



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2016

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Newsletter.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Hertford Civic Society will be held on Wednesday 20 April 2016 at 8.00pm in the Hall of the Church of the Immaculate Conception and St Joseph, St John's Street, Hertford.

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the AGM held on 15 April 2015
2. Report of the Committee for 2015
3. Hon Treasurer's Report and Accounts
4. Election of Officers
5. Election of Members of the Committee
6. Any other business

The current Officers and Committee are listed on p6-7 of this Newsletter. All retire annually. The Constitution provides for up to sixteen Committee members in addition to four Officers. Nominations for election of Officers and Members of the Committee should be made in writing to the Vice-Chairman, Malcolm Ramsay, supported by a seconder and with the written consent of the nominee. Nominations for election as an Officer must be made at least seven days before the AGM, but nominations for election of Members of the Committee will be accepted at the meeting. If you are attending the AGM, please bring this Newsletter, which contains the relevant papers.

Refreshments will be served after the business has been concluded, followed by John Bosworth's talk.

Membership subscriptions were due in January - thank you to those who have already paid. To take out or renew a subscription, or to establish a standing order, please contact Membership Secretary Annette Robinson - contact details p7.

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PROGRAMME

Hertford Conservation Area Appraisal. 20 April 2016

After the AGM business is concluded, John Bosworth, the conservation specialist working for East Herts Council, will talk about the on-going review of local Conservation Areas, particularly Hertford. A topic right up our street.

Local outing to Haileybury for WW1 'trench trail tour', with refreshment afterwards. 18 May 2016

Your events organiser has tried out this tour, and can report that it is a very moving experience, presented in a thoughtful and balanced way, while focusing on individuals, families, sports teams and year groups torn apart by the First World War. One highlight is the replica trench, constructed under the direction of a military historian, and complete with 'dugouts'. The visit will conclude with a cup of tea.

The tour will start at 2.00 pm, and will last for around 90 minutes, or 2 hours including a cup of tea. On arrival, park as for the swimming pool/gym, and initially we will meet in front of the pool. There is no fee for Civic Society members (non-members £4, if numbers permit), but anyone who registers and does not turn up would be denying someone else the opportunity to take part, as numbers are limited to 25, and no repeat event is planned. If anyone needs any help/advice/car share, contact Malcolm Ramsay. Anyone wishing to come will need, please, to pre-book with him, by post, telephone (no ansafone) or, best, by email (see p6).

Visit to Chatham Historic Dockyard. 8 June 2016

Chatham Dockyard is completely fascinating, as also revealed by a preliminary visit. First, it is well suited to group/coach experience; our visit will start with a preliminary guided tour, making use of our coach. There is something for everyone: not just docks but three ships to explore, including one built like the 'Cutty Sark' and also two more modern warships (a destroyer and a submarine), an historic garden, a working brewery (good beer), and the Ropewalk where we can get an additional guided tour and demonstration of rope making presented with great panache by a woman in period costume (the immense Ropewalk was the main sphere for women's work in late C19th Chatham docks). There is a brand new eating place (and a more basic cafe). Shortly before our visit, Chatham will unveil its own

counterpart to the 'Mary Rose': an 18th century warship ('Namur') reconstructed from parts used in its own dock buildings.

The cost this year works out at £32.50 (or £65 for two people). We will travel in great comfort, in an executive coach complete with all comforts including air conditioning and loo. Please book at Peter and Susan Brown's shop from early May or, more immediately, with Malcolm Ramsay, whose contact details are given elsewhere in this newsletter (see p6). Last year's trip was a sell-out, so don't leave it until the last moment. We depart at 8.45am, alongside Hertford East station.

Other events later in 2016. These are the Awards Ceremony at the Castle (14 September, from 7.00pm) and our final lecture, on affordable housing (9 November).

Malcolm Ramsay

PLANNING MATTERS

Hertford Golf Course

In the last Newsletter I reported that we had not objected to the revised scheme for earthworks at the site on London Road, Hertford Heath which has permission for a golf course. The latest scheme involves bringing into the site less material than previously proposed, but officers at the County Council have determined that it would really amount to a waste disposal operation, which they are not prepared to endorse. They are therefore recommending the County's Development Control Committee to refuse permission. In the meantime a lot of material has been brought on to the site in accordance with the original permission for a golf course on the land. It is good to know that the County officers are vigilant in trying to prevent the use of land for waste disposal under cover of some other proposal but, with the benefit of hindsight, it is a pity that the original

permission to use the land as a golf course was granted without stronger safeguards.

Sovereign House and Gates Garage

The Sovereign House site has been acquired by McCarthy & Stone, who specialise in providing sheltered and 'extra care' flats for retired people. As the last remnants of the old building are cleared away, their application for its replacement is being considered by the District Council. In scale, height and external appearance the current proposal differs little from the scheme put forward by the former owners, which the Council approved. McCarthy & Stone are understood to be interested in redeveloping the nearby Gates Garage site too, although it may be that Gates will not be in a position to move for some time. Some members living in West Street have expressed concern about the number of parking spaces included in preliminary plans recently put on public exhibition. If and when a planning application is made for the garage site, it will be important to ensure that what is proposed does not make the already difficult parking conditions in West Street even worse. However, as McCarthy & Stone point out in their Sovereign House application, many of those who buy into their schemes have given up driving, so parking spaces are needed mainly for visitors.

Ware Park

The applicant has lodged an appeal against the refusal of permission for a large five-bedroomed house in the Green Belt in Ware Park. Our objection to the application has been forwarded to the Inspector.

Hertford Town Centre Urban Design Strategy

The February meeting of the Council's District Planning Panel was asked to approve the Town Centre study 'as part of the evidence base to inform and support the East Herts District Plan' and 'to inform Development Management

decisions'. That's all well and good: the study contains a lot of sound ideas and incorporates points put forward by ourselves, other organisations and individuals during the consultation process. But if it is to achieve its aims of guiding future development in the town centre and providing a long-term coherent vision for the area, there will need to be a concerted effort by the three Councils, and others involved in the town, to get the strategy implemented. We realise that major changes will take many years and resources are very limited, but there are elements of the strategy which are probably cost-neutral because they simply call for routine tasks to be done differently.

Peter Norman

BLUE PLAQUES

The Town Council and the Society have now agreed to form a partnership in order to create a Heritage Trail, largely in the town-centre; mainly it will commemorate well-known people and past uses of buildings. The Council will fund the project and will produce an accompanying leaflet; the Society will be responsible for obtaining necessary consents and overseeing the purchase and installation of the plaques forming the trail. In all there will be nearly forty plaques including the five for which the Society has already obtained listed building consent. Each plaque will display the names of the Council and the Society together with the town's coat of arms. The wording of the plaques is being prepared by members of the Hertford and Ware Local History Group and a medium blue background will be used together with raised white lettering and lining. Some ten volunteers from the Society's membership will work on obtaining permissions from building owners and preparing submissions for listed building consent. It is hoped to complete the project by late summer.

Andrew Sangster

AGM PAPERS

Minutes of the AGM held on April 15, 2015

Apologies:

Dorothy Anderson, Malcolm Booker, Sally Paque, Deryck and Yvonne Rhodes, Peter Ruffles, Richard Henderson, Jane and Harold Chaplin

Minutes of AGM 2014:

These were accepted.

Matters Arising:

Terry Betts reported that the Society has made Herts County Council aware of traffic problems at the Rush Green roundabout. HCC officers say that there have been very few reports of collisions but that the road markings will be improved. The Society will continue to pursue this issue.

Report of the Committee:

Terry Betts took the meeting through the main points of the Report. The commissioning and installation of the Wallace statue had been the major event of the year and he thanked Malcolm Ramsay for all his efforts in achieving this. It is disturbing that there has been so little progress on the District Plan and Councillor Mike Carver's imminent retirement from the Executive Panel may lead to further delay. We will probably have to accept some housing on the Green Belt, but the Executive Panel has been very keen that any such development should be supported by sufficient infrastructure. Peter Norman urged canvassing our members' views on pressing for the referral of the decision to allow an out of town supermarket development on the Van Hage site to the Secretary of State on the grounds that East Herts Council officers had strongly recommended that it be refused and it was agreed *nem con* that he should email the Department for Communities and Local Government to this effect. Wrenbridge are now reconsidering their plan to redevelop

the Bircherley Green site as a result of the decision to permit the development.

Treasurer's Report:

John Bevan took the meeting through the main points of the Report. The Wallace sculpture entailed significant expenditure but it was considered that this had made good use of the fund created by Mrs Medlock for the benefit of the town. We have made donations to the River Beane Association and to Hertford Museum for the orrery; this object is currently in store following the restoration work and he is planning a visit to enable members to see it. He reminded members of the importance of completing the Gift Aid form, which has enabled us to reclaim £400 over two years. Finally, he thanked Tom Busby for his work in auditing the Accounts and reminded us that we may have to look for another auditor if Tom decides to retire completely in the near future. There were no questions and the Accounts were approved.

Election of Officers:

The following officers were elected -
Chair - Terry Betts, proposed and seconded by Andrew Sangster and Richard Threlfall
Vice-Chair - Malcolm Ramsay, proposed and seconded by Terry Betts and Richard Threlfall
Treasurer - John Bevan, proposed and seconded by Terry Betts and Richard Threlfall

The following were elected as members of the Committee - Hilary Durbin, Sue Jones, Peter Norman, Andrew Sangster and Richard Threlfall. Geoffrey Thornton, having served for thirty years including as Chair and Treasurer, did not wish to stand again and was warmly thanked by Terry Betts for all his work for the Society over this long time.

AOB:

Jane Page urged that members should lobby candidates for election to East Herts Council to make clear that we disapprove of the decision to allow permission for the Van Hage/Waitrose

development. Even if a new Planning Committee were appointed, it could not reverse the decision without risking major legal challenge, but it may be possible to influence any planning conditions that might be imposed. It is important that we make our views clear, especially if there is a possibility that the decision will be called in by the Secretary of State.

Malcolm Ramsay reported that the outing to Rochester is now full. Tickets for the garden party will be available in early May and anyone wishing to go on the crime and punishment walk in July should book a place with him.

Sue Jones

Report of the Committee for 2015

Throughout 2015 the town centre continued to be the main focus of interest and concern.

The previous year, Wrenbridge, a developer, in collaboration with Cordea Savill, pension fund owners of the Bircherley Green Centre, had held an exhibition of proposals for redevelopment. The expected subsequent consultation / exhibition about proposals for accommodating buses in the absence of a bus station, has never taken place.

Some Civic Society members had inevitably been unable to attend the exhibition. Others had difficulty understanding the proposals because the display boards were crammed into a tent. For these reasons information was circulated to all Civic Society members for whom we have email addresses inviting further comment. The Committee were most encouraged by the volume of comments returned which were collated into a single document which was forwarded to Wrenbridge.

Waitrose announced that the Wrenbridge proposals would not meet their future needs.

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Van Hages submitted a planning application for improvements to their garden centre complex at Great Amwell with the addition of a food superstore designed to accommodate Waitrose. The Committee were extremely concerned when a report prepared by East Herts Council planning officers stated that the impact on the key anchor stores in Hertford was predicted to be 24% trade diversion.

As a result of initiatives taken by the Committee, Mark Prisk MP, Hertford and Ware Town Councils, individual East Herts and Broxbourne Councillors, Members of the Society and members of the public, all wrote to the Department for Communities and Local Government asking that the application be called in for decision by the Secretary of State. In the event the planning application was withdrawn by the applicant before final consideration by East Herts Council.

Although the applicant expressed an intention to submit a revised application at the time of writing (3 March 2016) this has not happened.

In January 2016 Wrenbridge postponed a proposed briefing of the Committee on revised proposals for the Bircherley Green shopping centre. A spokesman wrote that “a few important aspects of the project have changed following discussions with planning officers at East Herts and the Design Review Panel”. A project meeting was to be held at the end of January and the spokesman hoped “to have some more clarity soon on the Wrenbridge and Cordea Savills’ intent to progress.”

While these events - to do with the proposed redevelopment of Bircherley Green and future of the Waitrose Store -continued, the Town Council had appointed Opus UK, described as an infrastructure consultancy, to undertake an investigation and feasibility study for proposals to enhance the street scene and accessibility of Maidenhead Street. Signed off in May 2015, this was very much an engineering based study. Although a proposed Action Plan included “Consultation with elected members, Key Stakeholders, and user groups”, as far as the Committee is aware, no such consultation has taken place.

While the Maidenhead Street commission was going on, in February 2015, East Herts Council in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council and Hertford Town Council, had commissioned Tibbalds, a planning and urban design consultancy, to prepare a Hertford Town Centre Urban Design Strategy “to

inform the future development of the town centre (taking into account economic, movement, and design considerations) and support the preparation of the emerging District Plan to 2031.” In March the consultants were sent the document referred to above which collated the comments of Society members on the Wrenbridge proposals for redevelopment of Bircherley Green. Although some of the comments are specific to the proposals many of them had a bearing on an urban design strategy for the town centre as a whole.

In September the Committee arranged a special meeting of the Society at which East Herts Council Officers gave a presentation about a draft Hertford Town Centre Design Strategy followed by questions and discussion. Subsequently a Working Party of Society members met to formulate comments on the report setting out the draft Strategy. These comments were forwarded to the consultants and circulated to all members of the Society for whom we have email addresses.

On 25 February 2016, a final version of the Town Centre Design Strategy was presented to a meeting of the East Herts Council District Planning Executive Panel with a recommendation that the Strategy be approved to inform and support the East Herts District Plan and inform Development Management decisions. In addition it was agreed that “a Steering Group be set up, including representatives from East Herts Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertford Town Council, to agree an action plan to bring forward appropriate projects in the short, medium and long term for the improvement and enhancement of the County Town, with a report on an action plan and identified projects being submitted to the Executive.”

Progress made by the Councils in 2015 with regard to policies for the town centre was regrettably not repeated as far as policies for the future of the town as a whole were concerned.

Comments on and objections to the Consultation draft of the new District Plan were submitted on behalf of the Society in 2014. The next stage will be a second consultation about Alterations to the Plan. The minutes of a meeting held in January 2016 between East Herts and Broxbourne Council record East Herts Council’s intent to undertake this pre-submission consultation commencing in June/July 2016. The Committee will need to be ready to respond to this consultation later in the year.

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The period of time that will have passed between the two consultation stages referred to is a reflection of the daunting task faced by the Council. The Committee believe that this task could be made easier by a variety of seemingly minor changes to the Plan preparation process such as allowing a Plan to be prepared and approved in stages rather than all at once, or a Plan being approved in part only, or approved for a limited period pending review. These and associated ideas have emerged from a dialogue between members of the Committee, retired Councillor Mike Carver (Chairman of the District Plan Executive Panel until May 2015) and representatives of other Civic Societies in Hertfordshire. These ideas have been the subject of correspondence with Hertfordshire MPs and were rehearsed at a meeting held between members of the Committee and Mark Prisk MP on 8 February 2016. The meeting with our local MP was also an opportunity to promote proposals for new settlements as an alternative to continuing revisions to Green Belt boundaries to accommodate peripheral residential development of existing towns - one of the themes of the objections to the draft Plan submitted on behalf of the Society. Later on the same day Mark Prisk attended a Select Committee meeting at which he referred to our meeting and asked questions arising from the discussions.

Faced in 2014 with the proposal for a new primary school building on the Simon Balle site the Committee decided to concentrate on attempts to minimise the consequences for vehicular traffic by concentrating on measures to reduce the number of pupil journeys to school made by car, including improvement of pedestrian routes. Achievement of this objective has required and, will, clearly, continue to require persistence and attention to detail. The first primary pupils started in the new school in September 2015 and numbers will build up over a period of seven years. Members of the

Committee have walked the routes to school (highlighting where improvements are required) with County Councillors Peter Ruffles and Andrew Stevenson and local East Herts Councillor Bob Deering. Meetings have been attended with local residents and representatives of the school. There has been continuing correspondence with the School Manager. Limited improvements have been made to the path over school land but much more is required to make walking to school an attractive option.

Significant progress was made during 2015 on the long running project which will result in the display of plaques commemorating the association of historical figures with particular Hertford buildings. This project is described on p4 of this Newsletter.

Detailed accounts of the events organised for the Society during the year are contained in the four seasonal Newsletters distributed to Members. These can be viewed on the Society web site and a limited number of printed copies remain available to members.

The Newsletters also record the often very detailed and sometimes technical objections and representations submitted to County and District Councils about particular planning applications.

Objections on behalf of the Society to the application for an illuminated artificial playing pitch at Richard Hale School were submitted as long ago as August 2014. The application was revised several times and finally reached the Development Management Committee for decision in June. Officers recommended approval of the latest revised scheme, and after a lengthy debate the Committee granted permission.

Last year your Committee reported that comments had been submitted to the County

Council in response to consultations about proposed reduction to bus services particularly in the evenings and on Sundays. Cuts to contract bus services were made from September 2015. These largely followed the consultation proposals, especially in removing most evening and Sunday services. However, the proposed reductions to daytime contract services were amended in detail.

At the end of 2015 the Society had a membership of 330. Of these 31 are Life Members who do not pay an annual subscription. 227 members pay their subscription by Standing Order saving Committee member time devoted to subscription collection. The Committee urges those who pay by cash or cheque to sign a Standing Order form and send this to Annette Robinson.

We now have email addresses for 139 members. This has enabled easy circulation to these individuals of reminders about meetings and other important information referred to in a number of places in this report. Other members who use email are urged to let us know their address. 66 members have now agreed to receive the Newsletter by email only. This has reduced printing costs and, in some cases, saved postage.

An indication of the age structure of the membership is the fact that 211 of the total 330 members paid a subscription at the "concessionary" rate - a timely reminder that recruitment of younger members must be an ongoing priority for the Committee for 2016 and beyond.

Terry Betts, on behalf of the Committee

Treasurer's Report and Accounts for 2015

I hope that you will welcome the change to the way that the annual accounts are now presented, and find them easier to understand. In particular fountain expenditure and the balances of the bank and deposit accounts are clearly identified.

The small £220 increase in members' subscriptions income was attributable more to the extra effort that was made to remind some of those paying by cheque or cash to renew, than to the recruitment of new members. This chasing effort could be reduced if more members paid subs by Standing Order, as many already do. Ideally all members would pay by Standing Order. It takes the Treasurer only about a day's work to prepare the claim to recover Gift Aid Tax - with £449 extra income obtained from the taxman in 2015 at no further cost to members. So please make sure that, if you pay income tax, you complete a Gift Aid declaration - the taxman then adds 25% to what you have paid, each and every year thereafter. If you do not know whether we have one on file, please complete another declaration.

Newsletter expenditure was reduced substantially by: changing printers, sending more by email and so printing fewer paper copies, and by some issues with fewer pages. We spent less in 2015 on subscriptions and donations to other organisations than we did in 2014. The 2014 figure was higher because it included a £100 donation to the River Beane Restoration Association and £305 given to Hertford Museum towards restoration of their Orrery (an antique model of the solar system). In 2014 we contributed £4,522 to the Russel Wallace sculpture; again there were no equivalents in 2015.

Report continues on p12

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2015

<u>Income</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>
Subscriptions and Donations	1,853	1,633
Surplus or Deficit on Social Activities		
Coach Visit	193	(115)
Garden Party	(133)	60
	-----	-----
Sales of Publications	124	70
Interest on Deposit Account	416	409
Recovery of Gift Aid Tax	449	470
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	2,902	2,609
<u>Less Society Expenses</u>		
Newsletter	958	1,493
General Meetings and Lectures	256	92
Public Liability Insurance	308	308
Maintenance of Society Equipment	84	76
Depreciation of Society Equipment	40	40
Other Expenses	294	245
Subscriptions and Donations	429	929
Civic Activities		
Salisbury Square Fountain	1,084	1,111
Russel Wallace Sculpture (net cost)	-	4,522
Blue Plaque Scheme	82	-
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	3,535	8,816
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<u>Surplus (Deficit) for the Year</u>	(633)	(6,207)
	=====	=====

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2015

	<u>2015</u>	<u>2014</u>
SOCIETY EQUIPMENT		
At cost	733	733
Less Depreciation	653	613
	-----	-----
	80	120
CURRENT ASSETS		
Sundry Debtors and Prepayments	10	148
Cash at Bank, in Charities Deposit Fund and in Hand	92,166	93,037
	-----	-----
	92,176	93,185
LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Sundry Creditors	215	91,961
	-----	-----
	91,961	631
	-----	-----
NET ASSETS	92,041	92,674
	=====	=====
ACCUMULATED FUND		
Balance as at 1 st January 2015	92,674	98,881
Less Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	(633)	(6,207)
	-----	-----
MEMBERS' FUNDS, as above	92,041	92,674
	=====	=====

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

I have examined the books and vouchers of the 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

The net result was that we had a relatively small annual deficit of £633 in 2015, compared with £6,207 in 2014. The Russel Wallace sculpture and once-off donations (already mentioned) explain most of the difference. Looking forward to 2016, we shall be organising the Civic Society Awards, with associated once-off expenditure tending to increase the annual deficit.

The Society's annual deficits are financed by reducing the balance of the Charities Deposit Account, originating from Mrs Medlock's legacy. The account stood at £91,894 at the end of 2015, with earlier year end figures being £92,478 for 2014, £99,869 for 2013, £99,380 for 2012, and £102,593 for 2011. It is clear that the Society remains well funded and can continue in this way to reduce each year the balance of the Deposit Account for some time more, but not indefinitely. Eventually additional income and/or reduced expenditure will need to be found.

John Bevan, Treasurer

CIVIC VOICE UPDATE

The House of Lords' Committee on the Built Environment has called for changes to planning laws in its latest report *Building Better Places*. Its recommendations include

- stronger policy support for early community engagement in both local plan making and planning decision-making
- making design review mandatory for all major planning applications in order to offset the long-term burdens and costs of poor quality design
- revising the National Planning Policy Framework to reduce the unreasonable use of viability assessments by developers to avoid funding affordable housing and infrastructure
- retaining current NPPF policy on the Green Belt but recommending that the

Government should publish clearer guidance on the definition of the "exceptional circumstances" in which Green Belt boundaries may be revised

- strengthening the priority given to brownfield development, including considering the reintroduction of a "brownfield first" policy at national level
- introducing a community right of appeal in certain specified circumstances, such as when a planning decision conflicts with an emerging neighbourhood plan or deals with a site unallocated by the local plan.

Ian Harvey, Executive Director for Civic Voice welcomed the report and added, "Quality of place is not just determined by the planning system. That is why we also need integrated Place Improvement Strategies which complement the local plan but also include a strategy for heritage management and improving the public realm (such as streets, squares and parks). Like local plans, Place Improvement Strategies should be produced through an inclusive and participative process. A named senior officer and a senior politician should be answerable for producing this strategy and making sure it is implemented".

The Report and comment from Civic Voice is available at

<http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/news/civic-voice-welcomes-building-better-places-report//>

Sue Jones

Reports on the talks to members on *Links Between Hertford and Hatfield* and the *School for Saboteurs* at Brickendonbury will appear in the next edition of the Newsletter.