

Hertford Civic Society Planning Matters by Peter Norman

The Gasworks site, Marshgate Drive

The scheme for 29 houses and 346 apartments, a gymnasium and 2,200 square metres of employment floorspace, to which we objected, has been allowed on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate as you may have seen in the *Mercury*,

Tamworth Road

It is unclear why the application has still not yet been put to the Development Management Committee for decision. A proposal for 11 houses and eight 4-storey blocks of flats was submitted 14 months ago. Following a very large number of cogent objections, including that from the Society, some rather marginal amendments were made in September.

Sites allocated for Housing in the District Plan

Representations previously about three applications. Those for Thieves Lane and the former Bengoe Nursery site have now been approved. The Archers Spring on the Welwyn Road remains outstanding.

The Corn Exchange

We are pleased to say that the District Council have now formally designated the Exchange as an Asset of Community Value (ACV).

HCS offered to work with them to get the building designated as an 'Asset of Community Value', following an approach from the proprietors of the Corn Exchange for help in ensuring that the building remains available as a music venue. ACV status can be a material consideration when the Council has to decide whether or not to grant planning permission for a change of use.

We have been informed that the building is to be sold, though at the time of writing it is not clear whether it is the freehold or a leasehold interest which is for sale, and there is no evidence that the building is yet on the open market. There have been indications in the past of an interest in converting the building into apartments; should such a proposal arise in the future ACV status will strengthen the Council's hand in resisting it.

Power Turbine and Generator west of Hertford Theatre

The Council now wish to pursue a modified proposal, and as part of the process they have to seek planning permission (from themselves!). As long ago as 2012 the Council decided to install a hydro-electric power turbine and generator on Castle Weir, next to the theatre. There were objections from the Environment Agency on flood control grounds, and the

project lay in abeyance for years. Accordingly an application has been made, but it is in outline with no details about the appearance or siting of the plant and equipment or the necessary building. This is a very sensitive location in the conservation area with a number of Listed buildings nearby, not to mention the theatre itself which is soon to be substantially remodelled and extended. So we submitted that a full application is needed to provide information on any installations that would have a visual or other impact.

At the end of last year the Council's conservation officer made a similar observation, and the Environment Agency objected because no flood risk assessment had been submitted. Since then no such assessment or any additional information has been published, and the application remains undetermined.

The Duncombe Arms, Railway Street

HCS was alarmed when a timber stockade made of rough-hewn planks was built. An application was made for various changes at the Duncombe Arms. We made no comment, but it was refused mainly because the Council were concerned that neighbouring flats would be affected by noise from drinkers in the refurbished rear garden area. The plan for the refused application had shown a number of independent planters on the edge of the pub's front forecourt, not a timber stockade.

We wrote to the Council urging them to do what they could to save Railway Street from a structure so totally inappropriate for a conservation area in the centre of a historic town, and were pleased when a revised application was submitted not showing the recently-erected stockade. However the application documents do not explicitly say that the 'stockade' fence is to be removed, so we have suggested a condition to require its removal.

41 Fanshawe Street

We submitted an objection to an application for two new houses in the rear garden. This part of the conservation area is characterised by substantial houses with a street frontage on large, elongated plots. The proposal, for two smaller houses away from the street, is therefore out of character and contrary to the established pattern of building in the vicinity. The new houses would encroach on the area of green space between Fanshawe Street and Wellington Street, and if this proposal were granted permission there are likely to be further applications for similar development in the long gardens extending down the slope from Fanshawe Street.

17 Highfield Road

We objected to an application for a detached house in the garden of No.17, which is a wooded garden significantly contributing to the appearance and feeling of the conservation area. The District Plan expects proposals in the

conservation area to respect established building lines, layouts and patterns, and safeguard all aspects which contribute to the area's special interest and significance, including important views and green spaces. The impact of this development would be felt in Morgans Road, where the houses are set back in deep front gardens and form a relevantly consistent building line. The proposed house would break this line standing out like a sore thumb just at the most sensitive point.

Bramfield Road Rare Breeds

Land occupied by Goldings Estate Rare Breeds Farm Ltd at the corner of North Road and Bramfield Road has been our concern for some time. The appearance presented to Bramfield Road is one of total mess, in sharp contrast to the public cemetery opposite; there are various buildings, some presumably used to house farm animals. However there was no planning application, and it was difficult to find out what was going on. There was then a proposal to erect two large barns to house livestock, feed and machinery much further from the road, in the Goldings parkland. The Council issued a refusal notice on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence that the land was used for an agricultural business (rather than a hobby). The decision is welcome, because the barns would have been prominent and unsightly in the parkland landscape, but what now needs to be addressed are the unapproved buildings, and the other activities and general mess along Bramfield Road.

Castle Grounds

The Town Council have recently consulted on a ' Greenspace Action Plan ' for the Castle Grounds. Among the points made in our response were that the Ashley Webb Shelter, the future of which is in doubt, should be preserved; the building should ideally be renovated and re-purposed, for instance as a café or as a bandstand (for lunchtime concerts, etc). The play area is an important resource in the grounds and should be moved as soon as possible to reduce the health risk from pollution and noise and to make it more central in the Castle Grounds. Anti-social behaviour is best reduced by encouraging more visitors to the Castle Gardens, increasing visibility by keeping hedges at a level for sight lines and reducing 'hidden places'. The bridge by the Motte should be made accessible to those with mobility needs as a priority.

We expressed regret that there is no clear proposal for how the American Garden should function following the planned expansion of the theatre, or how the garden/fish pass/theatre and American Garden should be integrated. It is important that people should feel they are being visually invited into the Castle Grounds from The Wash. Conceivably the American Garden should actually be more of a 'civic square', with some trees/greenery. We also regretted that the plan makes no mention of toilets or cycle racks. We would like to see

covered cycle racks, and comfortable, clean and upgraded toilet facilities are needed.