

# ANTAS

ASSOCIATION OF NORTH THAMES AMENITY SOCIETIES



*Most of the lower half of this picture of Aylesbury will be covered in housing to satisfy the demands of Kate Barker and government*

## NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2007

### CONTENTS

Chairman writes	2
Barker's backhanders	6
Housing in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	1
Combating Climate Change - A Role for Community Groups	3
Permitted Development	6
Town For Sale	8
Society reports	7

## Housing in the 21st Century

*David Kirby's talk summarized by Andrew Sangster, Hertford Society*

Our speaker at the Spring Meeting of the Association was David Kirby, an architect practising in Hertford; his topic was 'Housing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', a personal view of the present position. He began by noting that few subjects are so all-embracing of the human condition, starting with the emotive aspects generated by ownership, through design and aesthetic considerations,

financial matters and finishing with the built reality. Yet for all its high profile and the considerable specialist knowledge of the constituent factors, little study has been undertaken of the totality of the subject, understanding the technological connection between research, development, design and what happens on the building site.

Turning to the challenging targets for new build in the regional plans, how much of the current demand is driven by our perception of the role of housing, the wish to 'get on the ladder' at the earliest possible age, the need to accommodate fragmenting families, the provision of accommodation for workers essential to the maintenance

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Housing in the 21st Century cont'd

*(Continued from page 1)*  
of public services and what will happen to demand if interest rates remain high for a prolonged period? While the young are being forced to take on enormous financial commitments, thus fuelling the economic bubble, homes are being demolished in the former industrial areas of the North. What evidence is there that planning control is the best way to manage the situation? Of particular concern is that the planning system favours the broad brush approach, coupled with major house builders (strong lobbyists and powerful supporters of political parties) preferring the organisational economies of large sites, thus encouraging major expansions, such as those proposed at Harlow and Stevenage. How much more satisfactory it would be to identify the demand in the next few years and to accommodate it on smaller sites within existing settlements, building on already sustainable communities; but this would require a major rethink by the local planning authorities and the communities themselves. Why not also adopt a more pragmatic approach to development in villages, setting aside some of the present dogma and thus creating the potential for more sustainable communities, complete with basic services?

Examination shows that the building industry is remarkably flexible in its ability to work with the wide range of site conditions encountered, juggling a multitude of trades and suppliers and simultaneously adopting new standards and products. However, the industry should never be used again as an economic regulator because of the high loss of experienced and

skilled personnel each time. Much has been said and written about how prefabrication could transform the efficiency of the industry, but this can only save construction time, leaving the planning and preparation prior to site work and the selling and preparation for occupancy afterwards unchanged. The reality is that even large building companies cannot justify committing the major fixed capital investments needed while there remains a strong expectation of tailoring houses to suit particular sites. So prefabrication continues to be limited to components such as roof trusses. Rapid house construction is not the problem; the major consideration is the available flow of customers and the capacity to handle them (or in the case of affordable housing, the rate at which housing associations can identify clients and complete

arrangements). High rates of building require high levels of working capital, so builders prefer, where appropriate, completions and occupation in batches to minimise financial exposure.

The speaker foresees further improvements in efficiency of the building phase of developments, with much improved energy efficiency and enhanced levels of

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### *Rapid house construction is not the problem*

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performance specifications, but sadly, with the demise of the Parker Morris standards, much less space for occupants. The escalating percentage of the final price attributable to the cost of land is fuelling the drive for higher densities in the form of multi-apartment developments with rooms of ever reducing size.

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*How much more satisfactory it would be to identify the demand in the next few years and to accommodate it on smaller sites within existing settlements*

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## The Chairman Writes

*Tony Fooks*

We are now into summer, local elections have been held and our activities will probably increase in the forthcoming months. The listing of member societies' Officers is now up and running on the web site and being used. It is of course, password protected and the password has been circulated to society chairmen and secretaries.

Many of us have been involved in the South East Plan and the Examination in Public and we await the Panel's recommendations.

The topic of climate change has aroused a great deal of interest, see the article by John Davies elsewhere in this newsletter.

New Planning guidelines are now uppermost in our minds.

I would encourage members to send their input and comments on all drafts that our hard-working Hon. Secretary sends out.

The Executive has debated the question of how big the ANTAS area should become, as we would not wish to become as large as a region of the Civic Trust, although I hasten to add we will not turn away interested parties on the fringe of our two central counties, Bucks and Herts.

I hope to complete an article on the Local Development Framework system shortly and it will be available to all members and their respective groups. Have a great holiday and I look forward to seeing you all in October at our Annual General Meeting.

# Combating Climate Change - A Role for Community Groups?

*The last issue of the Newsletter carried a summary of a presentation on Global Warming, given to ANTAS in November 2006. Since then much has happened, and we are re-visiting the subject to ask a simple question: whether community groups, such as civic societies, have a role to play in meeting the challenge. In this personal view, John Davies looks at the proposed mitigation measures, and questions whether some of the more likely options are inherently local in nature. If so, their effective take-up may require support within the local community, including from civic societies.*

*by John Davies, Hitchin Society*

## Since our last Newsletter

Over the last six months the debate over climate change has, for many people, moved beyond questioning whether global warming is happening, and whether human activity is the predominant cause. A series of official reports (*right*) has now explored the underlying science, the effects on climate, the economic consequences and the mitigation measures that might be applied. These provide powerful evidence that human activities are behind the changes that we are now experiencing.

Some are not convinced, and believe that the rise in temperature may be due to natural causes, such as changes in solar activity. However, the overwhelming body of scientific evidence indicates that global warming is now being caused predominantly by a build-up of greenhouse gases, principally carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels, and methane from farming and other changes in land use. These causes are the direct result of human activity, suggesting the possibility that timely and appropriate human action could provide a solution. A range of such actions have the potential for limiting further change; these are termed mitigation measures.

## How much time do we have?

The credibility of individual mitigation measures depends on how long they would take to deploy on a world-wide basis, compared with the time before greenhouse gas concentrations reach what may be regarded as the "safe limit".

Considering the rapid pace of industrialisation in China and India, a longer-term increase of 3ppm per year may well prove to be conservative. If no concerted action is taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (the "Business as Usual" case), 500ppm will be reached in under 25 years, while the Stern Review states that 550ppm will be reached in 28 years.

### *Reports in recent months*

October 2006 - The Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change, UK government.

February 2007, Paris - IPCC\* Working Group I: The Physical Science Basis.

April 2007, Brussels - IPCC Working Group II: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability

May 2007, Bangkok - IPCC Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change

\*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, set up by the United Nations in 1988.

Greenhouse gas levels are rising fast: from a pre-industrial level of 280ppm, carbon dioxide alone has now reached 380ppm, and with other greenhouse gases the combined effect is equivalent to 430ppm of carbon dioxide. The "safe limit" to which this should be allowed to go is a very uncertain concept. Many consider that it would be unwise to go above 500ppm, and some suggest that even this is too high. Governments have compromised on a target of 550ppm, around double the pre-industrial level.

Over recent years CO<sub>2</sub> levels have increased by about 2ppm per year, last year it was 2.6ppm, and this year may be even higher.

## What are the miti- gation options?

To be effective, mitigation measures need to be deployed worldwide, not just on a few demonstration sites in developed, western economies. Some require massive capital investment, and the development of new industries on a vast scale. Other options are based on well established technologies that can be rolled out within the required timescale in countries at all stages of development. The summary below is based largely on information from the Stern and IPCC Reviews.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Combating Climate Change - Groups' Roles *cont'd*

(Continued from page 3)

- **Renewables**

A wide range of technologies, most of which are well-established and available for use now. These include hydro, wind (on-shore and off-shore), tidal, solar and geothermal, all producing energy with little or no greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Biofuels**

Based on recently grown plant matter, burning such material only releases CO<sub>2</sub> that has been taken from the atmosphere during the growing stage, and therefore does not contribute to a net increase. Biofuels include ethanol (used as a substitute for gasoline), bio-diesel and biomass (such as wood) for direct combustion. Although superficially "green", the area of land required for a significant replacement of fossil fuels would lead to large-scale competition with food production. Other aspects of biofuels, including the loss of tropical forests for bio-diesel production, suggest that this is a far from benign solution.

- **Carbon capture and storage**

Various approaches are available, but typically involve CO<sub>2</sub> being removed from power station flue gases by large-scale absorption plant. The separated CO<sub>2</sub> would then be transported to permanent storage such as in depleted oil- or gas-wells. Although technologically feasible, full-scale demonstration plants have yet to be built. The capital cost is likely to be high, with further operating, transport and sequestration costs. It seems implausible that power stations throughout

the world can be retro-fitted with such plant within the time-scale available for effective action. Longer-term, this may become important to enable the continued use of fuels such as coal.

- **The hydrogen economy**

Hydrogen itself is a clean fuel as its only combustion product is water. Proponents envisage the large-scale production of hydrogen, which would be distributed by pipeline, including for use as a vehicle fuel. However, the production of hydrogen requires energy, and unless made using electricity derived from renewables (or nuclear), this has implications for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (or capture and storage). Hydrogen is a very light gas and cannot be liquefied under practical conditions; its use as a transport fuel requires high pressure gas containers, with weight and range penalties. These and other fundamental difficulties suggest that hydrogen is unlikely to contribute substantially to the solution within the required time-scale.

- **Nuclear energy**

Nuclear fission technology, typically based on uranium, does not in itself result in greenhouse gas emissions. However the great concern about nuclear safety, the long-term storage of radioactive waste, and the possibility of weapons use, make this technology highly controversial. Designing and building a new generation of nuclear power stations involves a long lead-time, and the availability of uranium may restrict the contribution nuclear can make to global energy

supply.

Nuclear fusion technology, based on hydrogen, holds out the eventual prospect of unlimited, non-polluting energy. A major international research project has recently been agreed, but cannot possibly contribute to a solution within the available time-scale.

- **Energy saving**

This is a range of low-risk options based on existing, proven technology. Although requiring changes in life-style choices, this does not necessarily imply a lower standard of living. It would however require a totally new approach to heating, lighting, transport, distribution and waste disposal, challenging conventional arrangements at a range of levels. Examples include the use of more efficient combined heat and power (CHP) technology, both in large power stations and on a domestic 'micro' scale, and 'zero-emission' housing. Municipal waste now going to landfill should be used for energy in CHP plants.

Steps would need to be taken to reduce the need to travel, while better public transport, modal shift from road to rail, and the promotion of walking and cycling, should be aimed at a rapid reduction in car dependency. This has been described as a "win-win" situation with less congestion, lower costs and reduced emissions. Where car use is unavoidable, vehicles with a much improved fuel efficiency would be a prime requirement. The rapid growth in aviation world-wide needs to be urgently

### *Global Warming - a brief history*

1824 - Fourier recognised that the atmosphere let in more heat from the sun than it allowed out as infra-red radiation, making the world warmer than it would otherwise be.

1859 - Tyndall identified the gases, carbon dioxide and water vapour, principally responsible for this effect.

1895 - Arrhenius took this further by calculating the effect of doubling the level of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.

1980s - Growing concern at the rapid increase of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.

1988 - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) formed by the United Nations.

1992 - Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro. Led to Climate Change Convention and "Agenda 21" (a sustainability programme for the 21<sup>st</sup> century).

## Combating Climate Change - Groups' Roles cont'd

addressed, as aircraft emissions are particularly damaging and it is likely that fossil fuel will remain dominant in this sector.

- **Agriculture, land-use, waste**  
Major reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions can be achieved by preventing deforestation, and by new planting (afforestation and reforestation). Changes in farming practices and in waste management can reduce emissions of other greenhouse gases. Much of this could be achieved now, given appropriate incentives and enforcement.
- **"Geo-engineering" options**  
Examples include ocean fertilisation to remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, and sunlight reflecting mechanisms. These are highly speculative and unproven, with the risk of unknown side effects. Unlikely to have any relevance within the time-scale under consideration.

reduced scale. How the balance could be made up would be a political and economic judgement, made as the situation unfolds.

It is perhaps a feature of the more credible options - renewables, energy saving and better land-use - that they are, for the most part, inherently local in nature. While governments will need to set the necessary framework for such policies to be adopted, and for reaching essential international agreements, it may be that there is a

possible that civic societies are well placed to offer leadership towards the local acceptance of more sustainable policies.

Indeed, it may be that one of the outcomes of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, Local Agenda 21, was prophetic in its suggestion that the guiding principle towards sustainability should be "think globally, act locally".

### *Think globally, act locally*

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit also set up "Local Agenda 21" (LA21), recognising that sustainability programmes needed to be implemented on a local basis.

In our area, Hertfordshire County Council set up two LA21 pilot schemes, one in Hitchin, the other in Potters Bar, both involving local community groups.

Although not continued beyond 1998, these gave first-hand experience of local participation in sustainability issues.

contribution to be made by local communities in accepting and supporting local schemes.

## Which way forward?

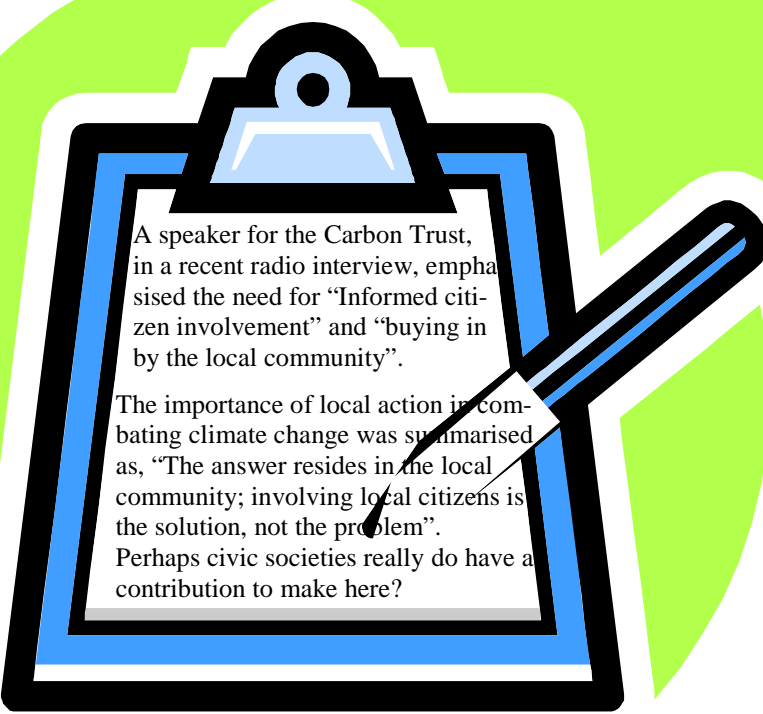
Of the various approaches described above, the most credible mitigation measures for implementation within the available time-scale would appear to be those based on existing, proven technology - renewable energy, energy saving and better land-use practices. These would need to be deployed on a massive scale, although the investment costs are thought to be affordable, and the much reduced dependency on fossil fuels would give cost savings and improved security of supply.

It is recognised that during the implementation period other sources of energy would continue to be required, although on a

## Acting locally - a role for Civic Societies?

Implementing schemes locally may well need a change of attitude towards a wide range of proposals, from wind turbines in nearby countryside to solar panels on buildings. Improved cycling, walking and even public transport schemes are often opposed by local residents, while strong objections are made against waste incineration, even to generate heat and power.

Bringing about a change in attitudes may well be a role for community groups, including civic societies. While some may feel that civic societies should remain focused on the historic and built environment, it is



A speaker for the Carbon Trust, in a recent radio interview, emphasised the need for "Informed citizen involvement" and "buying in by the local community".

The importance of local action in combating climate change was summarised as, "The answer resides in the local community; involving local citizens is the solution, not the problem". Perhaps civic societies really do have a contribution to make here?

**Letter to the Editor re Winter Newsletter 2006**

*from Dr John Davis  
41 Fairmead Avenue,  
Harpenden, AL5 5UD  
(not John Davies, Vice Chair.)*

Ref your “Global Warming” (a misleading benign term – Global Heating would be better, or “Climate Change”) item Winter 2006 – and your invitation for views: as follows – personal ones, I haven’t had them agreed by the rest of the Harpenden Society’s committee.

**Global Heating**

Sir – you invite comments on page 4 of the winter issue on measures to constrain – hope-

fully reduce – CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Of the six you list, I certainly agree the list but would add to it gradually improving the insulation of *existing* housing (for which many district councils offer grants) to counter the major energy loss resulting from our windy climate, wind being as effective at stripping heat from a building as low temperatures. The second could be a long-term aim but, more immediately, there should be more robust control over the grandiose, developer-led (more profitable) “six-bedroom executive home” replacement – and infill – housing now so common in the area. Better control

too on new retail outlets – how *much* food do we all need to buy! And a ban on new out-of-town supermarkets, before our high streets decay irretrievably.

On a personal level, less – or no – flying off, using that cunningly advertised and uniquely damaging form of transport (due to its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions being mostly high up where they don’t disperse, thought to be over twice the effect at ground level). Certainly no domestic or near-Continent flying where rail is far more energy-efficient – and often takes not that much longer.

Yours etc ...John Davis



**Permitted Development Rights are under consultation and some issues need flagging up**

A consultation paper has been issued on the Permitted Development Rights for Microgeneration equipment for domestic properties. On a quick read through it seems quite sensible vis-à-vis planning regulations that ought to come into force when properties/owners are beginning to sprout eco-friendly wind turbines, solar panels, etc. It is important to regulate against the possible negative effects this might have within Conservation Areas/Listed Buildings in particular but perhaps also in the wider context.

It is something civic societies might be concerned about, see [www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508888](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508888)

Green Belt is not excluded from Permitted Development Rights.

A covered swimming pool built in a riverside garden under Permitted Development Rights did not need planning permission—a loophole—for the setting of the River Thames, and for flooding. Other policies are said to protect the setting of the Thames, but surely floodplain policies should apply.

**Chiltern Society bemoans ‘Rape of the London Green Belt’**

*The Editor*

The **Chiltern Society**, being a huge group of some 7,000 people, encompasses groups focussing on every aspect of concern in the Chilterns. They too are exercised by climate change or global warming. John Norris of the Rivers and Wetlands Group says, “Global warming ... is the increase in near-surface air temperature averaged across the entire surface of the planet. The change will [not] be the same everywhere; some parts will warm more than others and a few parts of the globe may actually become cooler.”

It is the article in Chiltern News (June 07) by Planning Field Officer and architect Jenny Habib under the above shocking headline, which caught my eye.

Commenting on the Barker Review of Land Use Planning—final report of 226 pages issued in December 2006, Jenny says - Treasury officer Kate Barker, who is not a planner and has no known experience of anything other than tax collection, authors “an oddly ignorant document. However Barker’s theory is being

followed by the unelected regional bodies which have, in their recently revised Spatial Strategies (plans) demanded a huge increase in the amount of housing to be built in the South East. The review says housing should be built on the Green Belt and that local councils must put forward suggestions for suitable sites.

The driving force behind the Barker Review seems to be the financial value of development but there is no budget recommendation for the expansion of facilities or infrastructure. There is no understanding that master plans are general outlines, whereas planning applications need to be looked at in detail.

One of the strangest aspects of the Barker Review is the suggestion that developers should make “Goodwill payments” to the “individuals involved in the planning process” (paragraphs 7.17 to 7.25) and Jenny suggests this seems to be an invitation to developers to make bribery a Government policy.

# Societies face up to various issues

The Editor

In **Aylesbury** new estates being built on green field sites highlight the failing infrastructure. It's the same old story repeated up and down the country, traffic lights and roundabouts are not yet in place, bypasses may never be built. The County Council is gradually installing a transport hub by adding bus lanes to the inner ring road, but by taking away the central reservations on the dual carriageway. The Society did have a success when a member campaigned to retain a valued underpass.

**Buntingford** recognises the dedication of the Executive Committee which is increasingly engaged on major regional and national issues as well as the local consequences. Like most amenity groups there is a need for successors. They have commented on the East of England Plan, the Barker Review and East Herts Council Local Plan. Locally Buntingford Civic Society is active on town council committees such as Traffic Advisory Group, Police Community Forum and Parish Pathways Partnership. Involvement with young people saw BCS members 'mock interviewing' students about to enter the workplace.

The Buntingford Journal celebrated its 30th year of publication and its circulation of a thousand copies for each of the ten annual editions generates substantial advertising revenue which permits the Society to make grants and undertake refurbishments of town artefacts, and keeps the society in a strong financial position.

**Chesham**, being the last stop on the Metropolitan Line of London Underground (LU), is concerned that local councillors have no say in Transport for London (TfL) which is answerable to the

Mayor of London and the Greater London Assembly (GLA), who are not answerable to any resident outside their area, nor to any MP representing the areas that LU 'serves' beyond the GLA area. CrossRail, when built (and serving Maidenhead it too will cross the GLA's boundary), will also be the responsibility of TfL. Civic and amenity societies serving the wider area should be getting together to reconstitute TfL, so that local councillors, as against just GLA representatives, can be involved in the decision making process and ANTAS support will be welcomed.

**High Wycombe** continues with active planning input to the Council. Bucks Chilterns University College want to sell their out-of-town Wellesbourne site for housing and the society involved themselves to mitigate the worst effects. But some locals felt they had colluded in an inappropriate development. Fortunately, the Council threw it out.

**Hitcham & Taplow** continue to engage with the community via their Village Green Party: this year South Bucks District Council gave a small subsidy. South Bucks District Council are in the long drawn-out process of putting together their Local Development Framework. Applications are still considered under the existing local plan, which is not good news because Taplow Paper Mill complex of 48 acres has been purchased by property speculators, who have declined to talk to the Society.

**Hitchin** is struggling with North Herts District Council. Officers and members are ignoring public opinion and pushing through their own agenda, in the face of strong opposition from residents, the society and other organi-

sations. Hitchin's historic environment is treated with contempt and there is no overall strategy or briefing for planning.

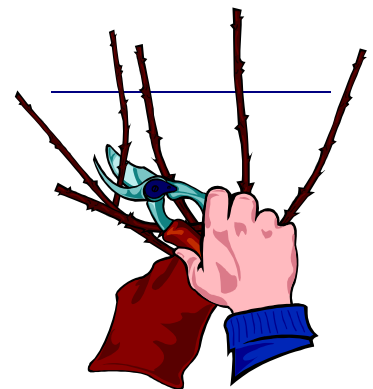
**Marlow** is more optimistic having had six applications from the John Lewis Partnership to build a huge (27,000 sqft) superstore in the town centre turned down. It appears that there is a new national awareness and uncertainty as to the real consequences of building huge superstores particularly in small historic town centres. The Society continues to be overwhelmed by consultations on Regional and Local Plans and suspects this is the same for many consultees throughout the country, whether they are public or private, voluntary or statutory. People are silenced by masses of impenetrable verbiage.

**Potters Bar** progresses its campaign to limit the operation of a waste transfer station just over the border in Welwyn Hatfield District. What began in the 1960s as a cottage industry has grown without planning permission. The firm has appealed against the enforcement order and a public inquiry will be held in December; meanwhile the nuisance to local residents of noise, smell and traffic continues. A study into accommodation for gypsies and travellers in South and West Herts identifies 85 sites and five are at Potters Bar which already has a traveller site - there may be opposition.

The **Radlett Society** sent a full response to Go-East's consultation in March, particularly opposing the notion of compensating Green Belt allocations, and the increased housing numbers for Hertfordshire and Herts-mere. They also opposed Helioslough's proposals for a

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*People are silenced  
by masses of  
impenetrable  
verbiage.*




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Strategic Rail Freight Interchange close by at Park Street, St Albans on Green Belt, and the plans were rejected.

**St Albans** is under threat on all fronts from government housing quotas, and in the worst scenario could finish up as part of a gigantic North London sprawl.

The **Wendover Society**, which appeared doomed to extinction, has been revitalized by 10 new committee members.

# ANTAS

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Hitchin Society

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Marlow Society

Oxford Civic Society

Potters Bar Society

Radlett Society and Green Belt Association

St Albans Society

Welwyn Garden City Society

Welwyn Planning and Amenity Group

Wendover Society

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## Town for sale

*Town for Sale acknowledges the photos as provided courtesy of Hitchin Forum.*

The Hitchin Comet featured an elaborate April Fool's hoax, sadly too true. A host of banners went up around the town with a common message directed at North Hertfordshire District Council, which was working against the town's interests. One sign said "For Sale, Former Town Hall - No Civic Pride Needed", another "Welcome to Hitchin, Home of the Bulldozer - All Developers Invited".



Campaigners want to stop the sell-off of public buildings such as the Town Hall.



## Town for sale

Signs slam council



CAMPAGNERS opposed to the disposal of public buildings in Hitchin gave their protest a new twist on April Fool's Day. A host of banners were placed around the town, with a common message directed at North Hertfordshire District Council which has decided to demolish some of the town's most precious assets. The council has also said it could even sell the venue which has led to fears that the building public could be taken out of the



**AGM Saturday 13 October 2007 at High Wycombe**