



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2014

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Newsletter.

Hertford town centre is facing radical change. Many of you will have been following the proposals for re-development in the local press and will have visited the exhibition mounted by the developers. These could have very significant consequences for Hertford's commercial future and for the nature of our historic town centre.

Some of you responded to our request for comments on the plans by email, which was very helpful to the Committee in formulating a response to the developers, Wrenbridge. This electronic survey proved to be a quick, convenient and effective way of canvassing members' opinions, so if you would like to make sure that we have your email address on our database for future consultations, please contact Terry Betts or Annette Robinson. Details are on p6-7.

Public art can add not only to the quality of our built environment but also to our knowledge and understanding of the contribution important individuals have made in the past. The representation of Alfred Russel Wallace and the bird of paradise created for the wall of Hertford theatre by local artist Rodney Munday will remind us for years to come of his role in the development of scientific understanding and the theory of evolution as well as adding to the cultural attraction of this riverside area. See p2 for more information.

This summer has also seen the opportunity for social gatherings and expeditions and so we can also report on a fascinating trip to Faversham and a convivial garden party in a beautiful setting.



Hertford's current waterfront at Bircherley Green

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*Hertford Civic Society is a
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PROGRAMME

The first of our two autumn events is the film/lecture on the River Beane (on Wednesday 15 October). That leaves just one final item, which will provide another opportunity to reflect on the sculpture of Alfred Russel Wallace. Rodney Munday will be discussing not only his recent sculpture of Wallace but also his other works and the different ways in which they were commissioned and created.

Commemorating Alfred Russel Wallace: the value of public art commissions (lecture, Wednesday 19 November)

Local sculptor Rodney Munday, who has created the relief sculpture of Wallace on the exterior of Hertford Theatre, will be talking to us about different ways of commissioning the arts, and specifically about his own experiences of interacting with funders, sponsors and interested members of the public. This should be a good opportunity not only to hear what he has to say but also to see pictures of other sculptures made by him, which have been designed both for local and international settings.

Malcolm Ramsay

WALLACE RETURNS TO HERTFORD

Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) is returning to Hertford this October. The man who ‘discovered’ evolution alongside Charles Darwin was brought up and educated here. We are celebrating his links with Hertford and the centenary of his death through an exciting sculpture on an exterior wall of Hertford Theatre. We initiated a competitive process for sculptors in 2012, and held a public consultation in August 2013, after gaining financial support from East Herts Council and Hertford Town Council. It’s good to be able to say that East Herts Council, which owns the Theatre, has also provided practical assistance. We needed their help not least because we could not find any better site elsewhere in Hertford: we did look around quite carefully. It has all taken time, so we have now slipped beyond the centenary, but we are confident that we have a sculpture of which Hertford can be proud.

You will soon be able to judge this for yourself, as the unveiling is taking place on Saturday 18 October, at 15.15. This public event will feature not only the Wallace sculpture and its sculptor, Rodney Munday, but also Dr George Beccaloni of the Natural History Museum in London, the world’s greatest authority on Wallace, who will be making a brief speech.

By happy coincidence, Rodney Munday went to the same school as Wallace, Richard Hale. This may have helped to inspire Rodney Munday, when designing and making his Wallace sculpture. The school will be contributing a musical element to the unveiling, to help things go with a swing. The venue is the far-from-enormous patch of grass between the Theatre and the statue of Samuel Stone, so if you want to be standing close to the Theatre and the sculpture, make sure you get there in good time. We opted for quarter past three by way of start time as there is also another event starting inside the Theatre on the hour. We don't expect ours to last more than half an hour.

Malcolm Ramsay



Rodney Munday working on the Wallace sculpture in his studio

BIRCHERLEY GREEN RE-DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

As reported in the last Newsletter, Waitrose is coming to the end of its lease and is most unlikely to stay in its present site unless it has substantially more space, currently 16,000 sq ft. Achieving this expansion would mean a major rebuilding of the site. The developers, Wrenbridge, put their plans on display in the shopping centre for two days at the end of August and invited comments from the public.

They propose to build a 22,000 sq ft anchor food store with the remaining retail space re-configured into a smaller number of larger shops, which could possibly attract national chains, and a restaurant next to Lombard House. Above the shops and restaurant they intend to build 124 flats reaching up to four storeys, including the shops. There would be surface parking fronting onto the river and some underground parking, totalling 300 spaces, for shoppers and flat dwellers. In order to accommodate these changes, the bus station would be removed and buses would have to use other stops in the town, mostly in Fore Street.

An email survey among Society members produced a wide range of comments, both for and against. These will be available on the website, but this selection gives the flavour of the range of issues raised:

'There is no real reference to Hertford beyond the Centre. This is relying on 'trickle-down', i.e. because Hertford becomes such a dynamic retail centre, the present rash of empty shop units will suddenly fill up. I don't buy this.'

'The ailing County Town may have a future after all. The proposed regeneration could revive the fortune of day-time shopping to match the night time economy.'

'Additional accommodation will also reduce the need for encroachment into the Green Belt and a range of shops selling essentials like shoes,

reasonably priced clothes, books/records etc., as well as an anchor food store should form the bulk of the retail and not more restaurants.'

'I think the root of the matter is that this town centre site is just too constrained to accommodate a major supermarket with open, surface parking without taking away its town centre character altogether. It's not worth having another Brookfield Farm in the middle of Hertford just to try and keep Waitrose.'

'We think this is an excellent project and hope that it will be built.'

'Happy with the modern design and the mix of residential above with generous communal garden area, roofs could be "green roofs".'

'I would like to suggest a much needed facility would be a complex of apartments for older people - not necessarily warden controlled. (Other flats could be put in alongside) These units could then free up larger housing units for families in the town.'

'The number of flats results in the need for the main structure that bisects the site on the proposal - a cheerless, monolithic block of flats with little or no architectural charm - the sort of thing you see stalking a railway line in built-up areas.'

Bircherley Green



Current bus station and multi-storey car park



'It seems to me to be arrogant to suggest that a car park, dotted with a small grid of token trees represents an improved river frontage. Although not particularly attractive, the present riverside path is popular and peaceful, especially for lunchtime breaks.'

'...buses will be relocated to Fore Street and other areas. What does this mean for the buses and for other traffic that will encounter the number of buses, vehicular routes in and out of town, the evening taxi rank, short term 30-minute street parking in Fore Street which if lost will affect businesses in the town centre?'

We also received a long letter from Councillor Nik Wilson (Conservative, Kingsmead) which pointed out the difficulties likely to arise from moving the buses to Fore Street; in particular, traffic congestion and also problems for deliveries to the shops and restaurants, short term parking and taxi marshalling in the evenings. He sees the proposed redevelopment as a threat to the conservation area and its listed buildings and called for a concise plan to upgrade the town.

Based on comments from members and discussion in the Committee, the Society has made the following submission to Wrenbridge:

‘Further to the public exhibition of the proposals to redevelop the Bircherley Green shopping centre in Hertford, the Committee of the Civic Society has looked in some detail at the drawings. The Society since its inception has as one of its priorities sought the maintenance of the vigour and vitality of the town-centre. Thus we view with dismay the possibility of there not being a quality food supermarket in the main shopping area. Clearly the proposals put forward by Wrenbridge are for fundamental change and as such are attracting many public concerns. Our Committee thinks that the attached suggestions, if implemented, would help to address those concerns and we urge you to consider adopting them before submitting a planning application.

1. Building heights are excessive dominating the small scale surroundings, particularly the riverside building.
2. There is a need to respect the Conservation Area by providing greater variation in the elevations and the materials used. Balconies might be considered.
3. There appears to be no provision for accommodating Boots or a similar chemist’s chain.
4. It appears that there are no means of servicing the smaller shop units other than from the front. These are currently accessed from service yards.
5. Similarly there appears to be no access provided to the rear of the Museum.
6. Given that the surface car park will be located alongside a river frontage it is essential that means are found of making it more attractive and less intrusive, probably by the use of soft landscaping.
7. Access to the row of car parking bays immediately adjacent to the river appears to

interfere with pedestrian access and enjoyment of the riverside.

8. Temporary car parking arrangements during construction need to be identified. One possibility is the yet to be redeveloped site on Railway Street between St John’s Street and Hertford East station.
9. Alternative arrangements for accommodating buses need to be publicised before any planning application. A lay-by on Railway Street for buses only should be considered.
10. The apartments could be attractive for older people downsizing and still seeking independent living accommodation, but they would need to be sized and laid out accordingly.’



Buses will have to use Fore Street if the bus station is demolished

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OTHER PLANNING MATTERS

Flats in Mill Road:

This application, referred to in detail in the Summer Newsletter, has now been approved subject to the signing of certain legal Agreements. We had expressed concern about the relationship of some of the flats to the new link road which will serve the industrial units in Mead Lane, and the Council's own Environmental Health officers advised that permission for these apartments should be refused on grounds of noise and air quality, or that if permitted the windows should be fixed shut with mechanical ventilation. However the Planning Officers noted in their report that "the windows would be installed as openable, but will be supported by mechanical ventilation so that residents have a choice in terms of ventilation. This is considered to be a reasonable approach in this situation".

Artificial Turf Pitch, Richard Hale School:

Members living in the Queens Road area drew attention to what at first seemed an innocuous application for an all-weather pitch on part of the school's playing field. The problem is that the new pitch is to be floodlit, and will be available for use by a number of local sports groups throughout the evening and at weekends. Clearly the provision of more sports pitches is not something we would wish to oppose in principle, but at Richard Hale the proposed pitch would occupy about a third of a fairly small field with houses abutting the field on two sides. It was therefore particularly regrettable that the School Governors did not consult in detail with those likely to be affected before submitting their application. If such consultation had taken place, we believe that the scheme might have been modified in several ways to minimise its effects on the school's neighbours. As it is, noise and disturbance seems likely to be a significant problem, and the bunds proposed to mitigate the problem are unlikely to be effective. We therefore asked that the application in its present form be rejected.

New Primary School at Simon Balle:

The County Council have decided that some land at Simon Balle School is the only possible site for the new primary school which Hertford needs very soon and the application was approved, subject to conditions, on September 25th. We made a detailed submission highlighting several deficiencies in the Transport and Travel Assessments submitted with the application. In particular we opposed the idea of a mini-roundabout at the junction of Hagsdell Road and Mangrove Road. Inevitably the addition of a primary school to the Simon Balle site will have some impact on neighbours, and we

urged that a liaison mechanism be set up to enable the local community to bring concerns to the attention of the school for consideration.

Hertford Golf Course:

Permission for the development of a golf course on London Road between Hertford and Hertford Heath was granted many years ago. To date a greenkeeper's house and some rather grand entrance gates have been built, but no golf course. We were therefore concerned to see an application to revise the plans for the course which would involve bringing in substantial quantities of 'inert waste' (subsoil, rubble etc). The ostensible purpose would be to re-mould the topography so as to retain and conserve rainwater to be used to irrigate the course. The matter will be decided by the County Council, who of course are well aware of the problems which can arise when developments of this kind are begun in good faith but may be abandoned if financial and economic circumstances change.

There has been no clear explanation of why the water storage areas have to be engineered by building up the land rather than partially excavating it. The quantity and quality of the landfill will not be easy for the County Council or the Environment Agency to monitor, and even with controls on traffic routing (also difficult to enforce), the construction traffic generated would have an adverse effect on the Green Belt and the locality. Given that the site is in a vulnerable Green Belt location and having regard to the risks referred to, we suggested that this application ought to be treated as one for the construction of a golf course involving the importation of material as set out in the application, rather than an application simply to vary an existing permission.

85 Railway Street:

Yet another application for a block of flats on the corner of Railway Street and St John's Street has been submitted. Again a four-storey tower feature is proposed. We have repeated our criticism that the tower is one storey too high and would be too prominent in Railway Street. The development on this site should be limited to three storeys to protect the amenity of the adjacent houses in St John's Street and to limit the degree of overlooking that will be experienced. We also questioned the appropriateness of the retail unit which is included in the proposal. When demand for retail floorspace is so slack it would surely be wise to restrict the construction of new shops outside the town centre in order to concentrate demand within it.

Peter Norman

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CUTS TO BUS SUBSIDIES

Like many other local authorities, Hertfordshire County Council is proposing to cut subsidies to bus services at evenings and weekends. More information about the national situation can be found from the Campaign for Better Transport at www.bettertransport.org.uk. The Society made the following submission to HCC's consultation process, which is now closed:

'The council's stated aim is that of "providing the best value for taxpayers' money while meeting, as far as possible, the essential travel needs of Hertfordshire's residents". However what is proposed are cuts to save a specific sum in the coming year, by terminating many evening and Sunday bus services, without providing: an assessment of impact, rationale for which services are to be cut, or an evaluation of alternatives. Indeed it is apparent that a few subsidised services (see note 1) may be retained in the evening and on Sunday. The council has not given any evidence of carrying out a value for money analysis, or of ascertaining Herts residents' travel needs. We understand that similar cuts are in prospect in subsequent years.

The information provided in the consultation is in our opinion totally inadequate to justify the cuts proposed. We requested more information, but were told that nothing further was available to either councillors or to the public. Ticket sales are recorded by operators and should be analysed to better inform councillors and the public.

The council gives two inconsistent lists of services to be cut. For just Hertford services, the first list shows cuts to services 310 and 351. The second list shows neither 310 nor 351, but includes 390, not on the first list. So it is unclear which of these three services are to be cut. The council says that some evening services will be cut "after 6:30", without making it clear if a service which is timetabled to start before

this time, but end after it, is to be cut. Given that Hertford's rush hour with its attendant traffic congestion and pollution is not completely over by 6.30pm, it would make particularly good sense to postpone the bus curfew by at least half an hour (however it is to be implemented). This would allow more people the option of travelling home by bus as opposed to having to use cars at this busy time.

Many people use buses because they have no car, no access to a car, or cannot afford taxis. This includes the young, the old, and those on a low income. The impact of the cuts on these groups is not assessed. While all pensioners may receive free bus travel, that makes no difference to the difficulties they will experience from proposed reductions in their ability to travel locally.

Some services (see note 2) targeted by the cuts follow routes parts of which are also covered by trains, or by other unaffected bus services; others do not (see note 3). There is no rationale given, for the services to be cut, which refers to unaffected services.

We are concerned that cutting out subsidised evening services could make remaining services less attractive both to operate and to use, with net costs increasing, leading perhaps to further cuts.

Subsidies might be reduced if revenues could be increased, but no alternatives to cuts are mentioned in the consultation document. We believe that, before any cuts are made, possibilities which might reduce the overall level of subsidy required should be examined and a public report made.

Recommendations

Before cuts are made in the coming year, HCS strongly recommends 1) that a proper impact assessment be made, 2) that a clearer rationale for cuts be stated, 3) that alternatives to cutting services be fully explored and reported, and 4)

that consistent and clear information be provided on the proposed cuts to services. There is an even stronger argument to be made for doing this for subsequent years, when cuts may well be deeper, and for which there is more time available to do this work.

Notes

Note 1 e.g. subsidised 310 Hertford to Waltham Cross buses later in the evening may or may not be cut, depending on which of the two HCC lists correctly describes the proposed cuts.

Note 2 e.g. subsidised Hertford to Stevenage or to Ware buses follow routes parts of which are also covered by trains, or by other unaffected bus services e.g. 724.

Note 3 e.g. 331 Hertford to Royston service is the only public service link for many villages en route.'

John Bevan

VISIT TO FAVERSHAM

We began our visit with thorough and well-planned guided tours led by members of the Faversham Society. Despite some regrettable developments in the town centre, Faversham still has over 400 listed buildings so there are plenty of items of architectural interest, ranging from the Elizabethan grammar school to an Art Deco cinema.

It was once a significant wool exporting town, and although the creek has largely silted up, it still has boat repair yards. Part of the waterfront is accessible and a brick and timber warehouse has been converted into shops and cafés, making it a pleasant area to explore.

The brick-making industry no longer survives, but brewing, based on artesian wells 200 feet deep and the once extensive Kent hop fields, is still a major employer. The impressive Victorian brewery, now a supermarket, is in a similar style to that of our own McMullen's.

It once had an important explosives industry, which started in the C16. This dangerous and often fatal occupation has left its mark on the town; repeated explosions caused so much damage to the church tower that it was demolished and re-designed as an open-work stone structure that would allow the shockwaves to pass through, doing relatively little harm. The industry was finally closed down and moved to Scotland in the 1930s when it became clear that North Kent was now within easy range of German bombers.



The abbey was also lost to the town through war, although indirectly. King Stephen had imported the stone to build it from Normandy, but with the Dissolution of the Monasteries

Henry VIII ordered its demolition and much of the stone was taken back to the Continent to reinforce the defences of Calais, then an English stronghold, against France.

Faversham's prosperity declined with the silting up of the creek, and by the mid-C20 many of its fine buildings were in disrepair. The impetus for conservation began with a proposal to demolish a number of medieval houses in Abbey Street for re-development in the 1960s when it was regarded as a run-down and dangerous slum area. Now it is now an elegant, wide street (it once hosted medieval fairs) of beautifully preserved timber-framed and Georgian houses.



The local Civic Society was set up in 1962 as a result of this conservation campaign and has gone from strength to strength. It now has more than a thousand members and covers a wide range of activities which might elsewhere be undertaken by separate history and environmental societies, including running an education centre, a second-hand bookshop and preserved gunpowder mills, all through volunteers. More information at www.faversham.org/society/
Sue Jones

Converted brick and timber warehouse



Fun in Faversham

The Faversham trip was great fun, like every other coach trip I have done with the Civic Society. The company was good, and travel easy. Faversham itself is a gem of a small historic town - so much so that I had no time to sample more than a few of the local beers which Shepherd Neame produces there. The local equivalent of the civic society also run the museum, and organise guided tours. The trip cost £27, including our well guided tour of the historic town centre. Excellent value for money. I am left wondering why more members don't go on these trips!

John Bevan



Medieval house built into the remains of the abbey gateway

SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

We are very grateful to Linda and Jeremy Secker for providing such an interesting and beautiful setting for this year's garden party, held at Amores in Hertingfordbury.

Despite being surrounded by roads on all sides, this garden feels secluded and quiet, bounded as it is by high fences and tall trees. At one time it had an elaborate and detailed design typical of the C19 when gardening labour was cheaply available, but the present owners have simplified this into something more manageable. Nevertheless, it retains much variety and interest with its range of trees and other planting, shady paths, maze and a collection of historic moulded bricks and garden sculpture.

We were able to study an album of remarkable photographs, some dating back to the C19, showing how the Grade II* listed house has been used and changed. It is a timber-frame building from the C16 and although it has been altered many times, including the addition of a stair turret in the C17 and major alterations to the windows in Victorian times, it retains a wealth of detail from many periods. The present owner's family carried out a major restoration in the 1950s which revealed many remarkable features, including a brick Tudor fireplace bearing the name of the then owner, William North. More architectural details are available at www.english-heritage.org.uk.

Once again, Serendipity provided excellent catering and we enjoyed a musical interlude when cellist Oliver Gray played part of Hayden's Cello Concerto in C and Schumann's Adagio and Allegro, an uplifting complement to a summer evening in a beautiful garden.

Sue Jones

CIVIC VOICE UPDATE

It's political party annual conference season and Civic Voice is using the opportunity to put pressure on politicians to give people more say in local planning procedures by meeting MPs and running discussions and fringe events.

Freddie Gick, Chair of Civic Voice said "In attending the Party Conferences for the first time, Civic Voice will be pressing for radical changes to the processes by which local communities can contribute to local planning decisions. While Civic Society members across the country recognise the need for extra housing and have considerable experience to bring to bear, they are often faced with very limited opportunities to respond to consultations on unsustainable plans that are not right for their areas. We want to see a new approach in which local authorities are required to demonstrate that local planning decisions can be made only after it has been demonstrated that there has been active participation in the process by members of the local community. We look forward to an interesting debate on this and other issues."

Civic Voice is continuing its existing campaigns on the sale of assets of community value, saving our high streets, listing local buildings of historic interest and improving broadband infrastructure in ways that do not damage the streetscape.

They have also launched a new campaign to protect, repair and conserve First World War memorials.

For more information visit www.civicvoice.org.uk

To apply for or renew membership of Hertford Civic Society, please complete and send this form to:

Annette Robinson, 11 Norman Avenue, Bishop's Stortford, Herts, CM23 4HL. Tel. 01279 833242

Existing members need submit the form only if their details have changed, e.g. new address

Subscriptions, per annum, are as follows:

Full membership £9.00

Full joint membership at the same address £14.00

Full membership with concessions £5.00

Full joint membership with concessions at the same address £8.00

Joint membership (one full and one concession) at the same address £11.00

Corporate membership £20.00

Junior membership (under 18 years of age) £5.00

PART A MEMBERSHIP FORM

I/We wish to become/remain members of Hertford Civic Society and

(a) enclose a cheque for the sum of £_____being my/our subscription for 2014

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

FULL NAME(S) _____

CLASS OF MEMBERSHIP (please circle) FULL CONCESSION CORPORATE JUNIOR

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____ TELEPHONE _____

EMAIL _____

Your personal details will be held on a computer and used to help run the Society as a membership organisation, to include the collection of subscriptions and delivery of a newsletter. Your details will be kept secure, in compliance with data protection principles, and will not be given to third parties. The committee may write to or email you from time to time, with news of interest to members, to find out your views, or to ask for participation in Society activities. If you do not want your details to be held on computer, tell us, but be aware that it may then not be practical to provide you with full membership services.

PART B GIFT AID DECLARATION

NAME OF CHARITY - Hertford Civic Society. Registered charity No. 266111. I pay tax at the standard rate and wish the above named charity to treat as a Gift Aid donation all subscriptions I have paid since 6 April 2000 (if applicable) and all subsequent donations until further notice.

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____ SIGNED _____ DATE _____

PART C STANDING ORDER FORM

NAME OF YOUR BANK _____

BANK ADDRESS _____

SORT CODE _____ ACCOUNT NUMBER _____

Pay to the account of:

Hertford Civic Society at Barclays Bank, 12 Market Street, Hertford SG14 1BA; sort code 20-20-37; account no 40475807 on receipt of this order and on each 1 January thereafter, the sum of £_____

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____ SIGNED _____ DATE _____