



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2017

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 26 April 2017 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 20 April 2016
2. Report of the Committee for 2016
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 pp6-7 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 Chairman, Terry Betts, 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 the 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 is concluded, followed by Kevin Fitzgerald'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

Spring is here, so it's **AGM** time once again. This takes place on Wednesday 26 April, with the main part of the evening's event devoted to a lecture by the very active head (Honorary Director) of the Hertfordshire branch of the CPRE, which stands for Campaign to Protect Rural England. Kevin Fitzgerald's theme is 'What is the future for Hertfordshire's countryside?' What's happening across our county and in our district? What can we do about it? In helping us to think through these questions, Kevin will be able to draw on perspectives broader than our own. What's going on across England, as government-sponsored development plans are steadily finalised?

Coach outing

Soon after that, we have our annual coach outing to look forward to, on Wednesday 17 May. This time it's to the Stour Valley in Essex: Harwich, Dedham and Dedham Vale Winery.

This day trip focuses on three different aspects:

- First, in the morning, we will be visiting historic, maritime Harwich, which is at the river mouth, and is quite separate from the modern ferry port. We will have a guided tour of all sorts of quirky buildings, including a unique C17th crane and one of the earliest cinemas anywhere. (Anyone not fancying an 80 minute walking tour could instead visit the Redoubt, a fascinating Napoleonic-era fort and museum, complete with some of its historic armament.)
- Then we will head a short way upstream to Dedham, "easily the most attractive small town in Essex" (Pevsner), where the artist John Constable lived and painted. We will have time for lunch and a chance to see one of the finest East Anglian churches.
- Finally, on our way back, we will be calling in at Dedham Vale Winery, a lovely place for a tea break even if you are completely uninterested in one of the oldest English vineyards and its bottles of wine (hard to resist?)

The cost this year works out at £25. That includes the coach and the walking tour of Harwich (or alternatively the cost of entry to the Redoubt). A booking sheet/envelope will be available in Peter and Susan Brown's shop in St Andrew Street from late April, or, more immediately, please contact Malcolm Ramsay, whose contact details are given elsewhere in this newsletter (see p6). As ever, we leave Hertford in our coach from alongside Hertford East or Tesco at 8.45am, and reckon to return by around 6.30pm. Not many places are left.

Rest of the year

Plenty more still to come, including the blue plaques walking tour on the evening of Wednesday 2 August, but details of this and other events will be covered in the next newsletter.

Malcolm Ramsay

PLANNING MATTERS

Bengeo Quarry

As you will have seen in the Press, the County Council have refused to grant permission for the proposed quarry north of Bengeo. Before going to Committee the application was revised to reduce the volume of material to be extracted and to modify the final landform. We welcomed those changes, but reiterated our objections on the grounds that part of the quarry would have been outside the area designated in the County's Minerals Local Plan, and that there is no current need for more gravel now that permission has been granted for a much larger quarry just west of Hatfield. If permission had also been granted at Bengeo there would have been a real danger that work would have begun, but then have proceeded very slowly owing to lack of market demand, creating an eyesore lasting for many years.

The County officers produced a detailed report with a strong recommendation for refusal, based not only on those factors, but also on the concerns about pollution of the aquifer and air quality about which the Stop the Quarry Campaign lobbied so forcefully. In the end the Committee's decision to refuse permission was unanimous.

Retirement Community

Despite requests from the Town Council and ourselves that the appeal against this proposal should be determined at a Public Inquiry rather than by written representations, the Inspectorate declined to change the procedure.

Our submission to the Inspector emphasised the fact that the site (the former brickfields beyond Hertford Town FC) is part of one of the important 'green fingers' which follow the river valleys and allow the countryside to penetrate almost to the centre of the town. It is also in the Green Belt, where national and local planning policy says that new buildings are not appropriate unless they replace existing buildings and would not have a greater impact on openness than the buildings replaced. The site does contain traces of buildings associated with its previous use for brick-making but we submitted that the proposed care home and residential blocks would undeniably have a greater impact on openness than those residual surviving features. We reminded the Inspector that Ministers have repeatedly made it clear that, no matter how strong the need for more housing, such need alone does not amount to the very special circumstances necessary to override Green Belt policy.

Regrettably, it seems almost inevitable that some Green Belt land around Hertford will have to be released in order to meet the ever-growing housing needs of the District, but that makes it all the more important that choices about the future of the Green Belt are part of an overall strategy, and not pre-judged by decisions on individual planning applications. At the time of writing (22 March) the Inspector had visited the site but the decision had not yet been issued.

Las Vegas, 26 Maidenhead Street

A new shop front was proposed, including bi-fold doors extending to pavement level. The site is in the conservation area, of which the Council only recently published a fresh appraisal. The appraisal document highlights the way in which inappropriate shopfronts have been allowed to erode the quality of Maidenhead Street, and the importance of seeking improvements whenever the opportunity arises. We objected to this application because the installation of the new

doors would have led to the removal of the existing stall riser (the solid panel between the glazed area and the street) which extends in the same form and material across the adjacent building to The Wash; the stall riser is an integral part of the façade of this corner building, which complements and reflects - without exactly replicating - that of the building on the opposite corner of Maidenhead Street. The application was refused.

The Bridge House, North Road

This pub has been closed for some time. The current owners, a firm of housing developers, applied for a certificate that, under permitted development rules, they are entitled to use the site for retail purposes. We pointed out that the relevant section of the Order which sets out the rules applies to a building only, not its site or curtilage, and does not permit any development which involves the demolition of a building. Yet the map accompanying the application showed the land in question as an empty site comprising the footprint of the building and the whole of its curtilage. We were pleased that, when granting the certificate, the Council limited it by attaching a revised plan showing the building only.

The parking area at the Bridge House was far larger than would have been needed to serve the pub, and before the pub closed part of it was used as a car park for commuters, rather than by patrons of the pub. As the North Station car park is not large enough, more commuter parking is needed in this location and it would be desirable for any redevelopment of the site to include provision for it; if the Council were able to show that part of the land had, and retains, a lawful use for that purpose it could strengthen their hand when negotiating with any future developer.

9 The Avenue, Bengoe

This is an application for a single house, but the site is subject to a Tree Preservation Order, within a conservation area, and on the edge of the Green Belt and one of Hertford's Green Fingers. Set on the crest of a ridge, it is conspicuous from the Green Belt/Green Finger land to the west. The application includes detailed measures designed to minimise the number of trees affected and protect those that would remain, but the success of these measures would be heavily dependent on adherence to precisely specified working practices and intensive monitoring by professional experts. Although we do not doubt the intentions of the applicant and his advisors, we came to the view that there is a real risk of harm to trees on and around the site, which would further damage the integrity of this swathe of woodland along the escarpment. We therefore urged the Council to follow the precautionary principle and refuse permission, which they did.

31 Chambers Street

A proposal for a new building comprising nine flats was previously refused on design and parking grounds. We objected to that proposal because the primary elevation of the new building, to Port Hill, would have been to the same eaves-height as its mid-nineteenth century neighbour, but would have had three storeys rather than two. A fresh application, which modifies the part of the proposed building next to Chambers Street, has now been submitted; however the elevation to Port Hill is substantially unchanged. The design results in an uneasy and contrived relationship between the buildings which does nothing to preserve or enhance the appearance of this part of the conservation area. Our objection will therefore be renewed.

Peter Norman

Hertford Heritage Trail - Blue Plaques

Since the last Newsletter the remaining plaques have been delivered to the Castle and the working group members have contacted property owners again alerting them to the imminent installation of the plaques. Meanwhile three competitive tenders have been obtained for the work based on a specification drawn up by Society members. An order has now been placed with Pymont Build Ltd of Ware and it is expected that the plaques will be installed in the first two weeks of April. The work will be inspected and approved by Richard Threlfall acting on behalf of the Town Council.

The Council is in the process of completing the leaflet to accompany the trail which will provide a route map and some further information on each plaque site. The Council is also arranging for a press launch on the evening of Wednesday 3rd May and a public launch on Sunday 7th May as part of a planned event at the Castle. The Society will have its own launch in August when there will be a walking tour.

The Society thanks the working group members for their efforts in identifying and contacting property owners; they are Patsy Bamford, Sally Paque, Judith Fawcett, Veronica Fraser, Tom Busby, Stephen Porter, Malcolm Ramsay, David Hunt, David Kirby and Richard Threlfall.

Andrew Sangster

National Trust Pass

Paid up members of Civic Societies can now benefit from an arrangement with the National Trust. You need to go to the Civic Voice website, download a request form, complete it by hand, post it back to Civic Voice with a SAE, and you will receive in return the free day pass. The link is

<http://civicvoice.org.uk/resources/national-trust-passes-request-form>

AGM PAPERS

Minutes of the AGM held on April 20, 2016

Apologies: Dorothy Abel-Smith, Terry Betts, Anne Miles, Sally Paque, Sheila Pettman, Annette Robinson, Diana Wilkinson

In the absence of Terry Betts, the meeting was chaired by Malcolm Ramsay. Thirty-seven members of the Society were present.

Reports: The Reports from the Committee and the Treasurer, and the Accounts, were received and there were no matters arising.

Election of Officers and the Committee: The Officers and Committee were re-elected unopposed.

Chair - Terry Betts

Vice-Chair - Malcolm Ramsay

Treasurer - John Bevan

Other Members of the Committee - Hilary Durbin, Sue Jones, Peter Norman, Andrew Sangster, Richard Threlfall.

Membership Secretary - Annette Robinson (not on the Committee)

The Vice-Chair issued a general invitation to Society members to consider joining the Committee; none did so.

AOB: *Gravel digging at Bengeo* - There is widespread concern about plans to dig gravel in Bengeo close to houses and the primary school. Although part of the area in question is included in Hertfordshire County Council's Mineral Plan, it may be possible to mitigate the effects of digging on noise, dust in the atmosphere and traffic movement. Councillor Peter Ruffles reported that he had received a number of representations on this subject, some of them in favour of the digging. A working group, chaired by Peter Norman and including John Bevan and Andrew Sangster, was set up to respond to HCC and members of the Society were invited to

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volunteer. The AGM concluded with a song protesting against the gravel digging composed and performed by Harold Chaplin, who accompanied himself on the guitar.

Following the AGM, members heard a talk on the Hertford Conservation Area Appraisal by John Bosworth, a conservation specialist working with East Herts Council.

Report of the Committee for 2016

For yet another year the future of Bircherley Green was clouded in uncertainty. At the time of the previous annual review Waitrose had said that redevelopment proposals - specifically designed to accommodate them - would not meet their needs. A planning application for a food superstore for Waitrose at Great Amwell, included with a scheme for improvements to the Van Hage garden centre complex, remained undetermined. In the event the Great Amwell proposals were withdrawn. The predicted submission of a revised scheme at Great Amwell did not materialise and eventually Waitrose decided to include their Hertford store in a country wide list of closures. Meanwhile in November, the developer Wrenbridge had sent to the Society and others, a leaflet illustrating a new scheme omitting a food store altogether. Although a very short period was offered for return of comments Society members were consulted and a response was sent to Wrenbridge listing the issues raised. Very similar proposals (featuring a new hotel, retention of the bus station, together with residential and non-food retail units) are now the subject of a planning application awaiting decision by East Herts Council. Comments have been submitted on behalf of the Society.

It is possible that there may be revisions (probably limited) to these proposals.

The presentation by John Bosworth titled "Hertford Conservation Area Appraisal" (given following the formal business of the 2016 AGM) was the precursor to the publication of a very thorough report about the town's extensive Conservation Area. The report examined the conservation value of building groups in areas adjacent to and within the existing designated area. Some refinements of the boundaries were proposed (small extensions to the defined area and limited deletions from that area). Members of the Committee attended the public meeting and exhibition in the Seed Warehouse and subsequently formulated detailed comments on the report. The Council has now adopted the recommendations.

Following five years when it was not considered that there were sufficient candidates for consideration the Hertford Civic Society Awards process was run again in 2016. At the Awards Ceremony held in the Castle, the winners were announced. Calton Court retirement homes for couples and singles (corner of Windsor Drive, Sele Farm) was singled out for an Award and Beeson's Yard residential development over shops (corner of Railway Street and Priory Street) was Highly Commended. Commendations were also given to two five-bedroomed houses at 65 and 67 North Road, the extension and refurbishment of the Six Templars pub in the Wash, the St Andrew's Centre, and extension and refurbishment of 5 Hagsdell Road. The Committee thanks the Civic Awards Panel chaired by Jan Goodeve and Richard Threlfall for acting as Convenor.

2016 events concerning strategic forward planning for our town, East Hertfordshire District and the wider county were far from reassuring. The County Council held a consultation as part of a continuing process of evolving "Transport Vision 2050" the most controversial feature of which is the revival of the idea of building a Hertford Southern By-pass.

Despite the continuing deterioration of air quality along the "A414 corridor" through Hertford (defined as for some years now as an Air Quality Management Area) a new By-Pass, considered undesirable by many, would not be starting construction possibly for a decade. The Society submitted a robust response to the consultation on the "Vision".

Comprehensive objections and representations relating to the draft East Herts District Plan were submitted by the Society in 2014. When the much- delayed Pre-Submission version of the Plan finally saw the light of day in October 2016 the East Herts Council clearly felt that it had no alternative but to brush such objections aside in view of the pressures to identify sites for house building that are perceived to be needed. To justify this the Council chooses to adopt an interpretation of the National Planning Policy Framework in which pre-existing Green Belt designation is only one factor "taken in the round" in adopting a "balanced view" of how development needs are best accommodated. Consequently, Green Belt alterations and new housing sites to the west and north of Hertford remain unchanged from what was originally put forward in 2014.

Although the opportunity to submit objections to the Pre-Submission Plan was taken up enthusiastically by the Society, it

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*Hertford Civic Society is a registered charity
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was very disappointing to discover that these objections were simply tabulated by the Council and passed on to the Inspector charged with the task of deciding whether or not the Plan is “sound”. The “submission” was due to be delivered to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol at the end of March 2017. It is hoped that an Inspector will hold an Examination in Public later in 2017.

Since journeys to and from work by County Council and East Herts Council employees add significantly to congestion on the A414, we have lobbied Councillors about measures that might be taken to reduce the number of peak hour staff journeys made by car including extension and promotion of car sharing.

The number of children at the primary element of the “Through School” on the Simon Balle site is building up over a seven-year period. At the time when planning permission was sought for the new school outright opposition was unrealistic. Instead the Society decided to seek improvements to pedestrian facilities to encourage walking to school. Despite holding site meetings with Councillors and writing many chasing emails progress is painfully slow.

For some while the Society had been working towards implementation of a scheme whereby plaques are erected on buildings around the town highlighting former uses or associations with individuals famous in various walks of life (similar to the familiar blue plaques seen in London). During 2016 this project was given impetus by a request to the Society from the Town Council to provide the organisation and manpower to set up a Heritage Trail with many more plaques than previously planned. Funding is being provided by the Council instead of by the Society. 2016 saw much of the spade work completed by a team of volunteer members working with Andrew Sangster. The Committee thanks Andrew for bringing this endeavour to completion.

We continue to examine all planning applications within and adjacent to the town and where felt to be appropriate objections and comments are sent to East Herts Council or (for minerals and waste applications and schools etc.) the County Council. In collaboration with the “Stop the Quarry” campaign carefully considered objections were made to the original gravel extraction proposal at Bengo and to the subsequent amendments. The Quarry proposal is now mercifully refused. Successive versions of the Mimram Retirement Village have also been consistently opposed in the name of the Society primarily on grounds of Green Belt policy.

Details of objections and observations on planning applications are summarised in our Newsletters. Thank you to Peter Norman who takes the lead in this part of our work.

Over the year the usual programme of talks and visits attracted the interest and support of members of the Society. Particular thanks are due to Malcolm Ramsay in this connection. We hope that members who attend the talks gain benefit from the setting up of our new public address system. Comprehensive write-ups of the elements of this programme are to be found in the Newsletters.

Members often comment favourably on the quality of our Newsletter ably edited by Sue Jones and distributed by Hilary Anderson and her team.

Terry Betts, on behalf of the Committee

Treasurer’s Report for 2016

The overall financial picture remains good, with the relatively small annual deficit (Civic Awards aside) similar to last year. The deficit was funded by withdrawing cash from the Charities Deposit Fund, the balance of which continues to decline each year, although it remains substantial.

Whilst members' subscription income dropped by only 3%, other income reduced by a third, primarily Gift Aid Recovery due to the shorter period of the claim made. Subscription rates were again held constant. Total income was therefore 12% down on the year. No garden party was held in 2016.

Fewer newsletters were published in 2016, which together with a change in printer, and a reduction in postage due to the greater use of email, meant that costs were almost halved. Savings in other areas were offset by the 2016 Civic Awards Presentations - our first since 2011. Depreciation and the value of the Society's assets rose due to the purchase of a new Public Address system.

John Bevan

The Accounts are presented on pp10-11.

PREVIOUS TALKS TO MEMBERS

The Civic Movement in the Future

Civic Voice Awards for excellent contributions to the local environment should become the national kitemark to raise standards for design that rank alongside the Royal Institute of British Architects' Stirling Prize for Architecture.

The claim for such Awards, epitomised by Hertford Civic Society Awards scheme, was made by Joan Humble, chair of Civic Voice, in a talk on The Future of the Civic Movement at the HCS meeting in February. "We want to make it as famous as the Stirling Prize," she said. "We want it to be the best."

Civic Voice, which has 76,000 members through its constituent civic societies and trusts, is celebrating 50 years of conservation since the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 triggered a range of positive reforms and regulations to protect the environment from over-development.

The impact of local communities through their societies on design, often winning awards, was considerable, she said, citing the Alder Hey hospital, the design of which was influenced by drawings by 15-year-olds, and the motorway service station near Gloucester that involved the community in its design. Knowle Society won the Queens Award medal for work in the community and has 3,000 members.

Design awards were often primarily about architecture, she said, but Civic Voice wanted more community-led design awards involving greater community participation, giving a steer to local leadership and promoting a more innovative approach to quality design.

The philosophy of Civic Voice, Humble said, is "caring about the place you live in, caring about the people in that place and working to improve it for everybody." It had clout as a national organisation through the collective strength of its member organisations. "Civic Voice is about drawing together civic trusts and societies so you can speak more loudly to government."

The Civic Voice manifesto, *Better Together*, for the 2015 General Election, was drafted in consultation with member organisations and pointed to the unacceptable lack of power of many local authorities to influence developments in their own areas. "Greater strength was required to protect places you live in from excessive or inappropriate development and give power to local people and local authorities to gain legal protection through assets of community value. We have influenced policy and achieved some of this."

People in positions of power increasingly acknowledged the importance of the Civic Movement. Prince Charles said recently: "Nowhere should be without its Civic Society and no-one should be without the voice you can provide."

(cont. p12)

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2016

	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>
<u>Income</u>		
Subscriptions and Donations	1,798	1,853
Surplus or (Deficit) on Social Activities		
Coach Visit	20	193
Garden Party	-	20 (133)
	-----	-----
Sales of Publications	22	124
Interest on Deposit Account	383	416
Recovery of Gift Aid Tax	317	449
	-----	-----
	2,540	2,902
<u>Less Society Expenses</u>		
Newsletter	495	958
General Meetings & Lectures	132	256
Public Liability Insurance	334	308
Maintenance of Society Equipment	-	84
Depreciation of Society Equipment	139	40
Other Expenses	152	294
Subscriptions and Donations	483	429
Civic Activities		
Salisbury Square Fountain	1,414	1,084
Civic Award Presentations	1,045	-
Blue Plaque Trail	-	82
	-----	-----
	4,194	3,535
Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	(1,654)	(633)
	=====	=====

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2016

	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>	
SOCIETY EQUIPMENT,			
At cost	1,397	733	
Less Depreciation	792	653	
	-----	-----	
	605	80	
CURRENT ASSETS			
Sundry Debtors & Prepayments	385	10	-
Cash at Bank, in Charities Deposit Fund and in Hand	89,602	92,166	280
	-----	-----	
	89,987	92,176	-----
			100,247
Less CURRENT LIABILITIES			100,627
Sundry Creditors	205	89,782	215
	-----	-----	91,961

NET ASSETS			-
	90,387	92,041	
	=====	=====	
ACCUMULATED FUND			
Balance as at 1st January 2015	92,041	92,674	
Less Surplus (Deficit) for the Year	(1,654)	(633)	
	-----	-----	
MEMBERS' FUNDS, as above	90,387	92,041	
	=====	=====	

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

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

T.A.Busby

This crucial role was further underlined by the creation of the All-party Parliamentary Group for Civic Societies, which drew substantially on the expertise of Civic Voice.

There was also evidence that Civic Voice had helped encourage the growth of new civic societies which now had influence in almost two-thirds (60%) of local authority areas, she said, dealing with everything from street clutter and creation of town trails to mounting commemorative blue plaques and promoting conservation areas and design awards. When Civic Voice was set up, she said, Yorkshire pressed for the third Saturday in June to be designated Civic Day, Malvern set aside a whole week, involving poetry reading, art shows and everything possible to promote conservation issues.

Pressure from Civic Voice also led to £5m in Libor fines being set aside for renovation of damaged war memorials in preparation for the celebration of the centenary of Armistice Day. “We conducted surveys to map where memorials are. They were in stained glass windows in churches and in schools. It’s not just the thing itself but the names on them. They are people who died for us and their loved ones. When schools are remodelled or churches knocked down, the war memorials disappear. We found 220 in Blackpool alone.”

Three areas of particular concern addressed in her talk were the recruitment of younger people to civic societies, the extent to which commercial rates were driving more shops from the high streets and the need for civic societies to help councils under pressure from spending cuts to fight inappropriate development.

With regard to recruitment, Humble was not unduly concerned at the aging profile. It was hard to get the message into schools, she said, given the increasingly inflexible curriculum and difficulty getting into schools; also, working age

people were often unavailable at appropriate times. “But I’m perfectly happy with retired people coming in; they are a lot more energetic than 20 years ago. I’m not one of those who say you must get out there and gather in 20, 30 and 40-year-olds. You have more time available.”

That said, in her experience, the best way to attract younger people was by engaging them in projects and getting photo publicity in the press. In her area of Blackpool, the Civic Society stepped in when council cuts threatened the renovation of shoreline protection shelters and carried out volunteer work in hi-vis jackets displaying the civic society name. Other newsworthy and attractive projects included Blackpool tram stop restoration and the clearing of plaster from old tiles during refurbishment of the Imperial Hotel.

Problems associated with commercial rate hikes driving local shops from the high street were raised during questions from the floor at the meeting. A highly innovative response was needed, she said. “We all need to make sure that what is available in the high streets is of high quality and that you as a society make sure shop fronts still look reasonable and make sure planning rules don’t get in the way. If there are too few shops, you have to look at alternative usage.”

This brought her on to the need for societies to assist councils under pressure from cuts in planning and heritage staff “to work with them as heritage champions”. If you have no conservation officers, how do you influence the councillors who are not experts? Civic Societies offer something they can work with. So, in her appeal to all civic societies, in the 50th anniversary year of the Act, she called on them to advise councils on such issues so they are not acting on decisions with inadequate information.

Ian Nash