

Minutes of the ANTAS Meeting, held at The Kings Head, Aylesbury on Saturday 12th April 2008

PRESENT:

Dr Peter Diplock, President, Diana Wethered, Vice-President, Tony Fooks, Chairman, Andrew Sangster, Hon. Secretary and Alastair Maclean, Hon. Treasurer. Also present were Philip Kolvin, Chairman of the Civic Trust, Peter Bembridge, Managing Director of the Civic Trust, John Egan, Chairman of EEACTS, Tony Molesworth, Hon. Secretary of CTSE, Merrin Molesworth, Newsletter Editor, Chris Woodman, Web Master and representatives of the Aylesbury, Berkhamsted, Buckingham, Buntingford, Chesham, Chiltern, Harpenden, High Wycombe, Hitcham and Taplow, Marlow, Oxford, Potters Bar, Radlett, St Albans and Wendover Societies.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

These were received from Ian Morgan, Vice-President, David Peevers, Cllr Mike Appleyard, Dr Ruth Farwell and the Amersham, Beaconsfield, Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City Societies, and the Welwyn Planning and Amenity Group.

WELCOME:

Members were welcomed to the meeting by Keith Robinson, Chairman of The Aylesbury Society. He noted that Aylesbury was an ancient market town and that the meeting was taking place in one of the oldest coaching inns serving the route out of London. The town centre had been much redeveloped in the 1960s leaving only small areas of the original buildings, but there were now plans to replace many of the 20th Century buildings, particularly around the central square. It is lamented that the river through the town lacks visibility, with little being done to make better use of this amenity. He reminded the meeting that under the South East of England Plan eighteen thousand new homes were planned for the town. Through ANTAS the local Society had expressed strong concerns about the prospects of local employment for future occupants. It had also pressed for restoration of the link from the town to the former Oxford to Cambridge railway line should the proposed re-commissioning of the line between Oxford and Milton Keynes go ahead.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

The minutes of the meeting at Potters Bar on 21st April 2007 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

MATTERS ARISING:

There were none.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The Chairman presented the following report:

"We are now approximately half way through the ANTAS year. It only seems month since our AGM.

I know many of you have had major concerns in your own area with the ever increasing number of super-markets stores being built, developing consultations with your own Councils, which some of you have found difficult and frustrating.

With regard to the Newsletter I would like to extend the Executive's thanks to all contributors and also to Graham Taylor in assisting in the editing of the News letter and not least Merrin Molesworth for putting the final touches to it amongst her many duties as Mayor of Chesham.

I have for several meetings promised a report on the Civic Trust South East. I am pleased to report that after an Extraordinary General Meeting a new Executive Committee has been formed under my Chairmanship, with Tony Molesworth as Secretary and David Peevers as Treasurer, along with a number of representatives from around the region. The CTSE Executive has met and is now in the process of preparing all documentation and formal proposals for approval at the Annual General Meeting to be held at the Civic Trust HQ Essex Street on Saturday 31st May 2008. I am also pleased to announce that Phillip Kolvin, Chairman of the Civic Trust will be our speaker on that occasion.

The first action for the committee will be to seek the adoption of a new constitution as well as to ensure that we have full representation from all parts of the region. An active programmes is being developed for all involved. I can also report that we are well on the way to achieving these aims and are being supported by a wide range of groups in the region.

At the recent Rural Forum a presentation was made concerning Affordable Housing in rural communities. I would recommend to all our rural members that they should contact the English Rural Housing Association who will guide you through this very worth while exercise.

I would like to take this opportunity to announce the date of our AGM which is on the 18th October 2008 and will be hosted by Hertford Civic Society. It also gives me great pleasure to announce that Mr Martin Brookes of the Amersham Society has agreed to be nominated for the Chairmanship of ANTAS at the AGM.

Finally members, where you have a problem in your area please keep the executive informed as they are willing to give every consideration to assisting you with an umbrella letter of support from ANTAS. We have often found that this has helped by the receiving unit taking greater consideration in their deliberations on a particular issue.

My personal thanks go to the Executive for their work, but also to you as members who participate in such an active organisation as ANTAS.

Thank you.”

THE TREASURER’S REPORT:

The Hon.Treasurer reported that as a result of the savings made on the last meeting at High Wycombe funds currently held in the bank account were ahead of forecast budget. In addition the Committee had bought its annual requirement for stamps, including distribution of the Newsletter, before the recent increase in postage rates. Given the present bank balance, and if costs can be broadly contained at present levels, there would be no need to increase the membership fee in the coming year.

REPORTS ON REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGIES:

South East England

The Chairman reported that publication of the Secretary of State’s proposed amended Plan for further consultation had now been delayed three times, but was now expected before the summer recess. The Association will comment on the aspects affecting its area.

East of England:

John Egan (EEACTS) reported that the final text of the East of England Plan had still not been published by the Secretary of State. It was now expected in early May.

The Secretary reported that he had been invited to a briefing from the Environment Agency, Three Valleys Water Co. and Thames Water, which had been arranged by Mark Prisk, MP for East Hertfordshire. The purpose was to consider future water supply and waste water treatment. East Herts is considered to be an area of water stress, along with many other areas of the east and south east of England. The water industry and the regulatory bodies have started working in unison, perhaps as a result of scathing criticism at the Examination in Public of the East of England Plan, to plan and co-ordinate both future water supply and sewage treatment needs.

Meetings have been held with all local planning authorities to identify where the new homes to be provided under the Plan will be located, so that present water supply and sewage capacities can be assessed and the need for additional infrastructure determined. Clearly the industry expects to have influence in future in the consideration of planning applications for major housing developments. On the water supply side the industry will be relying on a reduction in per capita consumption and, in the case of East Herts, importing from surrounding areas, including the South-East. The latter will only be possible if the proposed reservoir at Abingdon is constructed. Most of the sewage from the east side of Hertfordshire, including Stevenage, is pumped to and treated at the Rye Meads works in the Lea Valley above Hoddesdon. There is little or no spare capacity at present to accommodate additional housing and the major constraint to expansion is the limitation on total pollution load of the effluent imposed by the flow in the receiving river under the terms of the EU Water Framework Directive. The solution will be to build smaller local sewage treatment works in the vicinity of major housing developments; this would benefit local rivers by increasing flows. However, the levels of investment that will be needed will be enormous. No doubt this situation will be repeated in many other areas covered by the Association’s members.

OTHER PLANNING MATTERS:

The Association had been invited to comment on the Action Plan, known as SNAP, jointly prepared by Stevenage and North Herts Councils for the major development proposed north of Stevenage. The comments submitted concentrated on principles and, in particular, expressed concern that it appeared to be ‘business as usual’ with low housing densities spreading out across presently undeveloped countryside and reliance upon private transport for movement. We put forward the view that several circumstances: increasing pressure to address the effects of climate change, energy price escalation, large increases in future infrastructure funding

and reduced credit availability, had changed since the Regional Plan was drawn up, indicating that more concentrated developments were needed on existing local centres and transport nodes. In addition expansion of employment should be based on existing employment areas which are currently well-served by public transport. The need for greater control of the housing mix offered by developers was also identified.

SOCIETY REPORTS:

Aylesbury

A mixed six months for the Aylesbury Society. With a committee of only 6 of which 4 are active, it is increasingly difficult to cover all issues arising in the town. Despite that, the good news is that we have had an influx of new members. This is partly due to the fact that we have achieved some headlines and front pages in the local paper. Controversy and campaigns always brings in new members. This has been for a variety of issues but chiefly covering our objections to the proposed Waterside shopping centre. Our main concerns are the position and size of the new scheme which will butt up hard on the A41 (Exchange Street) and will destroy one of the few green areas in the town together with 5 chestnut trees. We are also firmly against another supermarket being built alongside the canal and away from the town centre in an area earmarked for residential use. The other major issue is the proposed location of 9000 new homes. There are a number of options open although the Society is firmly against locating them to the south side of the town.

Bishop's Stortford

East of England Plan - We succeeded in getting Bishop's Stortford removed from the Plan as a strategic housing location. Unfortunately, however, the Government ignored their own Inspectors' recommendations, and reinstated Harlow North into the Plan. This would be a settlement the size of Bishop's Stortford on the opposite side of the Stort flood plain from Harlow. We believed this would be of no benefit to Bishop's Stortford or Harlow, and objected. The final Government decision on Plan is still awaited.

Jackson Square - We were pleased that Phase 2 was rejected by East Herts as a result of the justifiable outcry provoked across the town by the scale and unsympathetic appearance of Phase 1. The developers appealed and the Federation gave evidence in support of East Herts' refusal of permission. Unfortunately the appeal was upheld. The Inspector concluded that East Herts should have made its objections clear when considering the outline application and would then not have granted permission for Phase 1 in its present form. This highlights the importance of registering objections to any development proposal at the outline application stage. Waiting for the detailed proposals is too late if outline permission has been granted.

Stansted Airport - Our President and Vice Chairman gave evidence to the Public Inquiry last summer into Phase 1 development proposal – full use of the existing runway. The Federation objected on grounds of the impact on roads and parking, overcrowding of rail services, noise and pressure on housing and community cohesion. The Federation suggested that if permission were nevertheless to be granted it should be subject to the following conditions: no increase in number of aircraft movements, permanent noise monitors at Beldams Lane, Thorley and St Michaels Mead, progressive reduction in night flights, 50% contribution from BAA to new residents parking schemes and review of noise preferential routes. The 2nd runway application has now been submitted even though no decision has yet been published on the G1 application. Comments have to be submitted to Uttlesford by 26 June and the Federation will be objecting – working closely with Stop Stansted Expansion.

Schools Relocation - The Vice Chairman presented the case against the proposed relocation of the Herts and Essex and Boy's High Schools to the EHDC development control committee on 5 March. The full details of the arguments against relocation are on BSCF web site. We believe that the impact on the quality of education and on the physical fabric of the town would be disastrous and that, given a free choice, the last place to build a new school is beneath the busiest Stansted Airport flight path (see below on noise preferential routes). The Schools, having developed their proposals in secret, are at last having to go public on what they are planning to do.

Vision for Bishop's Stortford - East Herts has set up a committee to establish a vision for the future of our town. Our President sits on it but it remains to be seen whether the Committee will influence the future or whether all the key decisions (such as schools relocation) will have been taken in advance.

Noise Preferential Routes - National Air Traffic Services (NATS) have published a consultation document reviewing the use of air space in the whole of the London and South Eastern area. This consultation ends on 22 May. The main impact would be to bring the BUZAD noise preferential route (the most frequently used south westerly take off route) closer to Bishop's Stortford with much greater prospect of overflying Thorley, St Michael's Mead, and the Whittington Way Schools relocation site. The Federation will object but the exercise redistributes the use of airspace over such a wide area the prospect of change is unlikely.

Buckingham

Unlocking Talent in Our Communities - The Society has responded to this consultation paper, which (if you can cut through the jargon and gobbledey gook) has, as its central theme, the need to encourage much greater active participation in local decision making. The Society agreed with this aspiration but deplored the lack of real influence and power at County, District and Parish level. Our response emphasised the need to reverse recent policy changes, which actually succeed in creating **more** unelected quangos, and give local people accountable, elected representatives with control over local decisions. To encourage local involvement, we suggested that additional incentives might allow elected representatives to take a tax "holiday" from Council Tax and to limit the terms of office, with elections every three years.

Waste - The County Council has produced the second stage of its Mineral & Waste Strategy to 2026. Waste is a thorny subject. No-one wants it but all of us require its disposal in a safe, sustainable manner. An issue which we believe all civic societies should engage with is the need to pressurise waste creators into eliminating non-recyclable items. The Society is very concerned that the movement of waste should be minimised and be undertaken by rail and canal wherever possible.

Floods - Buckingham was severely flooded last July. Our Town Council arranged a very well attended meeting with the Environment Agency and the Drainage Board. The Society has been emphasising the need for proper management of the river bed and banks (as used to happen). This has been carried out on a small stretch of river through the town, which has already earned its keep when recent heavy rains caused the river to rise – this time without serious floodwaters.

Buntingford

Report to AGM - The numbers are mainly satisfactory. In particular the financial situation is good and our commitments are fully covered. If there is a frustration it is the slowness of bodies such as Hertfordshire Highways to respond to offers of money to undertake or authorise infrastructure improvements in Buntingford. Our financial strength is a result of the advertising revenue earned by the Journal. Members and non members alike use the Journal as a valuable source of local services and advertisers are aware that with each edition around 1000 copies are sold and delivered to members. We estimate that each copy of the Journal is seen by at least 2000 readers.

We are members of the Civic Trust which nationally enjoys 250,000 members of 750 societies. BCS is affiliated to the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies, East of England Association of Civic Trusts, Urban Forum and Campaign to Protect Rural England. These are the primary vehicles through which we contribute to national and local government consultation on a range of topics. At a local level BCS are members of the Traffic Advisory Group, Town Plan steering team, Locality Panel (policing) also 'Hidden Britain'.

There are direct grants made by BCS to local good causes such as the Scout Memorial, Aspenden play area, refurbishing the Town Sign, enhanced boundary signs and of course a contribution to the Christmas Lights and Buntingford Carnival. Preservation of our heritage is essential and in this respect we are publishing the late Phillip Plumb's Journal articles on the history of Buntingford, in addition, we will honour Bishop Seth Ward with a plaque to go alongside a copy of a restored portrait hung in the Seth Ward Community Centre.

We are proud of our rapidly developing website (buntingfordcivic.org.uk) and see this as a means to share information and gain the views of our membership. The Data Protection Act creates barriers to BCS holding personal data and thereby two-way communications are thwarted but do check-out the website.

Membership is around 256 families and friends. This is a good base but we intend to increase it over the coming year. It is essential that we gain members who will progress to membership of the executive committee if the society, which has served Buntingford and surrounding villages so well, is to continue for a further 30 years. The campaign to recruit new members will be under the banner 'Have a Voice' which is one of the principal benefits of membership in this day and age.

Chesham

The Chesham community (and Amersham) have two current concerns that would benefit from other Society's support as the issues must effect many of them. Support from the Civic Trust would be critical.

Firstly lack of water in chalk streams for several months/years at a time due to shortage of rainfall, compounded by over extraction lowering the water tables and secondly the impact of Special Parking Area controls on our traditional high streets.

Chesham developed where it did because of the presence of a spring fed chalk stream that powered several water mills along the River Chess. Amersham developed for a similar reason along the River Misbourne.

Historically it was considered to be a rare event for either of the chalk streams to dry up; yet today it happens all too frequently. A delighted Chiltern District Councillor recently told me that the Misbourne now had water in it

for most of its length; fortunately the Chess is in a much better state than the Misbourne with water currently flowing along its whole length. There are two factors causing the spring fed chalk streams to dry up – over extraction from the underlying chalk feeding the springs and drier seasons, caused probably by climate change. We can do very little to influence either of the causes, but the situation is likely to get worse as the demands for water can only increase if more and more houses are to be built, by government edict, in the county. The government will not accept as being valid grounds for refusal to build the extra houses that the roads are inadequate, that there is a lack of public transport, or power supplies or education or hospitals or employment. Understandably, in each case, the local authorities are expected to remedy the deficiencies, but neither the local authorities nor central government can remedy a shortage of rainfall that causes the water shortage. It is not practical to have water pumped in from wetter areas, like Wales or the Lake District, as it would be prohibitively expensive to do so. More houses being built in our water catchment area will mean that the chalk streams will run dry even more frequently.

New threats to our High Street's viability. SPECIAL PARKING AREAS - Local authorities are being encouraged by central government to widen the scope of measures preventing all day and long term on street parking in towns by charging for it. As a consequence Chiltern District Council are currently considering introducing charges for parking on the streets in both Amersham and Chesham shopping centres, but not in any of the smaller shopping centres like Chalfont St Peter or Little Chalfont. The impact from the introduction of this scheme will have disastrous impacts on both High Streets, as shoppers will still be able to drive to supermarkets and park for nothing. The supermarkets have already prompted the demise of many shops nationally; now their 'killer' impact will be even greater unless something is done to restore a level playing field. If all car parking on the streets, in municipal car parks and in privately owned supermarket car parks were required to pay the same charges – or no charges - and impose the same conditions, to everyone parking within a local authority area, (without stores refunding charges to shoppers) the situation would be much fairer. However this requirement for equal treatment for all parking in town centres could only come about by a change in the national law. (Residents of Lewes in East Sussex and West Sussex were recently interviewed on TV news about the impact the SPA has made in their areas, so it is not just Chesham and Amersham residents being penalised.) The local authorities all claim, and why should we doubt their honesty, that they are not implementing these schemes to raise revenue, but to give residents better services. If the effect is to knock another nail in the coffin of our high street shops will residents' interests be well served? I think not! Also are residents' interests being served if they then have to pay to park in their own roads, either at a meter or with a Resident's Parking Permit? Again I think not! If the local authorities need to raise extra revenue to pay for the administrative costs involved in enforcing the self-financing current SPA then they could be much more effective in charging those who break the law and park on single and double yellow lines or at bus stops without being penalised. Just look around the town and notice how many vehicles are parked illegally; and how often do you see parking penalty notices on a windscreen? Not very often I will wager. The SPA costs could be financed by more stringent enforcement of the existing regulations, without penalising residents wanting to park in their own streets as an easy touch. This issue must be of concern to most amenity Societies, has the Civic trust got any ideas to ensure that that there is a level playing field between the traditional High Streets and out of town shopping centres?

Chiltern

The Chiltern Society reached an important threshold in the last year, in terms of developing itself to deliver a wider range of volunteer services. The Heritage Lottery Fund sponsored the preparation of an Audience Development Plan which revealed that the Society is one of the largest English amenity groups focussed on a distinctive area, and that it was also the only one to be operated entirely by volunteers. As a consequence, the Society decided to recruit a full time Director to lead a comprehensive development programme and the successful candidate commences work with us next week. The Society has also submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to fund three years' employment of an Education Officer and a Volunteer Co-ordinator. Together these three posts will place the Society in a good position to expand its activities.

It has been another intensive year for the Society's Planning Group, with a lot of activity focussed on Local Development Plan consultations and specific topics as wide ranging as waste management, green infrastructures, airport and airspace developments and rural infrastructure. We were particularly pleased that our lengthy involvement in the 'Examination in Public' of the Draft South East Plan paid off in a number of new or amended policies that will help secure the natural and built character of the rural Chilterns and its market towns. We were delighted that the Panel based its proposed new River Thames Policy on the Society's draft, and gave us due recognition for that.

The Society continues to conduct statutory path maintenance work on behalf of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire County Councils, which saves very substantial costs that would otherwise be met by council tax payers.

As part of our partnership with the Chilterns Conservation Board, we are sponsoring the production of Chilterns walks leaflets and the development of a website connecting famous People and Places in the Chilterns.

Our Rivers and Wetlands Conservation Group remains closely involved with the conservation of the Chilterns chalk streams. Together with the High Wycombe Society, we are key players in a new project to 'Revive the Wye'.

Volunteers from our Historic Buildings and Landscape Group are working towards completion of the buildings part of the Chilterns Landscape Character Assessment project. The Group, along with local interests, expressed its serious concern about the Bucks County Council decision to locate a large timeline interpretation board in a conspicuous location just above the Whiteleaf Cross: dialogue continues.

Harpenden

A **gipsy/traveller site** is still proposed from 3 options for North Harpenden. However a local group, "Friends of Rural Harpenden" (FORH), to which the Society has connections, have employed the services of a planning consultant experienced in this field. A legal case has been prepared and submitted in the form of a dossier opposing any proposals on grounds of unsuitability of sites, the outcome of which should be known within the next three months from the St Albans District Council (SDC) responsible for determining site accommodation. In the meantime the Government are now inviting views on EERA draft policy proposals that every local authority should provide a minimum of 15 new pitches with more where there is a higher level of need. In the case of St Albans this would be 33 more pitches which would be double that of at least 6 out of 9 other districts in the County with a 3% per annum increase from 2011. The SDC will object to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy review on these grounds.

The **treasured asset** for Harpenden is its Commons and Greens which are regarded as sacrosanct and of historical interest. A few years ago a strip of Common at Hatching Green, a part of Harpenden just south, was removed for road widening to allow a developer ease of access to a new building site with a requirement to reinstate upon completion. The Town Council had been offered a 'Trade-off' of £8,000 from the developer for other funding. The Society in raising strong objection learnt that the Herts County Council, the authority responsible, had not in the first instance sought the appropriate approval from the Secretary of State under relevant legislation. Thus, as a result of our intervention the Common will be reinstated to the appreciation of local residents. At a public meeting of the local Town Council when dealing with the above matter, it became abundantly clear from the procedure and business of the meeting that once the public or open session was concluded, other topics or subject matter were to be discussed in a 'secret' closed session approved by the chairman to which the agenda made no reference. This was claimed to be statutorily permitted as a 'blue paper confidential' document under the provisions of Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972. This matter has been raised with the local Council and is to be discussed further.

Though a second runway is not to be developed at **Luton Airport**, there are still strong concerns about the changes in the flight path particularly as they affect local villages.

Hertford

Hertford is experiencing supermarket wars. Some eighteen months ago Sainsbury expressed its intention to take on Tesco. Hertford is surrounded by other towns within 15 minutes drive time, all with large supermarkets, thus has no hinterland. The town is well catered for by a town-centre Waitrose, an edge-of-centre Tesco and a Marks and Spencer food store..

Sainsbury submitted a planning application for an edge-of-centre site on the redundant part of a brewery.. Hertford Civic Society opposed this on grounds of: no effective demonstration of need, impact on viability and vitality of the existing town-centre, traffic congestion, deficient transport assessment and non-compliance with Employment Area designation of the site. The application was withdrawn when the Officers Report recommended refusal. In the meantime Tesco have announced their intention to submit a planning application doubling the size of the existing store with a multi-storey building, appropriate to a central London site but not a small market town, coupled with affordable housing.

The significant experience gained from addressing the Sainsbury application was the matter of formal Transport Assessments. These must be carried out in accordance with the guidelines to be found on the Dept of Communities and Local Government website. They must address in detail forms of transport to the application site other than by private car. This Sainsbury failed to do. Hertford Civic Society retained the services of an experienced transport consultant to prepare a critique of the submitted assessment, which the District Council made use of in considering the application.

High Wycombe

Our huge, brand new **Eden Shopping and Entertainment Centre** opened with great razzmatazz on March 13th. Correspondence in the Bucks Free Press immediately after the opening was mainly positive: the most hostile was from a "Disgusted of High Wycombe" complaining about the spectacularly skimpy attire of the dancing girls! Yesterday's issue had a very mixed bag – "An Abomination", "Urban Vandalism" and "Depressing edifice" were three titles, but there were also several much more positive though less eloquent eulogies! So we are starting to take stock:

- We wonder if the developers' proud policy of giving the development a feel of fresh open streets was wise – many have complained it is draughty and definitely not snug. It does seem that this is putting off potential customers. Moral: don't think that commercial self-interest will necessarily look after these issues.
- The residential blocks, which we got sent back to the drawing board following a meeting at which our members said the plans looked like 1950s Eastern Europe, look pretty good, though marred by an adjoining ugly, angular spiral car-park exit.
- The pavilion in the centre of the main new open space, intended to be reminiscent of a beech leaf, is much too tall, dominating the open space and blocking views from the new Library. Perhaps that was something we missed.
- The proximity of the new bus station to the new development is widely appreciated, though it is much further from the rest of the town centre.
- So perhaps we have joined the club of Amersham and Beaconsfield in having distinct old and new towns – even though ours are only a few hundred yards apart. So we ask you: "How does one keep one's 'old town' alive and vibrant?"

Bucks New University is now rising from the ground that you drove gingerly across 6 months ago, and computerised visualisations look quite exciting. We attended a site meeting with Councillors about the advanced steel cladding material to be used.

Our **Transport Group** may be making progress in its campaign to reopen the old railway to Bourne End for Ultra-Light Rail. While it may never have been realistic to expect Dr Elsa Woodward's mass petition to sway the planners at BCC or the Department of Transport, it has certainly generated publicity for the idea, with the result that a local entrepreneur – a gravel extractor turned green businessman – looks like using his contacts and some of his cash to kick-start the crucial engineering and viability study that the line needs as a first step. So don't underestimate the impact of petitions.

We in High Wycombe have just received, yesterday, the Inspectors' Reports on development of two major **greenfield sites** north of the town, which the Department for Transport sat on for 2-4 months before the Secretary of State took her decision! The result? One was upheld and one refused.

Finally, we are concerned about the tatty appearance of the new **market stalls** erected by Hughmark on our lovely High Street since the Council decided to put the running of the market out to private tender.

Hitcham & Taplow

Consultations - The last year has been punctuated by a succession of consultations, particularly related to the Local Development Framework. Core Strategies, Statements of Community Involvement, Preferred Options have all been responded to, some in reasonable time and others at ridiculously short notice. It has been a learning experience to discover how it all fits together and to be a part of the making of the new style plans which replace the old Development Plan system and I believe it is an exercise that is well worth the effort, because by taking part now we can see more of the workings of the minds of the planners who are bringing the LDF into being and better understand the processes of the plan's production and how it will apply when adopted. If knowledge is power then we are gaining power – but don't tell the authorities!

Planning - We have a major opportunity on a 48 acre site which includes a recently closed paper mill and the long closed Skindles Hotel with a large quantity of open land between the Thames and the Jubilee river flood relief channel. The site stretches from Maidenhead Bridge northwards to Boulter's lock weir. The site was purchased by a property speculating company in September 2006, who have now appointed an architect and planning consultants and have just begun a process of meetings with local people to explore the possibilities of the site. The owners wish to obtain a planning consent by the end of 2008. The site is entirely in the Green Belt and part of it is a Conservation Area, however there is a considerable amount of redundant industrial and commercial floorspace, so there are many opportunities for the area without threatening the openness of the Green Belt. We would very much like to see more public access to the riverside and of course the renewal of what is currently a very tired and derelict area.

Heathrow Expansion - The debate rumbles on, albeit the engines get quieter. What to do? The development priorities of such a large piece of infrastructure are always going to be in longer than 5 year timeframes, and governments, for obvious reasons, are pretty much incapable of seeing more than 5 years ahead. So everything is 'managed' as it occurs and no one is supported to take a step back and develop a long term vision. Commercially an international airport needs almost complete freedom to expand and operate whatever it needs without the constraints of space and working hours and so Heathrow is not in the right place. As a suggestion to get the ball rolling again why not revisit the idea of moving it somewhere else? There will be an article in the forthcoming Hitcham and Taplow Society newsletter suggesting one solution, planned now and implemented gradually over twenty or thirty years to build a new airport in the Thames estuary on man made land. Why not?

Hitchin

The Society's dissatisfaction with North Herts District Council's governance of Hitchin deepens further. A joint approach to the District Council by all the civic and historical organisations in Hitchin resulted in a meeting with the Council's Cabinet in September 2007. Specific proposals for improving the performance of the Council included the more effective participation of local people, and (in the absence of a town council for Hitchin) for Hitchin District Councillors meeting as the Hitchin Area Committee to be granted powers similar to those of a parish council. After a delay of six months, the Leader of the District Council has now responded, rejecting all the proposals and falling back on the formula of the Council being democratically elected to make tough decisions. It is clear that there is little or no prospect of an improved standard of local government for Hitchin at the present time, and a view now needs to be taken of whether anything useful can be gained by further talks with the Council.

Meanwhile, the Society continues to press the Council for stronger protection of the town centre conservation area; current issues include inappropriate new signage on the historic Corn Exchange and the need to replace trees along the river Hiz felled without consent.

A strong objection has been made to proposals in the Local Development Plan for housing development on green belt land to the west of Hitchin, particularly as Hitchin has more than exceeded its housing target against the principle of proportionality across the District. A robust submission has also been made concerning the plans for 10,500 dwellings to the north and west of Stevenage as required by the East of England Plan, arguing for the minimum of land-take and for the highest standards of sustainability in any new development.

Marlow

The final withdrawal of Waitrose from its continued attempts to build a **food superstore** in Marlow has left two large areas in the centre of the town open for development. One of these, in the ownership of the John Lewis Partnership, is zoned for residential development and the other, which is mostly owned by the Wycombe District Council is zoned for retail development. Both of these areas are required to be the subject of a Supplementary Planning Guidance neither of which, in the Marlow Society's view, has been completed properly if at all. Try as we may we have found it impossible to persuade the Council to complete these planning briefs, independent of a developer, which in our view is the requirement of the Adopted Local Plan. This is a town centre development problem with which the Civic Trust might well be able to assist us.

Marlow, along with many other towns in the Wycombe District, has now had **CCTV coverage** for several years which was installed at considerable cost to council tax payers. It is of concern to our Society that we have never been able to obtain any data correlating the effect of CCTV coverage with the incidence of crime, vandalism and unsocial behaviour in the town. We think that information showing whether CCTV coverage has any beneficial results or its effectiveness in solving or combating crime should be available. The Society fears that much of the CCTV coverage will shortly concentrate on nailing car parkers who overstay their parking time. This we fear might take precedence over crime prevention and solution when the Council is given powers to fine by camera shortly, when it also takes control of all parking when Wycombe District is declared a Special Parking Area this year.

Oxford

The Civic Society organised a clean-up operation code-named Oxclean based on an Australian initiative. This involved co-ordinating over 1500 volunteers of all ages and interests. It was so successful that there are plans for a repeat next, perhaps with sponsorship. For further details see the March 2008 Newsletter on the Oxford Civic Society web site www.oxfordcivicsociety.org.uk.

Potters Bar

The major item of interest to the Society remains the appeal by Chas Storer Ltd., a local waste transfer operator, against Hertfordshire County Council's issuing an enforcement order which would have the effect of restricting their operations to pre-expansion levels and the refusal of planning permission for the firm to build a materials recycling facility. Sited in the green belt to the east side of Potters Bar, Storer's began in the 1960s as a cottage industry collecting waste paper but has grown over the years, largely without formal planning consent (other than for green waste for which they were granted permission in 2003), to a large operation dealing with dry mixed waste including plastics and glass as well as paper and cardboard for which they can legitimately claim grandfather's rights. Despite recently entering into contracts with various local authorities in north London and Hertfordshire, Storer's deny that any intensification has taken place over the last ten years; they are also seeking to regularise the types of waste recycled and to maintain their currently unrestricted hours of operation and number of vehicle movements. The Public Inquiry took place over seven days in December and January. Herts County Council had engaged a QC to present their case and her chambers kindly provided a junior barrister on a pro bono basis to assist the local residents, who were backed by the Society and who appeared under Rule 6.

As the publication of the decision is taking longer than the normally expected six weeks, the Inspector has recently notified the interested parties of his provisional conclusions and invited responses. If the proposals are subsequently upheld, the company would have to cut back the bulk of its operations to 1996 levels and might eventually be forced to move to another site better suited to their operations with good motorway access and not near to a residential area. However the case has taken the Society five years to get to this point, during which time the company has engaged in just about every delaying tactic possible, so an appeal to the High Court in due course cannot be ruled out.

Radlett

1] **Strategic Rail Freight Exchange [SRFI]** – following my item on page 3, ANTAS Winter Newsletter, the outcome of Public Inquiry is expected to be announced not later than 3rd October 2008; it's possible that a decision has already been made by the Communities Secretary;

2] The Radlett Society is using **Google Groups** to help manage and share its comments on local planning applications; members have access by password to a database of applications and responses;

3] Hertsmere Borough Council is seeking comments and contributions to a list of **Locally Important Buildings** in Hertsmere – The Radlett Society is supporting this initiative;

4] In Hertsmere, contractors for **Network Rail** have been clearing trees and vegetation and then installing ugly grey steel palisade fences – a photo was shown to the meeting. The Radlett Society had spoken to Network Rail who confirmed that they could install green coloured fence but it costs extra. They have also promised to paint some of the fences already installed. However, Network Rail has permitted development rights and we recommend that Civic Societies try to seek early agreement on fences before they're installed and their landscapes scarred.

Our ref: Network Rail, The Mailbox, 100 Wharfside Street, BIRMINGHAM B1 1RT. 0121 345 3231

St Albans

A CASE OF BATTLE FATIGUE? - Would that I could say that we were in good shape, in fine fettle and ready for anything. The trouble is we are tired. The Society has always punched above its weight. Our views are taken seriously by the Council, the local newspapers regularly phone for comments on the latest issues, and equally regularly print our letters. For one of them we write a monthly column. Name a committee or steering group set up to consider licensing, recycling, Verulamium Park etc and we will almost certainly have a member on it. If residents have a planning problem, or an ad hoc action group is formed, the Civic Society is often one of the first ports of call. And if a major application for some malign development strikes the city, such as a completely inappropriate cinema scheme, or a Tesco superstore, then we're out on the streets with posters, and petitions and leaflets telling the public how to get involved in the planning process.

And this is the problem. We have 370 households on our membership list, but a tiny minority of those are what I could call active members. Sure, some of them are happy to attend our speaker evenings, and come on our coach visits to towns and cities of interest (Ely, Faversham and Broadstairs this year), but the day-to-day matters of the Society, mundane or intense, are left in the hands of the 10-strong committee, plus about 20 members who can be called upon in hours of need to help run stalls, hand out flyers or deliver publicity material. Yes, yes, age is a consideration. I guess our average is at least 60, and the younger ones are too busy bringing up their families and working all the hours God sends to pay off the mortgages on their St Albans-priced dwellings.

Which leaves us, the active retired, to be the public face of the Society and to grind ourselves inexorably into the concrete wastes that are now St Peter's Street.

Why is this happening? No quarterly newsletter, delivered by a small, stalwart band, goes by without our asking for people to come forward to be committee members, or to give assistance with specific tasks, but to no avail. Perhaps we happy few are deemed to be so successful – or so terrifying – that we don't need any help as we go about our business of trying to save the city from developers, rail freight terminals and Herts Highways. How do other societies cope? We should love – no, we urgently need – an answer!

Welwyn Planning and Amenity Group

Although relatively small with 80 members, WPAG is involved with more than its name implies. Originally a protest group in face of spec building in the 60s, the committee came to realise that it must widen its scope to have any influence on decisions, which would affect our long term quality of life. The committee's basic mandate is to monitor and make representation on planning applications and any other development in the interest of protecting the character and amenities of the village. To do this a sub-committee reviews virtually every application received by our local authority. We benefit from liaison with our Parish Council in that two of our committee have become virtually ex-officio but non-voting members of the P.C. Planning and Licensing Committee.

The WPAG committee reports to members formally twice yearly, and more frequently on any 'hot issues'.

To illustrate other involvement, we are members of LADACAN, a confederation of mid - Herts groups monitoring plans for possible expansion at Luton airport; we are corporate members of the Hertfordshire Society (CPRE) and participate in workshops, committees and occasional lobbying; and we are consultees of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council in respect of their management of two Local Nature Reserves – one of which a committee member has taken the initiative of applying to the County Council to have designated a Village Green - the highest level of protection against development.

Welwyn is lucky to have a beautiful chalk stream – the River Mimram – a highly valued and historic feature of the village. Regrettably twice in the past 10 years the river completely dried up in its middle reaches, partly due to low winter rainfall but exacerbated by extraction by the local water company. Consequently, when the company applied recently for the renewal of their licence at the same extraction rates as previously, WPAG and the Parish Council made a formal objection to the Environment Agency, asking that alternative and more sustainable borehole options be tested and explored. We awaiting their full response.

Finally, and most importantly, WPAG are playing an active part in the development and publication of a Parish Plan, to be launched in May. I am sure that anyone involved with Parish Plans will know the learning curve involved and the subsequent time and effort to achieve a robust result. In parallel with the Plan we are, again with the Parish Council, contributing on behalf of Welwyn at the consultation stage of our Local Authority's development of a Core Strategy, the foundation of their subsequent Local Development Framework.

To avoid overload on committee members such high levels of activity require sufficient capable and willing volunteers (ideally under retirement age!) with both the time and energy to engage and remain committed. This has been an ongoing problem with no simple solution, other than restricting our range of local involvement. We don't want to do that – the issues are too important. Suggestions welcomed from members of ANTAS who have found an answer!

Wendover

The Society has had to accept the development of Princess Mary's hospital site, which will lead to over 400 dwellings with little obvious improvement to the towns infrastructure, notwithstanding that the settlement will add over 20% to the towns population.

The committees developing concern is with the impending growth of housing in the Vale of Aylesbury. Requirements of the emerging South East Plan and the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Sub- regional Strategy call for 16,800 dwellings to be provided in Aylesbury Urbane Area, a Category 1 settlement, between 2006 and 2026. A further 4300 dwellings are to be shared between four category 2 settlements which have been determined as Buckingham, Haddenham, Wendover and Winslow. The Wendover Society believes that it should not be classified as a Category 2 town but rather as a Category 3 settlement with no significant housing allocation. Its view is based on the two grounds that:

1. It has recently had to accept a growth of over 20% in its population without additional infrastructure.
2. And that as a town virtually surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt, there is no available building land without encroachment on to the Green Belt.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

Peter Bembridge took the opportunity to advise the meeting of a development at the Civic Trust. The whole of the Trust's web site is being re-engineered with completion expected at the end of April. A civic societies section has been established which will provide the facility for inter-active discussion on matters of common interest and could assist with the development of the movement's position on various government consultations. Further facilities will be provision of information about each member society and potential for storing archives. Peter asked all ANTAS members to look at the new format and to provide feedback to the Trust.

DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING:

The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Saturday 18th October in Hertford. It is hoped to have a speaker on the topic of waste management.

TALK:

Following the formal business of the meeting Philip Kolvin, the new Chairman of the Civic Trust, gave a talk recounting his early experience in saving the Crystal Palace Park from a proposed multiplex cinema and outlining future plans for the Trust. Afterwards he discussed with members present their concerns and potential solutions. Both the talk and the subsequent discussion can be heard by entering the secure area of the Association's web site.