



# NEWSLETTER

## *Spring 2022*

Welcome to the Spring 2022 Newsletter. Due to the ongoing Covid situation and to help keep people safe, we have moved many of our activities, such as talks to members, online and have not issued printed newsletters for a while. Instead, we have a sub-group of the Committee developing improvements to the website so that you can keep up to date with the Society's activities and the issues we are pursuing, so visit [www.hertfordcivicsociety.org](http://www.hertfordcivicsociety.org) to keep informed.

### CONTENTS

Planning Report	p1
Town Centre Group	p2
'Confluence' - the fountain in Salisbury Square	p3
Eco-Events 2021	p3
<i>Talks via Zoom:</i>	
Hertford and Slavery	p4
Hertford Theatre Re-design	p4
Hartham Playground Re-launch	p5
Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust	p6
Committee Members and Contacts	p7

### PLANNING REPORT - WINTER 2021/2

In recent years changes were made to planning legislation to enable conversion of offices and retail premises to residential use. In many cases this is a sensible reassignment because high streets are shrinking as on-line shopping increases and more people are working from home. However, there have been two applications, Expo House and Collier House both in Mead Lane, where it was proposed to convert offices forming part of a commercial/industrial operation to form apartments. The Society, along with the Town Council and others, objected because in both cases it would have resulted in sub-standard accommodation; each application has been refused. As a policy, we have continued to oppose applications where in our view the proposals would be damaging to the character of the

Conservation Area. Two involved building houses in existing gardens, No.17 Highfield Road was refused for a second time and No.82<sup>A</sup> Ware Road was first withdrawn but a second revised application is awaiting decision. However, demolition and replacement of 5<sup>A</sup> The Avenue has received approval although in our view the proposal represents a gross over-development of the site. Another proposal we thought damaging to the Conservation Area, a single storey building including a swimming pool and basement car park in the former kitchen garden of 15 West Street, received approval subject to conditions. One forbids the letting or sale as a separate building, a suggestion we had made in our submission.

Last Spring we submitted a supplementary comment on the application to develop the former Christ's Hospital sports ground to the west of Mangrove Road. We noted that the attenuation pond for the surface water discharge from the site could have been incorporated within the main housing area if the original number of units had not been increased by some 35%, instead of in the undeveloped area within the Green Belt. If the layout could not be changed, we suggested some mitigation measures to reduce the visual impact.

The long-running saga of the redevelopment of the former Gates site on Gascoyne Way nears resolution. Two separate proposals from different applicants for retirement homes had been refused, principally on the grounds of loss of employment land. A third proposal for retaining the existing showroom and workshops for change of use coupled with the building of seven townhouses has recently received approval. However, at the behest of County Highways, the showroom cannot be converted to retail or services use owing to traffic and parking considerations so it will be limited to reuse as office accommodation, not very helpful when

there is already a surfeit of such space in the town.

Within the town centre we objected to the addition of a second storey and roof garden on No.8 Parliament Square (refused) and the redevelopment of the Kwik Fit site at No.138 Fore Street (awaiting decision). The big threat to the Green Belt came in the form of an application for outline consent to build a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Hertingfordbury Park. We objected on grounds that the applicant had not demonstrated very special circumstances allowing development in the Green Belt as required under the National Planning Policy Framework, and we endorsed the detailed objections from the Hertingfordbury residents.

Full details of the Society's submissions on recent planning applications can be found on the website.

Andrew Sangster

### TOWN CENTRE GROUP

A few of the committee have formed a sub-group to consider how the centre of the town is faring post pandemic and how activities of the Civic Society can support its revival. East Herts District Council and the Town Council have engaged consultants People and Places to survey residents and businesses for their perceived priorities. The purpose of the exercise appears mainly to be establishing a "partnership" that will form the basis for Covid 19 recovery grant applications from central government. In the meantime, the Civic Society continues to identify opportunities for investment in the town and welcomes suggestions from members that may feed into this process. We will of course keep members informed of further information about the instrument proposed by the consultants as details emerge.

Milena Nuti

### ‘CONFLUENCE’ - THE FOUNTAIN IN SALISBURY SQUARE

The Fountain was inaugurated in November 26 years ago after several years of discussion, preparation and testing. Designed by William Pye, an internationally admired sculptor, since 1994 it has entertained Townsfolk and Visitors despite several testing challenges - jars of foaming cleaner, source for washing vegetables and children, strength test for drunks and many more - including racking for four bicycles.

The maintenance team has replaced pumps and learned to deal with public safety matters - but not the hard-water scale deposited on the frame and deck or the general rubbish thrown into the bowl. The underwater lighting system has not stood the challenge of time.

After this long run-time a service is to be carried out to inspect and refurbish the equipment hidden under the deck. For this operation the fountain will be enclosed by a mesh screen to provide some security for working and overhauling the water supply and electrical equipment. It is planned for the disruption to last for three weeks.

Richard Threlfall

### ECO-EVENTS AUTUMN 2021

As climate change creeps up on us, what are we to do? We can't ignore it, but how should we each respond, as individuals, or in our neighbourhoods? In Hertford, in the autumn of 2021, there was a sequence of well-attended eco-events or eco-fairs, which all tried to make suggestions. All Saints church organised the first of these (11 September). Later that month, on 25 September, another organisation, Hertford and our Changing Climate (or HACC for short), hosted the next one, partly at/outside the Friends Meeting House, and partly alongside market stalls in the centre of town. Finally, in November, Hertfordshire County

Council organised “the first ever sustainable Hertfordshire Eco-Fair”, in and around County Hall. Civic Society members were alerted to all three events (emails from Terry Betts).

All the events involved stalls and talks, together with varied attractions such as poetry readings (All Saints), an appearance by the Town Cryer (HACC) and the chance to taste local beers (County Council).

HACC asked Hertford Civic Society to take part in their event, and we duly agreed: it was a time when the pandemic seemed to be fading. Sue Jones and Malcolm Ramsay were allocated a small table alongside HACC's larger travel stall: they talked with a steady flow of visitors, including some Civic Society members, and offered a one-page handout detailing the Civic Society's transport initiatives. To recap, they were:

- The 1990s feasibility study of cycle routes, which led to the creation of the now-popular cyclist/pedestrian route alongside the River Lea, between Hertford and Ware.
- Our more recent support for an east-west tramway across Hertfordshire, as championed by Civic Society member Reg Harman.
- Our opposition, in 2019, to a planned Hertford bypass, as articulated at a very well-attended public meeting, which we organised.

One of the HACC stalwarts on their travel stall was Vicky Glover-Ward, who happens to be the Chair of the Kingsmead Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (Kingsmead is the part of Hertford east of Tesco, through to the A10 and Rush Green). She briefed visitors on the Plan, well advanced even in September 2021. The ‘vision statement’ in the draft final version (under public consultation through to 11 February 2022, from Hertford Town Council) consists of three paragraphs, the last of which is focused on sustainable travel:

*To promote alternative methods to vehicular transport within and across Kingsmead coupled with local services to reduce car journeys thereby reducing traffic intensity, improving air quality and promoting a healthy lifestyle for residents.*

As a reflection of changing attitudes and priorities, this element of the Kingsmead Neighbourhood Plan at least matches and probably surpasses the other two such plans completed for different parts of Hertford (Sele and Bengoe) in recent years.

We need to try and find ways of promoting sustainability at all levels of society: as individuals; in our neighbourhoods; for Hertford, and then beyond the town. And roll on the tramway (as we hope it might be, though there is also a Mass Rapid Transit bus option) for which Hertfordshire County Council published initial plans, by way of public consultation, in January 2022.

Malcolm Ramsay

## TALKS TO HCS MEMBERS during 2021 via ZOOM

Recordings of talks to members are available on our website. Links can be found on the front page or on the Events page. Here is a selection of summaries of some of the talks given this year.

### **Hertford and Slavery - Clare Gittings**

Many people would be appalled to discover the depths of Hertford's involvement in the slave trade of the not-so-distant past. A typical case involved a mixed-race boy known as Howard, sold on several times, not on the far shores of West Africa or the Caribbean but in Hertfordshire's County town. Black Africans were snatched from their families, enslaved and given European names - stripping them of their African identity.

The extent to which Hertfordshire was involved in the slave trade was tellingly revealed by historian Clare Gittings in a Zoom presentation to Hertford Civic Society in February. Her close analysis of the latest research showed "shocking evidence" of slaves, even children, sold on. Slavery not only provided forced labour for colonial plantations in the West Indies but also a servant class for estates and great homes and gardens of this county.

Much of the detail comes from parish records and evidence of compensation claims after two Acts of Parliament outlawed the trade (1807) then abolished slave owning (1833). Nationally, compensation to 47,000 people, including 3,000 big slave-owners, reached £20m [around £1.8bn today] and was not finally paid-off by the taxpayer until 2015.

Slave-owning in Hertfordshire was linked closely to bankers who had their country estates here, given the ease of access to London, research for the UCL Legacy and Slavery Project and Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies (HALS) shows. And, just as abolitionists like William Wilberforce changed C19th attitudes to slavery, Clare Gittings said, so this research must help change our attitudes in the C21st. Quoting Wilberforce, she said: "You can choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you don't know". Likewise, today: "After HALS and UCL research you can't say you don't know. Hertfordshire was deeply involved in slavery."

### **Hertford Theatre redesign - Alastair Bogle (Bennetts architects), Rhys Thomas EHC, Tamara Jarvis EHC, and Julian Bullen, theatre director**

Hertford Theatre will be much more than a centre for the performing arts and cinema after the £20m revamp, says Alastair Bogle, an associate at Bennetts architects who are undertaking the work. It will be a cultural hub between the town and

castle grounds, opening people's eyes to a rich history that surrounds the theatre.

The revamp includes a thorough redesign of the main auditorium to give it a more intimate feel, a balcony and more seating - up from 415 to 550 - while creating space for larger productions. It will also include three new cinema screens, a foyer, café bar and new studios for smaller acts and performances, with an emphasis on community involvement. The new theatre will be on two levels with views out onto the River Lea from both.

There will also be new flexible theatre space and two community rooms, including space for creative activity. "Cultural buildings of this nature can give genuinely creative and beneficial activity," he said. There will be emphasis on every aspect of community life in the new theatre. "This includes community space and community rooms with strong ties to local businesses."

A big concern expressed by Civic Society members at the meeting was over the question of transport in an already congested environment. Julian Bullen, project manager for East Herts District Council, said considerable steps were being taken towards a "co-ordinated transport plan with buses and rail 1km or less from theatre," and cycling would be encouraged.

Sustainability was also a key issue. Therefore, as much of the existing building as possible will be retained, reusing as much material as much as possible with hybrid concrete or CLT (cross-laminated timber) used in addition to the brick. "It will be an intelligent building to drive down energy use," Alastair Bogle said.

East Herts Council has approved the plans and construction work was due to start by the autumn but has been delayed during the pandemic. Information will be posted on the HCS website as it becomes available.

### **Hartham Playground Relaunch - Rob Allwood, Leisure & Parks Development Officer at East Herts District Council and Jodi Bayliss, parent**

Shrill laughter and cries of delight are heard echoing around Hartham common in all weathers from children playing in the sandpit, mounting swings and facing the challenge of wood-and-rope climbing frames. Everyone agrees the transformation of the children's playground is a remarkable achievement on so many levels.

Something had to be done to enliven the lacklustre poorly-attended play area, according to Rob Allwood, Leisure & Parks Development Officer at East Herts District Council. "It was an unimaginative play area, drab and past its best," he said.

The impetus for change came from three mums who campaigned and created Hertford Playground Alliance. Jodi Bayliss, their spokesperson, summed-up the problem from their standpoint. There were places where "children were stumbling and falling," she said. The paths were "unworkable for people with wheelchairs and buggies" and "older children rapidly became bored."

Social messaging and crowd-funding by the Alliance raised £33,000 in 42 days, with local brewery McMullen's contributing £5,000. Momentum was sustained through a Facebook support group of 1,200 Hertford residents and a YouTube presentation of kids with placards appealing for help "Dig deep and donate" "Let's make it happen". The Alliance had also lobbied the council. "We had (Councillor) Peter Ruffles supporting us from the start to get a foot in the door," said Jodi.

Peter Ruffles described the playground renewal as "an example of joint action. The Council had a plan but it was not until energy began to arrive

with Jodi and the Alliance that things started moving.” The Council and Alliance then worked jointly with the community charity Groundwork to redesign the area. Other businesses, including Tarmac, added their support in the process.

Every opportunity was taken by EHDC to consult widely, with a Public Engagement Day including activities for kids, to get them interested. It was the parents and children themselves at such events who came up with the best ideas for climbing apparatus and greater challenges for older children.

A full transcript the presentation can be viewed on our website.

### **The Work of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, by Dave Willis**

Pandemic lockdowns, restricted travel and wholesale closure of theatres, cinemas, pubs, gyms and music venues for much of the past 15 months have brought a sharper-than-ever focus on the need for clean air and open space on our doorsteps for leisure and exercise. It has also heightened awareness of how vulnerable our natural environment is and the need for careful and sustainable management to accommodate the needs of wildlife and people.

For Dave Willis, People and Wildlife Officer for Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, this is achieved through a programme of good conservation management, education and community engagement, with active volunteers helping nurture the best of the natural environment.

Spelling out his hopes and aspirations for the environs of Hertford in his talk to the meeting, he said: “The aim is to support wildlife and inspire people to value the natural world. The Trust supports spaces in and around Hertford and protects the habitat Hertford sits in within the Lea Valley.”

Chalk streams, rivers, marshes and heathland are all within easy access of Hertford and can provide suitable habitats for a wide range of animals, birds and plants, if carefully managed. This requires understanding and cooperation from the general public, volunteers and public bodies. For example, King’s Meads, stretching from Hertford to Ware, is one of Hertfordshire’s largest reserves for people and wildlife. “The New River, with two gauge houses, is one of our more challenging sites for wildlife. There is an awful lot of footfall. My job to integrate people and wildlife on site...to communicate that to people. We are working very closely with Thames Water and the Environment Agency who own much of it - it’s a supportive partnership.

But equally essential is the volunteer effort, often for tough physical work pushing back scrub to open up the area and clearing out undergrowth vegetation. In summer, diggers are used. To the untutored eye, clearance looks savage but it’s essential for the habitat of bees, butterflies and wildlife. People were often alarmed to see waterbeds dry out but it was essential periodically to benefit a variety of flies and other insects.

“Community engagement across all our sites is invaluable,” he said, “and we are engaging with 21 organisations including the U3A, King’s Mead neighbourhood working group, Hertford Police, schools, scouts, brownies, nature writers and carers in Hertford.”

Ian Nash

COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CONTACTS

Margaret Anthony  
07525442275  
[margaretanthony@hotmail.com](mailto:margaretanthony@hotmail.com)

Terry Betts  
24 Morgans Road Hertford SG13 8BS  
01992 583643  
[betts.terry30@gmail.com](mailto:betts.terry30@gmail.com)

Hilary Durbin  
33 Fanshawe Street Hertford SG14 3AT  
01992 587230

Dr Mike Howarth - Webmaster  
5 The Drive Bengoe Hertford SG14 3DD  
07778 537505 01992 587292  
[drmichaelhowarth@icloud.com](mailto:drmichaelhowarth@icloud.com)

Sue Jones  
9 Villiers Street  
Hertford SG13 7BW  
01992 587949  
[editor@hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:editor@hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)

Milena Nuti  
[milenanuti@gmail.com](mailto:milenanuti@gmail.com)

Malcolm Ramsay - Chairman  
and Social Secretary  
Dunkirks Farm Southside  
Queens Road Hertford SG13 8BJ  
01992 500002  
[malcolm.ramsay789@btinternet.com](mailto:malcolm.ramsay789@btinternet.com)

Annette Robinson -  
Membership Secretary (not on the Committee)  
11 Norman Avenue Bishop's Stortford CM23  
4HL  
01279 833242  
[membership@hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)

Andrew Sangster -  
Planning  
25 West Street Hertford SG13 8EX  
01992 582594  
[andrew.sangster25@yahoo.com](mailto:andrew.sangster25@yahoo.com)

Anna Stanton

Richard Threlfall  
18 Mangrove Road Hertford SG13 8AJ  
[rthrelfall@gmail.com](mailto:rthrelfall@gmail.com)

Members of the Committee can also be  
contacted via the Society's website at  
[www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.hertfordcivicsociety.org.uk)