



NEWSLETTER

Summer 2016

Welcome to the Summer edition of the Newsletter.

Planning issues are very much to the fore in this issue. Hertford may be facing significant developments and some are arousing strong public feeling. As well as the regular report on planning applications, we also look at the proposal to extend quarrying for gravel in Bengoe and the possibility that the Caxton Hill industrial estate could be turned over to housing development. Hertford's very extensive Conservation Area has also undergone an Appraisal, which has implications for both the built and the natural environment.

In this edition we also catch up on the talks on a wide variety of subjects we had earlier in the year, from our links to Hatfield through the Cecil family and the Salisbury Estate, to spies and saboteurs in WW2, and to the introduction to the Conservation Area Appraisal. We have also had two fascinating and enjoyable outings to the Royal Historic Dockyard at Chatham and to see the life-size reconstruction of a Western Front trench as part of the WW1 commemorations at Haileybury, and where we had a talk from the school's senior archivist on the profound impact of the war on the school. These events will be described in the next edition.

We wish you all an enjoyable and relaxing summer.

The end of an era in Hertford's skyline as Sovereign House is demolished.

Picture by Ian Nash



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PROGRAMME

*Civic Society Awards Ceremony
 14 September 2016*

2016 sees Hertford Civic Society running the competition for awards for good architecture in the town for the first time in four years. The judging panel, chaired by Councillor Jan Goodeve and comprising Sue Bennett, Judith Fawcett, Tony Freeland, Colin Rice and Andrew Goodman, have given an Award to Calton House and Commendations to 65 and 66 North Road, The Six Templars, Beeson’s Yard, the St Andrew’s Centre and 5 Hagsdell Road. To mark the culmination of the awards process, there will be speeches and refreshments at Hertford Castle on 14 September when the Chairman and members of the Panel will welcome the owners, developers, builders and architects of the winning schemes and a plaque and certificates will be presented. There will be a finger buffet with wine and soft drinks and Society members are welcome to attend but, as space is limited, only a few tickets will be available. If you would like to purchase a ticket for £15, please contact Terry Betts by 1 September (details p6).

*Affordable Housing
 Lecture, 9 November 2016*

Jackie Trundell of Riversmead, one of the largest providers of affordable housing in East Herts, will explain what this kind of housing actually involves. What does it look like? How much of it currently exists? How do eligible people access it? In addition she will talk briefly about the current and future work of Riversmead.

PLANNING MATTERS

The most significant planning application in recent weeks was for a new quarry north of Bengeo. That is the subject of a separate article. Meanwhile we have submitted comments on a number of other developments in the town.

Gates Garage

McCarthy & Stone have applied to demolish the Gates car showroom on Gascoyne Way and build 33 ‘retirement living’ apartments on the site. Although such accommodation is much needed in Hertford, and this is a good site for it, we objected to the application for three reasons. First, the proposed building would be over-bearing when seen in relation to the historic houses in West Street, next to the site, and should be reduced in height by

the equivalent of one storey. Second, there is no provision for affordable dwellings, either on- or off-site. We have urged the Council to resist any claim that the inclusion of affordable units, or payment in lieu, would render the scheme non-viable. Third, there is a question mark about the number of parking spaces proposed (26): not enough, in the opinion of some residents of West Street. We therefore suggested that the use of the parking area be controlled by barriers to ensure that spaces in the car park are always available for visitors and visiting carers, rather than being taken up by shoppers and others. The Council's decision is awaited.

Bollywoods

The refurbishment of the Listed building in Fore Street, formerly occupied by Bollywoods, is proceeding under a succession of separate consents for different parts of the work. An application was made to replace part of the existing shop front with a new frameless glass entrance door and window extending to the ground. The frontage to be replaced had no particular merit, but we objected to the proposal on the grounds that a glass front extending to the pavement is not appropriate to an important building in the Conservation Area. We suggested that the presence of a stall riser would preserve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area. The Town Council made a similar representation but neither the Conservation Officer nor the case officer shared our view, and permission was granted under delegated powers.

83 Railway Street

As part of the development next to the undertakers on the corner of St John's Street, the existing building is being altered and extended. Application was made to amend the approved scheme by creating a new self-contained flat in the existing basement. We objected on the grounds that the proposed three-bedroomed flat would have no outlook,

other than on to blank walls a few feet away from the windows, and no access to any amenity space. The use of this basement as living accommodation was not envisaged in the original scheme, and it was clear from the documents that it was proposed later only because the developers had miscalculated the difficulty and expense of underpinning the walls to take the additional loadings from the flat to be provided in the roof space. Unfortunately our arguments did not prevail. The officer's report granting permission said in part "The lightwells will provide adequate daylight for habitable rooms, but the outlook will be rather poor, facing a solid wall 1m away this is a common arrangement for basement units no external amenity space is proposed but this is also not uncommon for a town centre location".

The Blackbirds

The new owners of The Blackbirds in Parliament Square applied to put up new signage. We made no comment on the technical specifications of the signage, but we joined CAMRA and the Town Council in objecting to the proposal to change the name of this historic public house from "The Blackbirds" to "The Stag". Heritage is more than bricks and mortar, and the "Blackbirds" name has been part of the history and character of Hertford for centuries. Permission for the new signage was refused, partly because of the proposed change of name.

Elburt Wurlings

With development at Sovereign House well under way, the owners of the adjacent vacant building (Elburt Wurlings, formerly John O'Gaunt) have recently applied to replace it with a new block comprising 14 apartments, a licensed café and basement parking. We have objected to the 'licensed café', which could in practice become any kind of drinking establishment, restaurant or café, apart from a take-away. This area immediately south of Gascoyne Way, once mainly offices, is set to become a residential area, with Bentley House, the new Sovereign

House and probably the site of Gates' car dealership to be occupied by elderly residents. A café or pub can sometimes be the focus of a community; but here on the very edge of the town centre another watering hole is unlikely to perform such a local function and much more likely to attract revellers from the existing night time economy on the other side of Gascoyne Way into what residents will expect to be a quiet residential area.

Moreover, the proposed building would be taller than either block of the new Sovereign House, itself higher than Pimlico Court; the character of Hertford as a country town is being eroded by the grant of permission for more and more high buildings and we urged that the building should be no higher than the redeveloped Sovereign House. The car parking proposed (one space per flat, with no visitor spaces) would also be inadequate. Observation suggests that even people living within easy reach of the town centre and the stations do in fact own more than an average of one vehicle per household; unless enough parking spaces are provided, the result will be cars unlawfully parked wholly or partly on pavements and in areas designed for pedestrians.

Ware Park

The applicants have lost their appeal against the refusal of permission for a large five-bedroomed house in the Green Belt in Ware Park (to which we objected).

Public access to Balls Park

As long ago as Spring 2015 we were assured that public paths through the park, agreed when permission was granted for the new flats and the conversion of the mansion, would be formally dedicated and completed "very soon". The County Rights of Way Service have now confirmed that waymark posts and discs have been installed, and metal roadside posts will soon follow. The electronic gates at White

Lodge will be fixed open during the day, as required by the planning permission.

Peter Norman

BENGEO QUARRY

The plan to open up a new sand and gravel quarry between Sacombe Road and Wadesmill Road, north of Bengoe, has aroused a lot of opposition. It cannot be denied that aggregates are needed for building homes, roads etc, and the Minerals Local Plan does designate an area north of Bengoe as a 'Preferred Area' for sand and gravel extraction. However, the present application is unsatisfactory and not acceptable.

In a letter to Hertfordshire County Council urging them to refuse permission we have explained our concerns, which can be summarised as follows:

The proposed quarry includes land outside the Preferred Area for mineral extraction. The boundary of the Preferred Area runs along the public right of way between the allotments and St John's Wood, whereas large parts of the proposed quarry would be east of that right of way. In this extended area which slopes down to the Wadesmill Road, workings and stockpiles would be particularly noticeable from that road and from the other side of the valley.

New quarrying operations should not be opened up before previously worked areas at Rickneys Quarry (currently mothballed) are fully restored.

The existing Rickneys Quarry has planning permission, first granted seven years ago, for a large extension. The fact that this permission has never been implemented demonstrates that the present need for aggregates is not sufficient to justify the authorisation of further extraction. Should Rickneys now decide to re-start work, the cumulative impact of this and the proposed new

quarry being worked at the same time would be completely unacceptable.

The risk of harmful levels of silica dust close to the school and residential areas has not been thoroughly assessed.

During the extraction period, gravel extraction renders land useless for agriculture and recreation, and turns attractive countryside into an eyesore. So the period of extraction, and the area affected by extraction at any one time, should be kept to a minimum. It is important that the work is completed in as short a time as possible and that later phases of a scheme are not taken out of agricultural use and left derelict for a long time before extraction starts.

We asked for stringent conditions to be imposed if it is decided to permit extraction, including:

- Restricting the new quarry to the Preferred Area designated in the Minerals Plan
- Setting up a liaison group to establish and continuously monitor conditions
- Carrying out a dust assessment and, if necessary, excluding parts of the site nearest the school and houses from the area to be worked
- Restricting the volume and routing of lorry traffic, including times of operation, and forbidding parking on the highway
- Imposing a time scale limiting the period of disturbance and environmental damage, and ensuring landscape restoration
- Using real-time monitoring to enforce conditions with costs funded by the operator
- Insisting on financial guarantees with respect to operating and restoration conditions

Bengeo residents have set up an action group to oppose the quarry development. Details are available at <http://stopbengeoquarry.org.uk/>

Peter Norman

CAXTON HILL

Society members and local residents expressed concerns about a proposed re-development of the Caxton Hill industrial estate at an exhibition held in the Methodist Church hall in Ware Road on 12 May. The site (which does not include the Fluorocarbon offices) covers about 7.5 acres and comprises 37 industrial units which are now about 60 years old and only half of which are occupied.

LaSalle Management Group, which manages the site for the owners, claims that it would not be commercially viable to upgrade these units to modern standards and that they therefore propose to redevelop the site as housing. They have two schemes under consideration: the first would consist of 100 homes, of which 40 would be “affordable” and a 65-bed care home, while the second would consist of 125 homes, of which around 50 will be “affordable”.

The Management Group says that “The homes will be a range of affordable units, as well as family homes, homes for downsizers and for young people. New buildings will be a mix of 2-4 storeys with gardens, in keeping with the nature of the residential buildings nearby.”

While the Society acknowledges that there is great demand for housing and that it is desirable to use brownfield sites before greenfield, we would be very concerned about the loss of employment land. This could reduce the range of economic activity in Hertford and would force people to commute for longer distances. Together with traffic generated by new housing, this would add to congestion on the Ware Road, which is already very busy. The development

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would also increase pressure on services such as schools and doctors' surgeries.

No planning application has been submitted yet, but the Society will continue to monitor the situation.

Sue Jones

PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

Links between Hertford and Hatfield

Hertford's connection to the Cecil family goes back to the C17, when they received the castle from Charles I. Although they rented out the castle and never lived there, their extensive ownership of houses in the town gave them a great deal of influence in elections, through control of their tenants' votes, until the secret ballot became law in 1872. Much of this property has since been sold, although the family still owns the castle (now leased to the Town Council) and the meadows along the R Lea near Gascoyne Way. A further connection was through the Hertfordshire Militia, which often carried out manoeuvres on Hartham, and was commanded by the second Marquis of Salisbury in the mid-C19.

But by the C20 great landowners no longer carried the same degree of political clout they had in the past; the Gascoyne Cecil Estate lost several thousand acres of land by compulsory purchase to the New Towns Commission to build modern Hatfield and continuing pressure on landowners is coming from the allocation for housing that District Councils are required to find through their Local Plans. A considerable Estate still exists, but nowadays it tries to exert 'soft power' locally, leading by example and building alliances with other landowners and local pressure groups to protect the environment and make good use of resources for the wider community, as well as for its own commercial purposes.

Anthony Downs, Director of Planning and Development at Gascoyne Cecil Estates, described to the Society in a talk at our meeting in January how a Charrette for Old Hatfield in 2008 was a good example of this approach. Over the course of a week the residents had the opportunity to come together and discuss ways in which their town could be improved, and planners and designers were engaged to provide on-going plans and designs as the discussion progressed and to produce a final report, which can be found at http://www.gascoynececil.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Old_Hatfield_Charrette.pdf

The Charrette led to the creation of Building Codes for houses and for shop fronts, and to the replacement of a set of lock-up garages by mews-style houses, some of which were sold, some rented and some used for estate workers. The Estate also persuaded Network Rail to carry out major improvements to the station and its traffic layout. "Hatfield station was a brick box built in 1972 as an unprepossessing gateway to the area, said Anthony Downs. "We designed something that satisfied rail red tape and yet with a sense of place. We decided on having a front elevation rather than a dingy car park."

A Residents' Association was established, and continues to lobby for improvements. Although Welwyn Hatfield Council was wary at first, said Anthony Downs, it now accepts that this approach is a valid way to consult and mobilise local people in the planning process. "Now when planning applications come in we've a level playing field with which to join them. The whole transformation of Hatfield involves restoration or new build in style and in character with the history."

The Estate has applied the same design principles to its properties within the Park of Hatfield House. Many of the buildings, such as coach houses, that became redundant after WWI have been refurbished to a high standard and provided with modern amenities so that they can be rented out to commercial interests, such as small IT companies, and approximately the same number of people are now earning a living there as did in the 1880s. "We have regenerated this estate in a C21 way. It's a new take on the Estate's model. People come to us saying they want something with character. Estate agents told us their clients are not interested in characterless places but are interested in serious conservation," said Anthony Downs.

Gascoyne Cecil Estates also part-sponsored a Charrette at the University of Hertfordshire in 2008 to look at development across the whole county. This Charrette brought together the County Council, transport planners, landowners, businesses, other organisations and residents to look at options for sustainable growth up to 2021 by re-thinking ways of designing settlements to accommodate new housing and improving traffic systems and their thoughts were presented in a final document *Guide to Growth*. https://www.herts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/10289/herts-charrette-guide-to-growth_02-12-2008.pdf

Concern about urban sprawl and coalescence of settlements has led to the establishment of a Green Corridor group (on which the

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Society is represented by Malcolm Ramsay) to prevent Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and Hertford from eventually merging into one another. The relevant land is owned by a small number of companies (Gascoyne Cecil Estates, Goodmans business park, CEMEX and Lafarge) and if they could work together with the local authorities and interest groups, it should be possible to establish a Green Corridor that would improve management of agriculture, woodland and the meadows along the R Lea to support wildlife and provide opportunities for outdoor activities such as walking and cycling, especially amongst children. Transport is a further issue as the A414 becomes increasingly crowded - could we improve public transport with a dedicated tramway and encourage cycling for shorter journeys? The *Green Infrastructure for Central Hertfordshire* document is available at <http://www.gascoynececil.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Green-Infrastructure.pdf>

Sue Jones

Brickendonbury Manor and its role in WW2

Distant echoes of gunfire and explosions in the direction of Brickendonbury Manor would have been commonplace on the outbreak of the Second World War. But few people around Hertford could have known it was a strategic part of Winston Churchill's top-secret school for saboteurs.

An estimated 1,200 trainees would pass through the manor for three-week intensive preparation and study before being parachuted into occupied Europe as saboteurs and assassins. Its relative remoteness and close proximity to five airfields, from North Weald to Tempsford, made Brickendonbury the perfect setting.

Originally proposed by Guy Burgess, with a syllabus drawn up by Kim Philby - both later condemned as traitors for leaking secrets to the

Russians - "Station XVII" played a vital role throughout the war.

The full extent of operations was not publicly known for decades, until former schoolteacher and historian Bernard O'Connor delved into archives and interviewed many survivors and their families. He gave a detailed snapshot of his investigations and how the school came into being in a talk to Hertford Civic Society in March.

Initially a centre for sending supplies to secret agents behind enemy lines, the work increasingly focused on wrecking missions and, as Bletchley Park focused on codes and ciphers, Brickendonbury was chosen to lead Churchill's initiative. Agents learned to use "sweets and toys" - a euphemism for explosives - as groups of individuals prepared to go in and destroy vital resources and supply lines or recruit volunteers to do the job.

At first, the service was run by the Special Intelligence Service (SIS) and drew in well-educated, well-spoken types from the world of business and industry. But, after Dunkirk, it was reckoned a different, more robust and direct approach was needed. The Special Operations Executive (SOE) took over in 1940 and Churchill's plan was hatched "to set Europe ablaze and rock the buggers from within".

From the outset, said Bernard, "the aim was largely to teach people to blow things up". A ready supply of explosives made at nearby Aston, Stevenage, was at hand for Brickendonbury agents. The first commander, Frederic Peters, deployed plastic explosives for the destruction of mines, engineering works, ships, ports and other facilities. One teacher, George Hill, who had fought the Bolsheviks, was recruited for his expert knowledge and wisdom. Training too came from creators of latest state-of-the-art munitions such as Cecil (Nobby) Clarke, inventor of the limpet mine for attaching

to ships, the “plate spigot” for blowing up tanks and the tree spigot which was detonated to fire at passing trucks and tanks.

Groups came for training from Belgium, Norway and Spain (publicly noted as “Republican”, they were generally communists, vehemently anti-Franco and keen to go back as assassins). Whatever their background, the three-week training was intense, 9.00 am to 6.15 daily and covering everything from PT, telecommunications, small arms and musketry (rifles) and devices (explosives) to sabotage of steam power systems, rail and transport links and the railway engines themselves. Training included simulated attacks at places such as Hertford rail sidings and the Hatfield airfield Mosquito works. And finally there would have been training in the use of incendiary devices for assaults on railways, canals, dams, engineering facilities and machine tool plants.

Security and confidentiality was so tight, said Bernard, that saboteurs in training were banned from telling anyone - girlfriends, wives, parents, grandparents, cousins, however close - what they were up to. Military Police were on constant duty in Hertford, eavesdropping conversations in pubs to root-out those prone to loose talk. “If they talked it was bad news as they jeopardised not only their own lives but those of others.” When away on operations, agents completed signed greetings cards for birthdays and Christmas in advance and these were posted for them while they were away.

After training, the agents went to Ringway (now Manchester) airport for parachute training before going on a mission. Bernard illustrated his talk with numerous original photographs revealing the extent of successful sabotage operations of power lines, canals and other strategic sites. But there was one aspect of the operation that is constantly downplayed, he said, in conclusion. “What is not often mentioned in the history books is the fact that,

at the manor, there was considerable training of assassins.”

Ian Nash

Hertford Conservation Area Appraisal

Far-reaching measures to protect and enhance the best of historic Hertford and improve the environment were spelled out by John Bosworth, a conservation specialist working with East Herts Council, at the April meeting of Hertford Civic Society in advance of public consultations this summer.

Bosworth, who had just completed a Conservation Area Appraisal, opened his talk by pointing to the pressure Hertford is facing from large buildings going up, making more urgent the need to retain buildings of quality and style and leaving terraces with windows and facades largely unspoilt. “In the District Council we have 42 Conservation Areas [in East Hertfordshire] and 4,000-5,000 listed buildings”, he said.

He described how Hertford Civic Society had been influential in getting conservation area appraisal underway. His team had now completed a 160-page document with illustrations, maps and other details towards a six-week public consultation exercise from 1 June at the Millbridge Rooms, with the report also available online and in libraries and council offices.

“We have done 20 of these Appraisals to date and the interaction between the councils, ourselves, societies such as yours and the public, while variable, has seen notable successes,” he said. Bishops Stortford proposals were enthusiastically embraced by the Town Council. They undertook recommendations and decisions and spent a lot of time and money. “I hope Hertford Town Council will be similarly engaged. We also had a great response from Buntingford Town Council who took quite a lot on board.

“We have a duty in law to undertake these Appraisals but I want to go far further than that as I do regard it as more than a box-ticking exercise. I want to involve the Council and general public, to make improvements rather fulfilling statutory obligations and walking away from it.”

Describing the law in relation to conservation areas and the need for planning permission to demolish buildings and walls above a certain size and also notify the District Council about work on trees, he said there was a lot of misunderstanding. “Many people think conservation protects and prevents development. That’s not the case; you can expect it to be of higher quality but it doesn’t prevent it.”

While households were permitted development rights, however, there was a morass of incomprehensible legislation. It gave householders the right to do work without planning permission; for example on chimneys, Welsh slates, roofing materials of their choice etc. They could remove windows and have a variety of whatever windows they like. “Nowhere is this more damaging than on a terrace of houses where you see modern slates and a whole range of personalised doors and clashing porches of various sizes,” he said.

There were many things the householder could do without the benefits of planning permission. “In Hertford lots of this work undertaken, mercifully, much good stuff has been spared. Yes, there has been a lot of damage but I have no hesitation in recommending that the District Council introduce Article 4 Directions which take away those permitted development rights and require a person to submit applications that require planning permission.”

The most significant thing his document does is to identify large numbers of buildings in Hertford that should be protected from demolition and

considered appropriate for additional protection. “There are chimneys, doors and windows, lovely architectural detail, high-quality and most unusual walls, lovely railings - all of which have been identified and should be protected. The appraisal identifies what’s good and should be saved and what is inappropriate. It’s not a box-ticking exercise. We look at the boundaries of the Conservation Area and review this. There is one significant change extending the Conservation Area in the easterly direction [further along Tamworth Road and Ware Road] and small areas, not significant ones, where it could be withdrawn,” he said.

“The question is whether it is an area of architecture or historic interest worthy of preservation. One thing above all else struck me, in addition to the visual, and that’s the manner in which some streets are overwhelmed by traffic and parked cars. You cannot tell people they cannot have cars and it’s a most intractable problem; there are crazy bits of parking on every corner, he said, singling out Nelson Street as a particular offender.

While it was an issue beyond the remit of his document, it was being addressed in the Town Strategic Plan. “That’s about the town centre; my document goes far wider.”

Pointing to the positive side of what Hertford has to offer he said there were a large number of good Listed buildings, including, quite unusually, a large number of relatively recent C20 Listed buildings such as County Hall and the Bluecoats development. “Overall there are 4-500 Listed buildings in Hertford. There are also extremely important open spaces and green fingers, acknowledged in this document as being in need of protection.”

There were many features the town should not turn its back on, he added. “Water features extend throughout the town and conservation area. These are environmental assets which

could potentially make a far greater environmental impact than they do at the moment.”

Unusually for a town like Hertford, there were terraced houses ranging from the mid-C19 through to streets as late as 1925-30. “With the passage of time in, say, 50 years people will identify these architectural qualities more than they do at the moment. There are literally hundreds of them that have been identified.”

The principal contribution of John Bosworth’s appraisal should be to save and protect the best in the environment. “There has been a pernicious nibbling away of the environment in the past and that will continue,” he said. “We should try to halt what has been happening and preserve the town for the future.”

This included some most unusual walls using kiln bricks at random to create attractive surfaces and these should be protected. In addition, “You have some very fine trees throughout the entirety of Hertford in parks, gardens, rear gardens and tree-lined streets.”

There was a downside to development in Hertford that required imaginative thinking to minimise impact; particularly “the anaconda Gascoyne Way winding through. What can we do about this? There are small pockets of verge where you might put trees. These currently are not a very attractive feature. Also, you have good shop fronts in one or two buildings but also discordant fascias that really shriek at one; nowhere is this more apparent than in Maidenhead Street,” he said.

“Elsewhere in the country there are authorities getting together with commercial arms of the town and drawing up proposals for enhancement.” Cambridge and Lincoln, for example, where there were district council decisions regarding shop fronts and fascias “and I would like to push this harder and have development controls in Hertford.”

“There are fine churchyards with exceptional tombs. But some are in an advanced state of decay and disrepair. I’m anxious that there is a comprehensive look at the sites.

“It won’t all be implemented tomorrow but I hope some of them will be and that the District Council will take a leaf out of Bishop Stortford’s book and push forward some of these things.”

He offered a range of suggestions on more sensitive use of modern utilities such as solar panels, creative thought on what to do with the remnants of the rail line in the western part of the town and more productive use of District Council grants for the protection of historic buildings. “I suggest getting a small terrace and drawing up proposals to get it back to its original design concept with the co-operation of residents over time to return that terrace to what it was as an example of that can be done.”

After John Bosworth’s talk, Councillor Peter Ruffles cautioned against making it sound as if the authorities were issuing a set of instructions. “Telling people isn’t the answer. Spend money subsequently (to any public consultation) to provide whatever education is needed to make sure things don’t go wrong.”

Bosworth replied that in the 20 consultations so far, “documents are carefully worded, spelling out that there are ‘opportunities to carefully consider’ for a better environment. Almost everywhere there was overwhelming support for it. Only a sprinkling of people spoke of their rights being taken away.”

Ian Nash

Appraisal documents for Hertford and other Conservation Areas in East Herts are available at <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/conservationareas>

OUR RESPONSE TO THE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Following the public consultation, the Society has welcomed the Appraisal and congratulated John Bosworth on his very detailed work. If we are to preserve the best of Hertford's natural and built environment, it is important that all parties - residents, owners, architects, builders and planners - are well-informed about, understand and respect the character of our town.

We welcome the suggestion that Article 4 Directions should be used to restrict undesirable development, but recognise that this is not a blanket solution and is a power that must be exercised sensitively. Over-riding the rights of home owners to alter their property (by installing modern windows or solar panels, for example) is controversial, especially where the desire to preserve visual quality conflicts with other important aims, such as energy conservation. Moreover, the Hertford Conservation Area is unusually extensive and it would be difficult, if not prohibitively expensive, to enforce broad brush Directions on so large a scale. In addition, such restrictions could not be imposed retrospectively and it would be seen as inequitable to impose them on homeowners whose neighbours had already installed their new windows or other features.

Therefore, as well as using legal powers where necessary, it is important that enhancing the Conservation Area wins public support. This might be done by persuading small groups of residents in particular terraces to work together on pilot schemes to restore their properties and show what can be achieved as an inspiration to others, and where properties are under local authority control, they should set an example by maintaining them to an appropriate standard. It would also be important to work with residents where Neighbourhood Plans are under development. Careful, on-going monitoring is

needed and we would recommend that East Herts Council set up a working group.

As well as these general principles, the Review makes some specific recommendations, many of which we support. In particular,

- We support extending the Conservation Area further east along Tamworth Road and Ware Road
- The town centre is not wholly within the Conservation Area but is the subject of a separate Town Centre Strategy. Paving could be enhanced, for example, and there could be greater control over shop fascias, particularly in Maidenhead Street
- Despite the importance of maintaining open space, land at County Hall could be considered for housing in preference to edge of town development
- The open space at Mill Bridge needs greater care and attention
- Leahoe House should be repaired or demolished
- The situation regarding the old school buildings in Dimsdale Street should be clarified and action taken
- We agree that some small areas, such as that around Stag House, could be removed from the Conservation Area, but removing land off Mangrove Road could endanger the Green Finger in Hagsdell valley and should be reconsidered or other measures, such as tree preservation orders applied
- The allotments on Folly Island should be preserved and not used for car parking, despite the very great pressure for parking space.

This is a summary of our full response, which will be available on our website www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk