play in a modern planning system," Ian Harvey said.

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