



# NEWSLETTER

## *Spring 2020*

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Newsletter and our best wishes to you all in the Covid-19 crisis.

Because of the current lockdown, we are now communicating with our members electronically, although we intend to return the Newsletter to print form as soon as possible for those who prefer it. You can keep up to date with any new information we may have via our website [www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)

We will not be able to hold our AGM until restrictions are lifted, at a time yet to be determined. This newsletter contains the AGM papers, so please find a way to keep them safe. Although we will not be conducting votes at the moment, any questions or concerns should be raised with the Chair or Treasurer, as appropriate. Contact details for them, and all members of the Committee, are on pp6-7.

The world-wide outbreak of the new Covid-19 coronavirus will have profound consequences. There will certainly be an economic depression, though how deep it will be and how long it will last cannot yet be predicted. This will have serious effects on all communities in terms of public services, housing construction, town centre trade, environment and transport policy. The reports in this Newsletter tell you how Hertford Civic Society has been engaging with these issues for our community up to the time of the outbreak, but we do not yet know how they will develop in the future.

We do know, however, that town centre trade was already weak nation-wide and that the pandemic will have serious consequences for Hertford's shops, markets and the Bircherley Green development. Although there are some signs that parts of the construction industry may be going back to work, we do not know how severe the financial situation is likely to be for such mixed housing/retail/public service developments as the one planned here. The Aldi supermarket, currently under construction, will probably also be affected, at least for a time. Our smaller shops, restaurants and pubs, some established in Hertford for many years, are likely to suffer in the short term and some may not survive.

Local councils will be under severe financial pressure and so services could be significantly reduced, perhaps even in the long term. Schools, social service facilities, libraries, museums, leisure centres and the theatre are closed for an indeterminate time and other services will be affected. You can keep up to date by going to [www.eastherts.gov.uk/](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/) and [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/).

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**A Wider View**

For the national picture of how local civic societies are being affected by the Covid-19 outbreak, go to [www.civicvoice.org.uk](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk)

*Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity No 266111*

**PROGRAMME SUSPENDED**

This is a sad saga, though it will not be unexpected.

In the face of the Covid-19 virus, we had to cancel the talk arranged for March 2020, on the potential ‘Green Corridor’ for wildlife to the west of Hertford. The PowerPoint presentation has been placed on our website. Perhaps we can re-schedule the talk. The PowerPoint presentation may be updated.

**All further events**, we know need to be cancelled or postponed, starting with the AGM and the ensuing talk about plans for Hertford Theatre, as scheduled for 29th April. At least, for the AGM element, the Accounts and Treasurer’s and Committee’s reports are available and members can always put questions to the Treasurer and Chair by email. The talk about the Theatre was meant to enable members both to learn about the potential plans and to give feedback to the speakers. Those plans probably continue to progress, and we will hope for a new opportunity to hear from the Theatre and its staff.

**The outing (20th May) to Flag Fen and Huntingdon** - it too has to be stopped, though it was clearly a popular option, and we will probably want to re-run it next year (virus permitting). Whether even the October and November talks will take place as scheduled, it is too soon to say. We will do our best to update you in good time.

**Ideas for our online future?** Many groups are getting mobilised for an online world. We should not remain in a cultural desert, without our talks, or Hertford Theatre itself. Perhaps some of you will have fresh ideas and more time and energy for things that we can do that are ‘civic’ but do not involve gatherings of people. Maybe on-line activities, or perhaps things altogether different, like making sure that members or others are doing OK? The spirit of the late Mrs. Melville comes to mind: a woman who, well into her eighties, was delivering ‘Meals on Wheels’, to people sometimes much younger than she was. An example worth remembering?

Malcolm Ramsay

**PLANNING MATTERS**

**The Gasworks site, Marshgate Drive**

As you may have seen in the *Mercury*, this scheme for 29 houses and 346 apartments, a gymnasium and 2,200 square metres of employment floorspace, to which we objected, has been allowed on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate.

### **Tamworth Road**

A proposal for 11 houses and eight 4-storey blocks of flats was submitted 14 months ago. Following a very large number of cogent objections, including that from the Society, some rather marginal amendments were made in September. In April the developers announced that they intend to submit an application for an entirely different scheme featuring a majority of three-storey townhouses.

### **Sites allocated for Housing in the District Plan**

We previously made representations about three applications. Those for Thieves Lane and the former Bengeo Nursery site have now been approved, but that for Archers Spring on the Welwyn Road remains outstanding.

### **The Corn Exchange**

Following an approach from the proprietors of the Corn Exchange for help in ensuring that the building remains available as a music venue, we offered to work with them to get the building designated as an 'Asset of Community Value'. 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. We are pleased to say that the District Council have now formally designated the Exchange as an Asset of Community Value. We have been informed that the building is to be sold, though at the time of writing it is not clear whether it is the freehold or a leasehold interest which is for sale, and there is no evidence that the building is yet on the open market. There have been indications in the past of an interest in converting the building into apartments; should such a proposal arise in the future ACV status will strengthen the Council's hand in resisting it.

### **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 now wish to pursue a modified proposal, and as part of the process they have to seek planning permission (from themselves!). Accordingly, an application has been made, but it 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 soon 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 submitted. Since then no such assessment or any additional information has been published, and the application remains undetermined.

### **The Duncombe Arms, Railway Street**

An application was made for various changes at the Duncombe Arms. We made no comment, but it was refused mainly because the Council were concerned that neighbouring flats would be affected by noise from drinkers in the refurbished rear garden area. The plan for the refused application had shown a number of independent planters on the edge of the pub's front forecourt, so we were alarmed when a timber stockade made of rough-hewn planks was built there. We wrote to the Council urging them to do what they could to save Railway Street from a structure so totally inappropriate for a conservation area in the centre of a historic town, and were pleased when a revised application was submitted not showing the recently-erected stockade. However, the application documents do not explicitly say that the 'stockade' fence is to be removed, so we have suggested a condition to require its removal.

### **41 Fanshawe Street**

We objected to an application for two new houses in the rear garden. This part of the conservation area is characterised by substantial houses with a

street frontage on large, elongated plots. The proposal, for two smaller houses away from the street, is therefore out of character and contrary to the established pattern of building in the vicinity. The new houses would encroach on the area of green space between Fanshawe Street and Wellington Street, and if this proposal were granted permission there are likely to be further applications for similar development in the long gardens extending down the slope from Fanshawe Street. This application has now been refused.

### **17 Highfield Road**

We objected to an application for a detached house in the garden of No.17, which is a wooded garden significantly contributing to the appearance and feeling of the conservation area. 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 impact of this development would be felt in Morgans Road, where the houses are set back in deep front gardens and form a relatively consistent building line. The proposed house would break this line standing out like a sore thumb just at the most sensitive point. This application has since been refused.

### **Bramfield Road**

For some time we have been concerned about the land occupied by Goldings Estate Rare Breeds Farm Ltd at the corner of North Road and Bramfield Road. The appearance presented to Bramfield Road is one of total mess, in sharp contrast to the public cemetery opposite; there are various buildings, some presumably used to house farm animals. However, there was no planning application, and it was difficult to find out what was going on. There was then a proposal to erect two large barns to house livestock, feed and machinery much further from the road, in the Goldings parkland. The Council issued a refusal notice on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence that the land was used for an

agricultural business (rather than a hobby). That decision is welcome, because the barns would have been prominent and unsightly in the parkland landscape, but what now needs to be addressed are the unapproved buildings, and the other activities and general mess along Bramfield Road.

### **Castle Grounds**

The Town Council have recently consulted on a 'Greenspace Action Plan' for the Castle Grounds. Among the points made in our response were that the Ashley Webb Shelter, the future of which is in doubt, should be preserved; the building should ideally be renovated and re-purposed, for instance as a café or as a bandstand (for lunchtime concerts, etc). The play area is an important resource in the grounds and should be moved as soon as possible to reduce the health risk from pollution and noise and to make it more central in the Castle Grounds. Anti-social behaviour is best reduced by encouraging more visitors to the Castle Gardens, increasing visibility by keeping hedges at a level for sight lines and reducing 'hidden places'. The bridge by the Motte should be made accessible to those with mobility needs as a priority.

We expressed regret that there is no clear proposal for how the American Garden should function following the planned expansion of the theatre, or how the garden/fish pass/theatre and American Garden should be integrated. It is important that people should feel they are being visually invited into the Castle Grounds from The Wash. Conceivably the American Garden should actually be more of a 'civic square', with some trees/greenery. We also regretted that the plan makes no mention of toilets or cycle racks. We would like to see covered cycle racks and comfortable, clean and upgraded toilet facilities.

### **Bircherley Green**

This is a summary of the comments made to the Council. A full version is on the Society's website.

In terms of the character of Hertford, improving the waterside and making it more attractive and

usable is a key objective of the Urban Design Strategy. The scheme now proposed would fail to achieve the objective of re-focussing development at Bircherley Green towards the river and providing usable public open space.

The development is to be laid out in two blocks, with the ground floors designated for commercial use and a GP surgery, and residential use on the floors above. The Urban Design Strategy says that Block A (to the west and close to Listed building Lombard House) should be no more than 3-4 storeys and Block B (to the east) 4-5 storeys: however, both are shown as 5 storeys. More serious is the fact that in the current proposal Building A is much closer to the river than in the Wrenbridge scheme, so that there is no usable public open space on the riverside. For these reasons Building A should be set back further from the river.

Moreover, the design does not allow adequate space for deliveries. While the hotel (fronting onto Railway St) has a service yard to the rear, which could also service Block B, Block A is to be serviced from Market St and Railway St via the pedestrian areas. While this might be managed safely through delivery time restrictions, the plans also show a vehicular access along the whole river frontage from the bus station to Block A. Though it may be necessary to allow for emergency vehicles to use the riverside, there is no hope of creating an attractive waterside public space, with outdoor seating and permanent landscaping, if the riverside is designated as a service road.

Landscaping is to be reserved, but the submitted plans strongly suggest that it not would be possible to devise an appropriate landscaping scheme. The Council should not leave the question of landscaping to be resolved later unless they can be sure that, given the proposed layout of buildings and spaces, it would be possible to implement satisfactory landscaping.

The multi-storey car park will have to serve residents, hotel guests and staff, shoppers and users of the planned NHS facilities. While it is true that car use should be discouraged and that there is also a bus station beside the development and further parking at Gascoyne Way, this situation will be difficult to manage. The substantial new health facility is bound to create a demand for client parking immediately adjacent to it. As a minimum there needs to be a designated drop-off point where less able-bodied patients arriving by taxi or in friends' cars can be set down.

It seems clear that to include the provision of affordable housing would render the scheme unviable, and we reluctantly conclude that the omission of such housing will have to be accepted.

Although the current application is better in some ways than the scheme previously approved - notably in the provision of canopies to shelter shoppers - it falls seriously short of what is needed to regenerate the heart of Hertford. But we have to recognise that, on a site where one developer has already walked away because they could not be confident of an acceptable return, the scope for the Council to negotiate significant changes is very limited.

If the present application is granted subject to modifications which would make it less viable, or if it is refused, there is a real danger that the opportunity to create a much-needed medical facility will be lost, and that the site will lie idle for the foreseeable future. Such an outcome would have catastrophic consequences for the town. Therefore, whilst we hope that some at least of our criticisms can be addressed, we do not ask that the application be refused.

Peter Norman

*Members will be updated via the website and/or email if changes are made to the application.*

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**HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY AWARDS 2020**

We still hope to run this Hertford Civic Society Awards scheme. Of course, health issues may force its postponement or modification. Equally, with the internet much more important, this could provide fresh opportunities for involving members, while observing health protocols.

The aim is to review recent schemes with a significant visible impact on Hertford. There are some rules: developments must have been completed since 2016 (the last round of awards); fall within the boundaries of Hertford Town Council; and be mostly visible from the public domain. Aside from this, new or refurbished buildings, and new or renewed open spaces (including public gardens), are eligible.

Below is the initial 'long list'. We welcome views on their suitability for the final 'short list' and would still be glad to receive any further suggestions. Please submit comments/suggestions by email to Malcolm Ramsay [malcolm.ramsay789@btinternet.com](mailto:malcolm.ramsay789@btinternet.com) as soon as possible.

The awards will be judged by an independent panel led by Dr Lee Prosser, Buildings Curator, Historic Royal Palaces. To join the panel, please email Malcolm to express your interest. You don't have to be an 'expert'. The commitment is two to three meetings/online discussions; plus your willingness individually (in the summer) to view the external appearance of sites included in the final 'short list'.

**Civic Society Awards 2020: Draft 'long list'**

Edward House & Isabella House, Pegs Lane (by police station)  
White Horse, Hertingfordbury  
Mutiny Close, off Ware Road  
Houses and flats in Claud Hamilton Way, Mill Road & Mead Lane  
Houses and flats at The Ridgeway, Sele Farm  
Former Waters Garage site  
Refurbishment of the Mill House, and new houses, at Ware Park Mill  
Station Gate, comprising Barker Court in Mill Road, Willmott Court in Railway Street, and 93 to 97 Railway Street  
Houses and flats in Tudor Way and Hutton Close, Sele Farm  
Houses in the grounds of The Cedars, Bengeo Street/Duncombe Road  
Two houses at 52 Bullocks Lane  
Seven dwellings on land adjacent to 1 St John's Street  
Flats over 10 Maidenhead Street  
Conversion of Media House, Ware Road into apartments  
17 Ware Road: change from offices to residential, and refurbishment  
Four dwellings at 62-68 St Andrew Street  
Business units at Great Northern Works, Hartham Lane

Conversion of the tower building at Hertford Brewery into seven apartments Maidenhead Street, Bull Plain and Salisbury Square: repaving, gates, etc  
Comprehensive improvements to The Ridgeway Park

Peter Norman, Milena Nuti and Malcolm Ramsay

### DO YOU TWITTER?

Many older members are, in fact, 'plugged in and switched on' to home computing for many aspects of life: banking, shopping and family links. Will you sign up to Twitter and 'Follow' official local authority and councillor Tweets about local events and issues?

We think Twitter can be useful to join these online conversations for a 'presence', to advertise events, and to drive links to our website for more detail. Please try out Twitter and explore the potential for our Society. Please let us know how you got on with this and other online software, such as Zoom video conferencing and Skype, by reporting back using our Blog and Comment features.

The committee is exploring a range of ways to communicate with members, attract new, younger participants and also broadcast HCS work to councillors and planning staff. There is a real need for continued public involvement in planning issues.

A reminder that members can still write to us by posting a conventional letter. It is cheaper to copy and paste long detailed text into the Contact Us section on the website. The Blog is an opportunity to share only short summaries of information and opinion. *Maximum text 5,000 characters.*

Short emails to all members will still come from Terry Betts, drawing attention to the website where updates and new information are now being added weekly. Watch the website!

Mike Howarth, web administrator

### AGM PAPERS

#### Minutes of Previous AGM held on April 24, 2019

The reports of the Committee and Treasurer were received nem con and there were no further questions. The Chairman, Treasurer and Committee were re-elected and Milena Nuti joined the Committee.

#### Report of the Committee for 2019

Hertford Civic Society, its members and committee, had a busy and fruitful year in 2019. Two well-attended public meetings were organised: one on the County Council's 'A414 Corridor Strategy' in January, and the other on

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Bircherley Green in October (in partnership with another local group, 'We Are Hertford'). Our higher profile generated more visits to our website: these peaked at around 1,000 for the earlier event, and 780 for the latter. As noted by the Treasurer elsewhere in this Newsletter, there was also an increase in the number of people joining the Society.

We faced some challenging issues, including the need to question the plans of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) for a bypass; the need to develop better public transport including an east-west tramway; and the need to play our part in fostering a new town centre development for Hertford, at Bircherley Green. There were also plenty of other planning issues in the town where we tried hard to make a difference.

**Bypass and tramway** - We have already reported on the public meeting in January 2019 at which some 200 people expressed mostly strong opposition to the County Council's plans for a Hertford bypass (see Newsletter, Spring 2019). A similar response was apparent in the County's on-line consultation on its A414 Strategy, while it also received critical feedback from both Hertford Town Council and East Herts Council. In response, HCC paused for several months to develop fresh plans. Only in October 2019 did it articulate its new vision, which featured enhanced public transport as its leading component. By then, HCC had also joined many other local authorities in formally recognising the importance of addressing climate change. By the end of the year HCC had commissioned consultants to advise on options for improved public transport across the County. HCC may not have entirely given up on the concept of a Hertford bypass, but at present it is certainly putting fresh effort into assessing alternative options to car use for east-west journeys, including 'guided busways' and a tramway.

Hertford Civic Society has supported the concept of a tramway across the county, believing this to be both the most popular option in terms of better public transport and also a very sound one

environmentally. As reported previously, we endorsed the proposal by Reg Harman, one of our members as well as a public transport expert, for 'Herts Orbital Tramway', or HOT. In 2019, two members of the committee (Mike Howarth and John Bevan) worked with Reg Harman to produce an eight-minute video about the tramway. This was placed on our website (it's still on the home page), and has also been shown in various local cinemas during 2019.

While Hertfordshire's transport issues are complicated, we have certainly helped to provide fresh thought for HCC, by way of 'critical friendship'. The Society was formally thanked by HCC at the start of the meeting in October 2019 at which Councillors adopted their revised transport strategy.

**Bircherley Green and Hertford town centre** - Throughout 2019, Bircherley Green has resembled a bomb site, complete with half-demolished buildings. The original owners of Bircherley Green (the Diageo pension fund) pulled out, leaving others the problem of what to do next. Would anyone buy the site? What could be done with it? We couldn't purchase the place, but we did invite our members to spell out their views as to what could be done: over 30 sent in detailed suggestions to Terry Betts, who was our main conduit to members throughout the year. Terry also continued as our link with Bircherley Green's new set of developers, Chase Homes, who became the fresh owners of the site during 2019.

Chase Homes have kept as closely in touch with the Civic Society as anyone could expect. We sent their project manager (Alan Ward) our members' views as to what could be done with Bircherley Green, for which he was grateful. He also turned up to listen to what everyone had to say when, in October 2019, we organised a lively public meeting about the town centre (in partnership with We Are Hertford). This wasn't quite such a massive event as the January meeting: in October, we squeezed into the familiar church hall, whereas in January we had filled the larger Roman



Catholic church itself. There were other issues which surfaced at the October meeting besides Bircherley Green. These included the news that the plans of East Herts Council for a major rebuild of Hertford Theatre (on which we had submitted comments) had increased very substantially in cost, and also the worsening shortage of NHS GP surgeries in Hertford. On this latter point, we have advocated the inclusion of a large surgery in any redevelopment of Bircherley Green, and the plans which Chase Homes lodged with East Herts Council in December 2019 did indeed feature a good-sized NHS surgery as well as shops, homes and other facilities. Chase Homes hope to start actual building work during 2020.

Confluence, our fountain in Salisbury Square, remains an on-going responsibility. It had to be turned off in November 2019, when it started to leak severely. We hope to commission repair work in the spring of 2020. Should there be any kind donors out there (or people willing to remember the Civic Society and our fountain in their wills), we would be very grateful indeed.

**Other issues and activities** - The Society had a well-attended programme of events in 2019. There was a splendid summer party on the lower slopes of Port Hill, courtesy of the Chaplin and Melville families; and an outing to Essex (Templar barns, Coggeshall and Bardfield winery). As well as the two public meetings, there were also talks on the Cowpers at the Hertford castle (by Clare Gittings) and on modern architecture in this area (by Andrew Goodman). At the AGM, led by a panel of speakers, we had a lively discussion about good/bad change in Hertford in recent years. Finally, some of us enjoyed a visit organised by Network Homes to the new social housing on The Ridgeway at Sele Farm. Accounts of these events can be found in various Newsletters.

The Committee remains in need of one or two enthusiastic recruits. Of course, it would be great if anyone with experience of planning issues could help to shoulder the burden currently carried by Peter Norman and others. Also, someone with

organisational and IT skills would be appreciated - as would anyone who feels able to take on some or all of the responsibility for events, still being done by your Chair. At our talks in 2019, we benefitted from help with IT by Paul Wernick, as well as committee member Mike Howarth.

Malcolm Ramsay, on behalf of the Committee

### **Treasurer's Report 2019**

#### ***Decline in Membership Subscriptions halted*** -

Although £50 of the year-on-year £83 increase is explained by donations made by those attending the public meeting organised jointly with the We Are Hertford (WAH) group, there was also a small £33 increase in subs paid. This is due to those joining the Society at meetings, especially the well-attended "A414 Corridor Strategy - a new bypass for Hertford?" one in January, as well as to the membership administrator's considerable effort made to remind members who pay by cash and cheque to renew their membership. Paying subs by Standing Order is more convenient and efficient for both members and the administrator. It takes a 61p second class stamp (65p soon) on a letter to remind a member to pay a sub which can be as low as £5 pa.

**Anniversary Garden Party** - Many came to this very popular event.

**Fountain expenses** - The big increase is due to a large bill for fresh water caused by a leak undetected for many weeks, costing the Society around £350, as well as the estimated cost of £500 for repairs to be carried out in 2020. This year end liability is shown in Creditors. The fountain will be restarted after the repair has been completed.

**Town Centre meeting** - the Civic Society supported the separate WAH group by paying for the publicity leaflet and hall hire for the October meeting which WAH and the Society organised. Those attending the meeting donated some £50 in cash placed in a bucket by the door. (cont. p11)

**HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY**

**INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2019**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
<b><u>Income</u></b>		
Subscriptions and Donations	1,777	1,694
Surplus or (Deficit) on Social Activities		
Coach Visit	( 25 )	18
Garden Party	315	143
	-----	-----
Interest on Deposit Account	553	402
Recovery of Gift Aid Tax	525	363
	-----	-----
	3,145	2,620
<b><u>Less Society Expenses</u></b>		
Newsletter	540	391
General Meetings & Lectures	245	82
Public Liability Insurance	359	342
Maintenance of Society Equipment	-	-
Depreciation of Society Equipment	133	133
Other Expenses	288	197
Subscriptions and Donations	454	520
Civic Activities		
Salisbury Square Fountain	1,839	1,022
Town Centre Meeting	154	
Donation to St Leonard's Church	-	500
	-----	-----
	4,012	3,187
	-----	-----
<b>Surplus (Deficit) for the Year</b>	<b>( 867 )</b>	<b>( 567 )</b>
	=====	=====

**HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY**

**BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2019**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
<b>SOCIETY EQUIPMENT,</b>		
At cost	1,397	1,397
Less Depreciation	1,231	1,098
	----- 166	----- 299
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Sundry Debtors & Prepayments	574	134
Cash at Bank, in Charities Deposit Fund and in Hand	88,712	89,442
	----- 89,286	----- 89,576
<b>Less CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Sundry Creditors	716	272
	----- 88,570	----- 89,304
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	88,736	89,603
	=====	=====
<b>ACCUMULATED FUND</b>		
Balance as at 1st January 2019	89,603	90,170
Less Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	( 867 )	( 567 )
	----- 88,736	----- 89,603
<b>MEMBERS' FUNDS, as above</b>	88,736	89,603
	=====	=====

**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

*(Treasurer's Report cont.) -*

**Other year-on-year changes** - Most are due either to timing issues (e.g. payment for printing some Newsletters, and making a Gift Aid claim in 2020) or to matters already discussed.

John Bevan, Treasurer

### St Leonard's Church Bengoe

In 2018, your Society gave a donation of £500 towards the cost of building the new annex housing wheelchair accessible toilet facilities at St Leonard's Church Bengoe.

The date of the completion of the church has been estimated as around 1120AD making this church Hertford's oldest surviving building! It is an unusual example of an Early Norman building: particular features include its semi-circular apse; a two-dimensional carving of a mysterious face on the west facing wall of the chancel arch and an incised sundial on the south facing wall next to the ancient interior door.

The building was used as the Parish Church for Bengoe until the mid C19th. On the completion of the new, much larger church, Holy Trinity, the old church was abandoned and fell into a serious state of disrepair.

Fortunately, towards the end of the C19th, a restoration project was set up and completed and the building was used for occasional services throughout the C20th.

The Friends of St Leonard's group was inaugurated in September 1984. Its members were keen that the church should be more widely used and appreciated. Concerts, exhibitions, displays, group visits etc. were set up. However, the ancient church lacked toilets: this became a problem for the organisers and the members of the general public who came to the events. It was obvious that the church needed an extension.

Planning permission for the construction of a small annex to the church was granted in 2010 after a

great deal of painstaking administrative work and fundraising. Work started in the autumn of 2018.

The official opening of the extension took place on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Many of our donors were present, including your own Malcolm Ramsay and Clare Gittings. It was truly a "Gala Night" for Bengoe: there was an excellent buffet; an amusing speech by our vicar, the Rev Robert Thompson, and an "Official Opening Ceremony" undertaken by Mrs Sylvia Norman. (Over the years, Sylvia has put in sterling work to raise money for the upkeep of both of our churches in Bengoe.) She was delighted to declare the annex "Open!"

as she cut through a fanciful garland of Loo Roll paper rather than a customary strip of ribbon! (see pic) There was much laughter and optimism among us all as we witnessed the start of a new phase of the life in the old church.

Since the "Grand Opening" of the toilet facilities, committee members of FOSL have organised a number of new events, including a cream tea for over 50 guests, a very popular local history exhibition, three well attended concerts and active learning sessions for over 100

school children.

The annex was designed by David Kirby and was built by Datum Contracts and Construction Management. Here in the parish of Bengoe everyone is very pleased with the outcome.

Thank you for supporting our project!

Gill Cordingley: Friends of St Leonards committee member

