

# A N T A S

ASSOCIATION OF NORTH THAMES AMENITY SOCIETIES

## Renewing the Civic Society: Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation

*Marie Rhodes, Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation*

Four years ago, the future looked bleak for our Civic Society. Its glory days were 1967-1968 when it was set up to fight to save the medieval heart of Bishop's Stortford from destruction to make way for a shopping centre, multi-storey car park and a dual carriageway.

Those plans were defeated and we still have our fine Corn Exchange designed by Lewis Vulliamy, and our medieval centre. The Civic Society flourished for many years and continued to monitor and oppose development that threatened the fragile character of a medieval market

national organisations to whom we were affiliated eg. the Civic Trust and the CPRE.

Somehow we needed to tap into the energy of the local associations. The turning point was the arrival of a new energetic (retired) member who volunteered to contact his own and other community associations to make the case for joining the BSCS in issues of common concern. He succeeded in setting up meetings to discuss the case.

We evolved the strategy of a



## NEWSLETTER WINTER 2009

### CONTENTS

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Chairman writes                   | 8   |
| Eco-towns, more consultation      | 2   |
| Letters to the Editor             | 2   |
| Renewing the Civic Society        | 1   |
| Society reports                   | 4—7 |
| Waste management in Hertfordshire | 3   |

town. We also celebrated sensitive contributions to the town through an annual civic award. But time took its toll. New members were scarce and founder members were aging. With fewer active members, the burden was falling on ever fewer shoulders. Our influence was fading: in the crucial area of representation, our local authorities knew that the Civic Society spoke for very few local households.

Local residents did care about civic issues, since there were several lively community and residents' associations in place. Some of our committee members were also active in their own local associations. BSCS believed it still had a real role to play both in advising on wider issues and in liaising with the

federated structure with a steering committee drawn from each member association. We agreed a set of policies. Individual organisations would still pursue local issues, but the Federation would support those which involved wider civic concerns.

The associations had their own representative structures and each consulted members about joining the proposed federation. All agreed. The new committee sat down together two years ago. Three great benefits were: fresh officers to help run the committee; a ready made communication structure through the members' own systems of newsletters and mailing lists; and an excellent web site set up and managed by a member of a local residents' association.

By now some major local issues were emerging – the proposed expansion of Stansted Airport and plans to re-locate two central schools to a Green Belt site financed by the sale of their sites for new housing. We have our new 'Corn Exchange' fight.

But we now have two years of working together. In dealing with local planners and politicians we can point to the 6000 households the Federation represents. We are experienced in dealing with the local press and handling media interest. And we have a team of committed and determined committee members who share a loyalty to their own associations and to the Federation. We are in good shape to carry the fight forward.

## Letters to the Editor

### Transition Towns

Madam  
Peak Oil\* is something that will happen one day - it is obviously inescapable. However, the UK government and major oil companies (who should know about such things) say it is decades away, and can be handled when it comes. Other experts quite plausibly (at least until the current economic down-turn) argue that Peak Oil will happen in the next few years and perhaps has already happened. With rising demand and falling production, shortages will occur and prices will rise, perhaps quite steeply. Once that happens, people will be forced to adjust their life-styles - driving less, using public transport more, conserving energy in their homes and businesses, and perhaps ultimately recognising that their standard of living is not going to go on increasing indefinitely. All that will happen quite inevitably, and while it might be very sensible for central and local

mate changes for which there are no precedents since the start of civilisation (and farming) some 8,000 years ago. Given that nothing much will happen to reduce green house gas emissions in the short term, something like a world 2 degrees warmer is now inescapable, and this will have serious impacts on people throughout the world. This is all set out in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th Assessment Report - recommended reading. Avoiding a 3 degree warmer world is now of vital importance. It can only be avoided by actions on a global scale covering industries such as power supply, transport, cement, iron and steel, etc. Carbon capture and storage will have a key role in this and the capital investment and infrastructure implications are vast. Similarly nuclear, if this is deemed to be part of the solution. All this makes the Transition Town initiatives pale into insignificance - wood fired pizza ovens and all (aren't all Italian pizza ovens wood fired?).

Yes, the Transition Town movement gives people something to get stuck into in a way that they cannot influence government or industry. They can have a helpful educational role in changing attitudes on a local basis. But I do feel that the sort of initiatives suggested, are a dangerous distraction compared with the magnitude and urgency of what needs to be done - and the consequences if we fail.  
*Yours etc, John Davies*

\* Peak oil is the point when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline.

### Freight terminal

Madam  
The Radlett Society and Green Belt Association, residents of St Albans, and those who care about the London Green Belt, are concerned. Helioslough is still seeking approval for a major freight terminal at Park Street. We supported St Albans District

Council's refusal of the original application, and objection at appeal. We shall redouble our opposition.

The planning reasons for and against the freight transfer hub were explored at the Inquiry, as was the case for rail rather than road, transport nationally. The proposal is based on commercial opportunism - the company knows the Government must be seen to support rail transport.

The amenity of Aldenham Parish is our main concern, but we are also threatened with reduced open space as far distant as Harpenden and Potters Bar, eg. a major industrial complex at Park Street would affect road access to St Albans and rail to London. There would be noise and air pollution. Although the Inspector found that the development would not result in the amalgamation of the existing settlements of St Albans, Park Street and Radlett, the construction of the terminal complex would leave only token space between them, which would be under pressure from accompanying service industries. Infill and conjoining would be a matter of time.

The proposal should be disallowed. Open space between Radlett and St Albans is already shrinking, and the London Green Belt should be permanent. We doubt if the development is nationally desirable and understand that similar freight transfer centres have not been commercial successful. Even if Government policy favours such distribution centres, the proposal does not justify the violation of an open space so close to an ancient and historic city.

Helioslough is resubmitting its application so soon after the appeal dismissal, because it has invested time and money on the project. Similarly, residents have put in effort to fight it and affected Councils have used taxpayers' money to object. Planning laws are deficient in various ways, but in particular they should be framed to disallow subsequent applications for developments so soon after a major investigation has found against them.  
*Yours etc, Graham Taylor*

## Eco-towns — more consultation

A new round of public consultation has recently been announced by government. A detailed Sustainability Appraisal, published at the same time, rates the short-listed eco-town sites as:

Class A - Generally suitable

Class B - Might be suitable, subject to meeting specific objectives

Class C - Only likely to be suitable with substantial and exceptional innovation

Of the two sites in our area (see ANTAS Newsletter, Summer 2008), Marston Vale in Bedfordshire is rated as Class B, while Weston Otmoor in Oxfordshire only manages to reach Class C. Clearly, neither are prime candidates for eco-town status.

For further information, including the draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on eco-towns, see [www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns](http://www.communities.gov.uk/ecotowns). The consultation closes on 19 February 2009.

government to plan for it (for example by investing in better public transport) it will be difficult to get people to change their behaviour before they have to.

Trying to force the issue may not get us very far.

Climate change is a very different issue - here we have options; the most serious consequences are not yet inevitable. What is unavoidable is that we are locked in to cli-

# Waste Management—change is essential

John Davies

*The keynote talk at our autumn meeting was given by Richard Brown, Assistant Director - Environment, Hertfordshire County Council. Richard has a wide-ranging background in ecology, conservation and farm management, as well as qualifying with an MBA. Initially working in agriculture in Somerset and in Yorkshire, and in farm ecology, Richard joined Hertfordshire County Council holding positions in countryside management, rural planning and waste management.*

## A major challenge

Waste management is one of the major challenges of today. Although the problems of waste are discussed in terms of Hertfordshire, similar issues will apply elsewhere. It will be necessary to come to terms with solutions to these difficult topics as carrying on as now is just not an acceptable option.

The problems in Hertfordshire are emphasised by the critical shortage of landfill capacity. Space is running out fast, and there is now only one-tenth of what was available ten years ago. Landfill costs have dou-

quences of disposing of waste in this way.

Hertfordshire's problems are emphasised by the need to send waste to landfill beyond the county boundaries, with large tonnages being transported to Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. Some 60% of Hertfordshire's waste goes to landfill; this now needs to be drastically reduced.

## The Waste Partnership

There are split responsibilities for handling Hertfordshire's 570,000 tonnes of waste annually. The ten district and borough councils act as Waste Collection Authorities, while the County Council is the Waste Disposal Authority, all working together as part of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.

## An ambitious strategy

Hertfordshire's strategy is first of all to reduce the amount of waste, then re-use, recycle and compost, and finally to treat what remains. The county is already in the top quartile of local authorities, with a recycling rate of 38.5%

well ahead of the national target of 50% by 2020.

The key issue is how to treat what remains after all other options have been applied. It is recognised that the solution must be for the long-term, at least 25 years. It must be environmentally sound and carbon efficient. It will involve both public and private sectors, each playing to their strengths, including the regulatory skills of the public sector. The quantity of waste remaining needs to be seen as an opportunity rather than just a problem: aiming to get the most appropriate investment in Hertfordshire, while minimising impacts such as transportation requirements.

## The proposed way forward

A feasibility study completed in 2007 has led to a business case being presented to the County Council in October 2008, with Private Finance Initiative as the preferred route. The recommended scheme is based on a combustion process to recover the heat content of the waste material; this would be used for CHP (Combined Heat and

Power) generation. A site has been identified at New Barnfield in Hatfield, as providing the necessary space and good transport links. There is potential for new housing in the area which could provide a local outlet for the heat produced, while the electricity would be sold to the grid.

nity are key to gaining acceptance for the scheme. It is essential that reliable, factual information is made available on the technology, and the roles and responsibilities of all involved. Spurious and out-of-date environmental claims often advanced by objectors need to be set against the proven performance of modern combustion plants, and the strict regulatory framework in which they operate.

## Environmental protection

In contrast, sending waste to landfill is environmentally damaging, not least on account of the formation of methane, a greenhouse gas over twenty times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Overall, the combustion of waste in modern plant is seen as the most effective way of protecting the environment, and minimising the emission of greenhouse gases. It may be that civic societies have a role in spreading an understanding that the present arrangements for waste disposal are no longer acceptable, and that change is essential.

If approved, the PFI scheme would be subject to a Treasury decision in March 2009, clearing the way for a contract to be finalised in 2011, with completion in 2014. It is recognised that communications with the local commu-

**Waste management in Hertfordshire**

Briefing October 2008

 Hertfordshire

Richard Brown  
Assistant Director, Environment  
Hertfordshire County Council

 WasteAware  
Hertfordshire Partnership

bled over the last five years as a result of the government's implementation of the European Landfill Directive, driven by an increasing awareness of the environmental conse-

compared with 32% nationally. Waste per head in Hertfordshire is now 504kg per year in contrast to 530kg nationally. The target for recycling and composting is 50% by 2012,

comparisons with the local commu-

## Society Reports

Shortened by Graham Taylor

### The Aylesbury Society

Under the Commons Act 2006, the Society applied for Town Green Status for a small green area of approx 0.24 hectares - one of the last in the town centre. Aylesbury Vale District Council and Warner Estates want to extend the Hale Leys shopping centre right to the road. The Society is not against this, but tried to retain the green. With its fine mature trees, it could be an asset to the mall, enhance the streetscape and provide an area to relax. However, on counsel's advice, the application was recommended for refusal by Bucks County Council at their Rights of Way meeting. All is not lost. Key to the development was a Debenhams store to be built on the 'green'. In the current economic climate and with the demise of their investors the scheme may falter in its present state.

### The Amersham Society

The big issue in Old Amersham has been the proposed building of a new Town Hall and Recreational facility by Amersham Town Council (ATC) on Barn Meadow, an open space recreational area owned by the council. The Society sponsored a public meeting where opposition was expressed, forcing a rethink.

Looking forward, we must deal with the Chiltern District Council core strategy which goes to Government in Spring. Despite predicting a static population in the area to 2026, it notes a central Government requirement for at least 2,900 additional dwellings in an area already containing much Green Belt and AONB. Changing household patterns are cited. The alternatives suggested are a concentrated or dispersed pattern; the latter being favoured as the 'lesser of two evils'. One hopes that some of these non-negotiable requirements will be revisited at central Government level.

### The Buckingham Society



Carolyn Cumming reported: Increased pressures for housing are threatened in the forthcoming Local Development Plan, which the historic infrastructure of a small market town is ill-placed to cope with. I have heard that the adherence to Supplementary Planning Guidance in the form of Vision & Design Statements is also threatened in emerging government guidance. Despite the inevitable slowdown that the present economic circumstances will engender, I suspect that the real damage will result in another crop of poorly-designed and badly-executed developments. We thank the ANTAS committee very much indeed for their work.

### Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation

Two major planning proposals preoccupied us in 2008: expansion of Stansted Airport

and plans for two secondary schools to relocate to a Green Belt site.

Stansted Airport: The Government agreed in October to uphold BAA's appeal against refusal of increased passenger throughput and the number of annual plane movements. We objected and gave evidence at the Inquiry. BAA also lodged an application to build a second runway which was called in and the Public Inquiry is to start in April 2009 when we intend to give evidence.

Separately, National Air Traffic Services (NATS) has been consulting on proposals to alter flight paths and holding patterns for the whole of the North London Terminal Area. One of the changes would have brought the busiest take off path from Stansted Airport closer to Bishop's Stortford and the Civic Federation objected. NATS are reconsidering this and other aspects of their proposals.

Schools Relocation: Two foundation secondary schools have applied to move to a single campus on an undeveloped Green Belt site on the edge of town, selling for housing their three existing sites. Simultaneously, the County Council wishes to sell a proposed school site and meet the shortfall in secondary school places by adding extra forms to the foundation schools. The result would be a campus of over 3000 students and 775 houses on the vacated sites - none of which was provided for in the local plan, adopted as recently as April 2007. We believe the proposals would be a disaster for the town. Fortunately our recent merger (see page 1) and experience of working together helped us to confront this exceptional challenge. We generated 1000 letters of objection and petitioned the District and County Councils with 3700 signatures. CPRE Herts sent a powerful letter of objection and the Town Council has been persuaded to vote unanimously to recommend that permission be refused.

### Buntingford Civic Society



The successful Buntingford Journal has a new editor Aliya Chowney and we anticipate further

growth of its influence in the community. Members of BCS are engaged in the development of a Town Plan which is expected to inform the LDF, although East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) failed to provide an approved format. The key area to address LDF issues appears to be at the 'options and choices' consultation stage. In co-operation with the Town Council, BCS generated 300+ signatures on a petition to EHDC regarding the apparent disregard of essential refurbishment needs in the Town. It may be coincidental but since a robust presentation to the Joint Members Committee by Cllr Jon Ling a number of works have been undertaken.

BCS achieved a good result to enhance the Town when it researched, gained design approval, installed and funded boundary signs for each of the four Town gateways.

### The Chesham Society

Bernard Meldrum explained that the Chesham Society, a registered charity, was having difficulty in recruiting officers and had reduced the number required for a quorum to remain legitimate.

Chesham's Lowndes Park had been awarded a Green Flag, the Civic Trust was thanked for it; but like the Harpenden Society, a flag pole needed planning permission. Should it really be necessary to go through a planning application for a single mast when banks of trees can be planted or felled without permission and that impact much greater?

### The Chiltern Society

Organisation and partnership working: An achievement under the CS's development policy, was the recruitment of an executive director Jenny Gilmore who has launched a membership drive aimed at

## Society reports cont'd

(Continued from page 4)

new and younger members. The CS strengthened its working relationships with a number of organisations, eg. with the Forestry Commission for expanded collaboration. The Society was invited to join the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Consortium, and continues to be an active member of the Planning Group of the South East Forum for Sustainability.

Conservation and Access: The Society's 2008 appeal raised over £10,000 for Milton's Cottage in Chalfont St Giles in the quatercentenary year of John Milton's birth. The Donate a Gate project progressed with volunteer installations passing 100 and money raised approaching £40,000. Members of the Historic Buildings and Landscapes Group worked with Planning Field Officers to comment on planning applications involving listed buildings and barn conversions. They participated in consultations on Conservation Area Character Studies or Appraisals for Beaconsfield, Well End (Little Marlow) and Aldbury. The Society's Conservation Volunteers exceeded previous years' work. New events at new locations and some new schools were added to the list of customers, which includes a number of parish councils.

The Society's campaign to alleviate low flows in the River Misbourne is still an issue. A detailed geological analysis report was prepared by a professionally qualified member for the Society's Rivers and Wetlands Conservation Group, contributing to efforts to restore flow to the Misbourne through Chalfont St Giles. Core work of the Rights of Way Group is to monitor and maintain the Chilterns' Rights of Way network of approximately 2,500 miles, raising any issues with the relevant County Council. The Group's Path Maintenance Volunteers had another busy year undertaking work on behalf of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire County Councils. Members of the Cycling Group participated in the team from

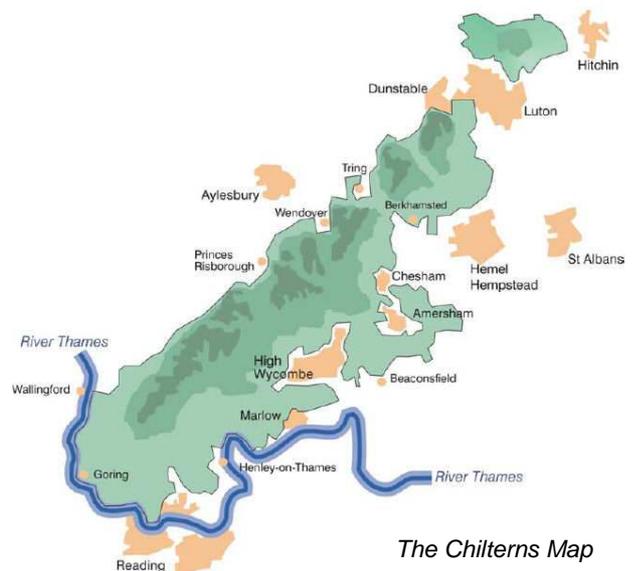
the Chiltern Conservation Board (CCB) and the Cycling Tourist Club that has developed a 400km on-road circular cycle route of the Chilterns. The Group is now planning, with The Wycombe Mountain Bike Club, to develop an off-road version based on the road route, which will include day and half day circuits.

Planning and the Environment: The Society's Planning Group continued monitoring planning applications and responding as appropriate, aiming to reduce the number of unsuitable developments which would harm the character of the Chilterns. Responses to a number of local, regional and national consultation documents were made. These included the consultation on the Bucks County Council Minerals and Waste Plan, which proposed alternative locations for waste transfer and energy from waste facilities. A set of key principles underlying the Society's approach to waste management was developed and conveyed to the four county waste authorities covering the Chilterns.

The Society's participation in the Examination in Public of the Draft South East Plan yielded some positive results. The panel's report and recommendations in August reflected several of the Society's inputs that sought to protect the Chilterns from various consequences of development and to enhance the countryside in and around the Chilterns AONB. The panel's recommendation for a new River Thames Corridor Policy was based on the text submitted by the Society, and acknowledged. The policy was accepted by the Secretary of State without change. A major concern emerged with proposals by NATS for significant changes in the airspace routings over the Chilterns with potentially damaging impact on the peaceful environment of the AONB. Responding to the complexity of these proposals was a challenge but the Society was fortunate to have members with profes-

sional expertise and whose detailed analysis enabled a comprehensive response.

Supporting Chiltern organisations and communities: The Society's Don Millar fund provides small-value grants to community projects. Grants were made to Ford End Watermill, to assist in repairs to the roof, and to Markyate Parish Council for interpretation boards. Funds to 14 projects since inception in 2004 totalled £4,466. The Society will participate in a LEADER project for the Chilterns area. This is an EU funded scheme to support rural industries and busi-



nesses. The project seeks funding via SEEDA in the sum of £3m covering the years 2008 – 2013 and will be a major benefit to the Chilterns.

The Society retained its strong working relationship with the Chilterns Conservation Board, and contributed £5,500 to the People and Places project and walks leaflets. It also gave £3,000 to the Chiltern Woodlands Project. The People and Places project links famous people with the places associated with them, in the Chilterns. Society volunteers researched and drafted several profiles for this website-based project.

The Photo Group's online library, representing 138 villages or towns is viewed by a

(Continued on page 6)

## Society reports cont'd

(Continued from page 5)  
 thousand every month. A new large leaflet was published to promote its three heritage visitor sites (Ewelme Watercress Beds and Nature Reserve, Bottom Wood and Lacey Green Windmill) and other visitor attractions in the Chilterns.

### The Harpenden Society



The Society supports the Harpenden Green Belt Association in opposing the Government's approval of the East of England Development Plan, which could adversely affect Harpenden's identity. An Examination In Public (EiP) will be

held into proposed gipsy/traveller site in North Harpenden. The Society believes the East of England Regional Authority process is flawed; the claim of a 3% future growth in gipsy and traveller numbers in the Region beyond 2011 is without supportive evidence.

Philip Kolvin, Chair of the Civic Trust, gave an inspirational talk about its work, including the Green Flag awards. Peter Barrett reported pleasure that for the second successive year, the Green Flag award has been won by the Town Council for the Harpenden Common. However 12 months on, the flag cannot be flown since planning permission by St Albans District Council has not yet been approved.

It is claimed that the NATS did not declare relevant information about the impact on nearby villages, of planned changes to the flight paths for Luton Airport.

### Hertford Civic Society

The supermarket wars continue in Hertford and Ware. First Sainsbury's sought to redevelop a redundant part of the brewery, but withdrew when faced with a recommendation for refusal. Then Tesco submitted a plan for redeveloping the whole of their existing site with a monstrous five storey building, car parking and 56 dwellings in multi-storey buildings. It has been refused permission and further action is awaited. Then Sainsbury returned with a

slightly smaller proposal, but addressing none of the principal objections such as traffic congestion; the Officers' report is expected shortly. Now ASDA has put in an application for an even bigger store in Ware.

In the meantime, the District Council commissioned a retail and town-centre study covering all the principal settlements in the District. This gave a cool analysis of the needs of the towns in the district and provides a useful tool in preparing the policies in the emerging Local Development Framework. For small 'market towns' such as Hertford, choice and competition are all very well, but not if they kill off the viability and vitality of the town-centre. In these circumstances the four aims of PPS 6 need to be prioritised. If your council has not carried out such a study, we suggest you press for one.

### High Wycombe Society



Over the years we have developed good relations with Wycombe District Council's Planning and Sustainability Department and the Society is involved in consultations right at the start of plans for new developments. Unfortunately this spirit of co-operation is not universal and we have been concerned by the apparent lack of accountability of the Leisure Department run by one portfolio holder and many council officers. When a new children's playground was proposed for the Rye Open Space, the High Wycombe Society's Friends of the Rye Group (FRG) had to resort to the Freedom of Information Act to bring the plans to light.

Another Leisure Department project, in partnership with the Environment Agency (EA), has been initiated. This time it is for installing angling platforms on Rye Dyke, one of which will be 40m long. A notice appeared in the Bucks Free Press saying that EA did not propose to conduct an Environment Impact Statement (EIS), reading as if ob-

jections would be considered. However, it emerged that the conditions requiring an EIS were not applicable. On being challenged that this meant that the public has no grounds to object, EA replied that the project had been passed by another department, adding that 'the fishermen' had been consulted.

### Hitcham & Taplow Society



Strategy for the new Local Development Framework stalled in 2007 as South Bucks decided by to wait for the South East Plan.

This is of concern and we feel exposed to development pressure without an up-to-date plan in place. We opposed a gravel development which is close to houses in and around the village. In 2007 the application was rejected but a another made on the grounds of changed circumstances.

Two years ago the Taplow Paper Mill was closed and the new owners have been developing a masterplan for the 19 ha area. It is all in the Green Belt, mainly in a Conservation Area, and will be one of the biggest planning applications we have encountered comprising a hotel, a tennis club with 14 courts plus clubhouse, up to 500 houses and flats and live work units and offices. The proposal would be considerable over-development.

Lastly a matter of concern is conflict between Permitted Development rights and Conservation Area Policies. A Certificate of Lawfulness may be granted under Permitted Development rights to carry out development which removes a Conservation Area feature identified as important by a Conservation Area Character Appraisal. This has just happened in Taplow and we have asked the planners whether there is anything which can be done to prevent it happening again.

### Potters Bar Society

The five year campaign to restrict the operations of Chas Storer Ltd, a waste transfer company, took a major step forward in June 2008. An Inspector upheld most of Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) enforcement order restricting operations and refusing planning



## Society reports *cont'd*

(Continued from page 6)  
 permission for a materials recycling facility. HCC had engaged a QC and her chambers provided a junior barrister on a pro bono basis to assist local residents, backed by the Society, who appeared under Rule 6. However any hopes of a speedy conclusion were dashed by the company being given leave to appeal.

Sited in the Green Belt, Storers began as a cottage industry collecting waste paper. It grew over the years, largely without formal planning consent, to a large operation dealing with dry mixed waste including plastics, glass, paper and cardboard for which they could legitimately claim grandfather's rights. Despite entering into contracts with various local authorities, Storers denied that any intensification had taken place and sought to maintain unrestricted hours of operation and number of vehicle movements. The Inspector's decision allowed some early morning and weekend operations, and vehicle movements are restricted to 2003 levels, which is approximately half of that measured recently. The fight is not yet over but we can only watch on the sidelines as the Planning Inspectorate defends the earlier decision.

### The Radlett Society & Green Belt Association



RS&GBA welcomed the Planning Inspector's rejection of property developer Helioslough's appeal against St Albans District Council's refusal of planning consent for a large Strategic Rail Freight Interchange in the Green Belt. It was the former site of Handley Page aerodrome, Radlett. The decision was supported by Secretary of State for Communities. The reasons were harm to the Green Belt, and failure to properly eliminate alternative sites. The door is open for a re-application which we will oppose (see letters page).

### St Albans Society

The council has said no to Tesco's application to build a superstore on the Evershed's

site in London Road, just outside the city centre. So far silence – no appeal, no more modest proposals. Are we to receive an unwelcome Christmas present?

The appeal by Helioslough against the council refusal to allow the development of a rail freight terminal between St Albans and Radlett has been turned down. But will they come back with an alternative?

The owners of the neglected Odeon building got permission to replace it with 14 flats. A great sadness – the Society fought hard to save it. At one point we had hopes of James Hannaway of the Rex, Berkhamsted. Given the current economic climate, will anything happen?

Our council appears to be in some disarray. Various key officers, including the Tesco case officer, have gone elsewhere, and the longstanding Head of Planning is on 'gardening leave' - the second top official to be sent swiftly out of the building. The conservation and design team (in a planning shake-up) are threatened with disbandment and possible job loss – disturbing, given the city's historic credentials.

Oaklands Further Education College, having more or less left its city campus where demolition of major Victorian villas has been heartbreaking, was given permission by the council to extend its Smallford campus onto the Green Belt. This application has been called in by the Secretary of State, as it is contrary to council policy. It's a respite – but probably only temporary. Life is further complicated by the rolling out of the City Vision, a council initiative for which government funding has been obtained. Consultants have been appointed to set up a master plan for the improvement and enhancement of the city and its environs. The usual surveys, polls, workshops etc will apply.

Meanwhile in the city centre, the Henry Davidson cinema contract limps on, with two

poor designs withdrawn because of public outcry, and now a failure to balance the finances of the brief. Let's hope the council doesn't bail them out; the Society has a brilliant design by architect Cesari Bednarski just waiting to be worked up.

The Society took part with the council and the Review newspaper in the inaugural Retailer of the Year competition – an event set up to show that St Albans is not just an eating and drinking destination. A great success – plans are now underway for 2009.

The Society holds an annual Members & Awards Evening, at which outstanding architectural projects finished in the previous year are celebrated and rewarded. Amid much controversy in 2007 some members threatened to resign – the top prize was awarded to Halligan House, a single storey modernist dwelling by the international architect Simon Conder. The house went on to win a RIBA award, and to be shortlisted for the Manser Medal for the best one-off house nationally. Now it's up for a Civic Trust award. Our refurbished website should be with us soon.

### Welwyn Planning and Amenity Group

Despite the modest size, WPAG has continued to maintain a high profile in the community especially in respect of monitoring all planning applications and making representations to the planning authority, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC). We made it a conscious decision to seek a cordial and open relationship with the team leader in WHBC Planning department responsible for our district, with the consequent benefit of access for frank face-to-face exchange of views on controversial major applications, free from the constriction of written submissions alone.

Since 2005 we have been involved in the preparation of our Parish Plan, which was published in June 2008. WPAG is involved in the follow-up of the recommenda-



Poplars at Welwyn

tions. These include the built environment, traffic and transport, community safety, local services improvement, facilities for the elderly and for youth and an interactive Parish Plan website.

WPAG is also a partner with the Parish Council and the Parish Plan Action Group in a formal approach to our Local Authority to make a significant input to the statutory consultation stage of the Local Development Framework. Our degree of success will depend on how effectively we make our case and how much importance the Local Authority attaches to the local democratic process.

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**Vice Presidents**

Ian Morgan, JP, DL  
Diana Wethered

**Chairman**

Martin Brooks

**Vice Chairman**

John Davies

**Honorary Secretary**

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**MEMBER SOCIETIES**

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Aylesbury Society

Beaconsfield Society

Berkhamsted Citizens  
Association

Bishop's Stortford  
Civic Federation

Buckingham Society

Buntingford Civic Society

Chesham Society

Harpenden Society

Hertford Civic Society

High Wycombe Society

Hitcham & Taplow  
Society

Hitchin Society

Marlow Society

Oxford Civic Society

Potters Bar Society

Radlett Society

St Albans Civic Society

Welwyn Garden City  
Society

Welwyn Planning and  
Amenity Group

Wendover Society

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Civic Trust South East  
(CTSE)

East of England  
Association of Civic  
Societies (EEACTS)

London Forum

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## The Chairman writes

by Martin Brooks

This is my first opportunity to write to you as the new chairman of ANTAS. I succeed Tony Fooks and knowing what Tony has achieved, my first duty and pleasure is to thank Tony for all he has done. He will continue to work for our movement as he moves up to chairman of the newly revitalised Civic Trust South East.



My first report is to assure you that I find your organisation in very good shape. With the help of all of you and your very able committee, my challenge is to ensure that we keep it that way. In this we

are all particularly indebted to Andrew Sangster our hon. secretary who has been the bedrock of ANTAS for so long. Many of you will know Andrew has suffered the sudden and unexpected loss of his wife Eve, who was well known to many ANTAS members and in the Hertford Society. I know you would want to join with me in sending Andrew our sympathy and condolences.

What a difference a few months make. With the rapid changes in the economic fortunes of a nation, I believe there will be some rearranging of the issues and priorities of all North Thames Amenity Societies. Those issues will not go away from the most economically active part of England, the most densely populated country in Western Europe. In the immediate future it could be a case of 'the best of times and the worst of times' to adapt Dickens famous quote to the more prosaic world of civic amenity and the built environment. Certainly we have been prosperous of late and much that we hold dear has in fact been threatened by the consequences of that prosperity in

terms of the pressure of development and growth.

Now we may be poorer and possibly more miserable in a more uncertain world where jobs, savings and credit will be much harder to obtain or keep. We do have the opportunity however, to roll back some of the unwelcome pressure of relentless development and ill-thought plans for our market towns, the jewel in the crowns of our shire counties. We should urge for reconsideration and a better approach, while bankers, businesses and developers temporarily retreat and leave local authorities with more time to think these things through. It is an opportunity to work with all these stakeholders: to take a more considered, sustainable and aesthetic approach which chimes better with the communities in which many developments in recent years have often sprouted with all the appeal of an ugly, alien invader. In the immediate future, central and local government will hold a more pivotal role as both the remaining major source of resources and as the regulator of planning. This should be a time when affordable housing can be built or requisitioned from the private sector in greater numbers and be brought into use in a more appealing way.

So with your help let us try to ensure that this opportunity born of an unwelcome time of economic hardship is not squandered. I look forward to meeting and talking with many of you to find out how we best achieve this in the next year or so.

*Spring Meeting  
Saturday 25 April 2009  
in the Fairway Room,  
at the Panshanger Golf  
Complex,  
Old Heans Lane,  
Welwyn Garden City  
AL7 2ED*