



Chair's Message

Welcome to this Annual BSCF Newsletter, for August 2021 – June 2022. The year has been a busy one; not only commenting on many developments but also being members of the Steering Group for several of the big developments and the new Stortford Partnership.

Firstly though, my thanks for your continued interest and support. I hope you have been safe and well as Covid-19 has still presented challenges, especially early this year. Despite this the Committee has met in person four times, as well as on Zoom three times. We also held our 15th and 16th AGMs in person, in October 2021 and May 2022 respectively.

The speaker at the 15th AGM was Professor Stephen Joseph, Visiting Professor at the Smart Mobility Unit (SMU), University of Hertfordshire. Stephen has significant expertise in sustainable transport and presented a very stimulating talk on the subject, with a special focus on possibilities for Bishop's Stortford. It led to a lively discussion on the realities for the town. As a result, we are trying to find ways to create some fruitful links with the SMU.

Our 16th AGM was followed by a talk by Dr Emily Cole, a local resident, on the architectural and social history and civic significance of the United Reform Church Hall, Water Lane since it opened in 1915. It arose from a study by Dr Cole, that BSCF commissioned in January 2022, when we became aware that the building is at risk of demolition as part of the Old River Lane development (District Plan policy BISH8). The study's main purpose is to have a record of the building, whatever its future. Again, the talk stimulated some lively discussion. Several people have also remarked on how interesting and informative the study is. Electronic and hard copies of the report are available. Please see www.stortfordcf.org.uk or contact BSCF via stortfordcf@gmail.com if you'd like one.

Sadly we have lost the services of Jeremy Morton, Clive Risby and Rob Francis from the Committee this year, all for personal reasons. Jeremy was our webmaster for many years while Rob was our Treasurer for 10 years. Our thanks to them all. We are pleased to welcome Tony Pook in Rob's place though. Tony is relatively new to Bishop's Stortford but knows East Herts well. He's also a great fan of Ford Mustangs, and is Treasurer of the Mustang Owners Club of Great Britain. Interesting!

May I take this opportunity to remind you that once again it's subscription time (see the attached form and www.stortfordcf.org.uk), so please send your subscription and encourage others to join us too. The more members we have the greater our impact on the planning, education, and other authorities. We're always pleased to welcome new Committee members too, so we have representatives from across the town. We usually meet for two hours every 4 -6 weeks, and exchange information, etc. in between, by e-mail.

Finally, I hope you find what follows interesting and informative and shows that BSCF has not lost sight of its overall objective of working for the improvement of Bishop's Stortford and its surroundings.

With best wishes for 2022 - 23. Please continue to stay safe and well!

Paul Dean, Chair

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Town Planning and Development Management

Aim: To ensure the town is a pleasant place in which to live and work, sustains a clean environment and is conducive to healthy economic activity, and the historic features of Bishop's Stortford are preserved.

Revision of Bishop's Stortford's Neighbourhood Plans

BSCF participated in revising and/or adding to the town's two Neighbourhood Plans (NPs). Four Committee members were specifically involved, working on the sections about transport, climate change, and the development of Bishop's Stortford South and the town centre.

The revised NPs have been subject to the required consultation and amended according to comments received as deemed appropriate, including comments from BSCF. The external Examiner has now reviewed the final drafts and has submitted his report recommending that they be adopted. He concluded that the NPs are 'of a very high standard' and recommended only limited modifications. These are now being incorporated into the relevant NPs and it is expected both NPs will be adopted by East Herts District Council (EHDC) in the summer. Meanwhile we now expect the emerging plan policies to carry full weight in assessing all outstanding and future planning applications and have the same status as EHDC's District Plan. In the case of conflict between the District Plan and the (revised) NPs the conflict should be resolved in favour of the latter. This is because the NPs are the most recent.

Bishop's Stortford North (BSN) – BISH3

In September we received a response from EHDC about the number of additional homes approved or waiting a decision in BSN. To date the only additional homes approved on the main site are 29 affordable homes at the Western Neighbourhood Centre. However, an application for up to 100 homes on one of the primary school sites that is no longer required is still to be decided and many other applications are still to be decided or submitted. The situation on St Michael's Hurst - the northern part, is very different. The original approval was for 329 homes. However permission has already been given for an additional 150 homes. An application for a further 50 homes on land no longer required for a primary school is still to be decided. The total additional homes on BSN is therefore not clear, but it is already 179 and could be at least 329, and possibly more.

Land South of Hadham Road – BISH4

Outline planning permission for this development was granted on appeal in 2017 but work only started early 2021, on the eastern part of the site. A Reserved Matters application for the western part of the site was made in May 2021. We commented on the lengthy foot and cycle access routes between the development and the Bishop's Park Community Centre, which do not comply with elements of the town's Neighbourhood Plan 1 Policy TP3 – Walkable Neighbourhoods. Sadly planning permission was recently granted without the more direct access we requested. A total of 247 homes will be built on the whole development, the number in the District Plan.

Bishop's Stortford South (BSS) – BISH5

Through our membership of the St. James's Park Community Liaison Group (CLG) and EHDC's BSS Steering Group, BSCF has continued to be involved in monitoring the development of 750 homes, a care home, an Employment Area and a Neighbourhood Centre at BSS – now known as St James' Park. Countryside's development of the first phase of 142 houses alongside Whittington Way is well underway, while associated infrastructure and services is virtually complete. Work on the new Bishop's Stortford High School (TBSHS) has started, as has Bellway's development of the 219 homes approved on Parcel C, on the eastern side of the site. Reserved Matters planning applications have also been



submitted for 155 homes on Parcel B, also in the east, and 103 homes on Parcel G2, in the west. If these are approved the number of homes will be nearly 620 – 83% of the planned total on only 72% of the area allocated for housing. We have estimated that, if this overdevelopment continues, as EHDC have allowed on other housing developments in the town, and if the rest of BSS were to be developed to the same density, it would lead to about 100 more homes on BSS than the 'around 750' in the District Plan. BSCF is the CLG member most concerned about these strategic issues, which will create significant additional demand for school places, health and other social facilities as well as increased traffic impacts. We have raised these issues directly with Countryside, the main developer. Interestingly, it appears to share BSCF's concerns!

As well as overdevelopment of homes the greatest planning challenge at BSS is still Wrenbridge's application for the Employment Area. Its original Reserved Matters planning application for what appeared to be a Distribution Centre (instead of the Business Park which was given Outline planning consent in 2018) was withdrawn last year following 450+ objections. It was resubmitted in March and is now described as an 'advanced industrial estate' which includes a number of smaller business units. It also looks less like sheds. Wrenbridge is still applying for Distribution use however and 24/7 operation is still stated as 'necessary'. This is expected to generate hundreds of HGV truck and van movements each day, all resulting in severe traffic, noise and air quality impacts on homes and road networks in and around Stortford and Sawbridgeworth. BSCF is preparing a detailed objection showing, again, how this application does not comply with the Outline consent and is unsustainable. We will be making our objection available to inform and support objections by other groups and individuals, which have already risen to over 130.

The Bishop's Stortford High School (TBSHS) – BISH6

EHDC's Development Management Committee (DMC) resolved in November 2020 to grant outline planning permission for the redevelopment of TBSHS's current site for 223 homes (compared with around 150 in the District Plan). In November 2021 BSCF were invited to join the reconvened Steering Group for the development. At that meeting we learnt that, more than 18 months later, the planning conditions and the legal S106 agreement which would give effect to this resolution have apparently not yet been concluded - and a formal Decision Notice of consent has still not been issued.

The site's redevelopment for housing is also subject to a condition in the District Plan, that sufficient secondary school places have to be found elsewhere in Bishop's Stortford before it can be used for housing. For the reasons set out in the Additional Homes section below, we believe this condition is still to be satisfied. When making its resolution in 2020, the DMC was also advised that mitigation measures would be put in place through the S106 agreement to reduce the severe traffic impacts which were predicted but until the agreement is concluded we do not know what this will include. We intend to raise these issues with the reconvened Steering Group.

The Goods Yard – BISH7

This development will not be completed according to the planning permission granted in 2018, primarily because Network Rail has decided to retain the siding close to the disused signal box. Work on a revised application and masterplan is therefore underway.

Citing 'financial viability' the developer now wants to increase the approved number of homes from 641 – compared to 'around 600' in the District Plan - to 'up to 753', on a smaller site. With such an increase in numbers – as well as elsewhere in the town, one wonders who is bearing the development risk. In many cases it certainly doesn't seem to be the developers or EHDC!



Ideas for step-free access from the side of the town east of the railway station are in hand - surprisingly this is complicated by land ownership issue. Discussions with a potential replacement developer for the hotel are also in hand. Overnight parking spaces appears to be a major issue for the potential developer.

Old River Lane (ORL) – BISH8

Along with the Goods Yard (BISH7) this is one of the town centre's landmark developments. The purpose, set out in the District Plan, is to provide *'high quality mixed-use development of retail, leisure uses, a 'civic hub' of other commercial and community uses such as GP surgery and office space'*, together with a mix of about 100 homes. The District Plan also requires that master planning of the site shall be guided by a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), on which the public will be consulted

Although not formally part of the ORL site the development of a new multi-storey car park (MSCP) at Northgate End, north of Link Road is a key part of the development. The MSCP project includes 15 residential units above several commercial units at street level.

As reported in our last newsletter, efforts to halt or defer construction of the MSCP were unsuccessful and the car park opened to the public on 13 June. We wait to see what the full traffic impacts are but visually the adverse impact on the town's Conservation Area has fulfilled our worst expectations, and for the residents of Yew Tree Place, has exceeded them. There is also the question of the MSCP's operating hours, which were to be limited to 07.00 am – 11.00 pm, and the operation of its lighting. EHDC has chosen to interpret to condition restricting the hours of operation as permitting exit on a 24/7 basis and it remains to be seen whether this is legally permissible.

Meanwhile, on the ORL site itself EHDC, as the site owners, appointed developers and commenced master planning of the site. We've long had concerns that the requirement to prepare and consult on the SPD would be bypassed, and civil society representation would be stifled. However, following pressure from BSCF and others, we are particularly pleased to report that a ORL Steering Group was formed last November, the masterplan process has effectively been paused and a draft SPD is finally being prepared to provide a development brief for this very important location.

As part of the Steering Group process, BSCF has been instrumental in widening community participation – notably to include the Bishop's Stortford Climate Group and the Bishop's Stortford Arts Forum, which represents 9 of the town's arts groups. Along with these and other community and business groups we have been making contributions to the SPD on changing retail, arts and other community needs and opportunities - including the future of the United Reformed Church Hall. We are also concerned that, currently, 137 apartments and 90 senior-living units are being suggested for the main site. Once again these are considerably more than the District Plan's allocation of '... around 100', giving rise to concerns about building heights, 'massing', and visual impacts in this historic area.

The Draft SPD was published 05 July, for 4 weeks' consultation followed by 8 weeks for revision according to the comments received and their feasibility. A soft copy is available on EHDC's website at <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-and-building/old-river-lane-supplementary-planning-documents>. Look out for hard copies too, at the library, EHDC's office in Charringtons House, opposite the library, and the town council's office on Windhill. You can comment by letter, e-mail or via EHDC's website. Doing so is most important as ORL will be with us for many years, so it needs to be 'good'.

Master planning should start towards the end of 2022, once the SPD has been revised and approved. BSCF fully expects to be part of this, along with the other community groups.



Additional homes

As for every one of the developments reviewed above, it has become depressingly apparent that the housing total for Bishop's Stortford and the site-specific numbers in the District Plan have been treated by the volume housebuilders and site owners as the starting point in a bidding war, to see how many additional homes they can ease past EHDC's planners, who seem to be unable to say 'no'. Every time an increment is agreed it becomes that much harder to refuse the next request.

Our best estimate of all the additional homes already granted permission or 'freed-up' by new care homes or senior living units is about 600, with a further 550 soon. This is an approx. 25% increase to the District Plan's total allocation of around 4500 homes, which itself is a 25% increase in the town's housing stock. It therefore appears that by 2033 the total homes built (including additional homes) could easily be around 6000.

The first adverse impact is the quality of the developments themselves with too much housing crammed into too small a space leaving not enough for gardens or public open and recreational spaces. Perhaps more important for the town's current residents is the adverse impact on the town's infrastructure. Bishop's Stortford's mediaeval street pattern and access roads are incapable of expansion and only the most recent planning application for TBSHS's present site let the cat out of the bag, in that once these developments are completed and occupied, much of the town's highway network will be gridlocked.

Equally important is the impact on the town's outstanding educational facilities. In granting itself planning permission for TBSHS's move to BSS, the County Council acknowledged that its plans for providing secondary school places would fall 2 forms of entry (FE) of 30 pupils short of peak demand. Even this assumed that TBSHS and the Herts and Essex School could be expanded by 2 FE more than their current capacity and that none of the additional capacity would be taken by pupils travelling in from Essex and elsewhere in Hertfordshire, who currently occupy about 30% of the secondary school places. But this assessment was based on the housing total included in the District Plan, not the 1500+ additional homes that appear to be in prospect. These would add a further 3 FE to projected demand.

We believe that the solution to this problem is for TBSHS to be rebuilt on its present site and the school being built on BSS to open as an entirely new co-educational school, rather than providing a relocation site for TBSHS, which, of itself, will add relatively few new places, and for boys only until Year 12.

Other adverse pressures arising from these additional numbers include primary school places, various health services – including Accident and Emergency, especially in view of the proposed new Princess Alexandra Hospital to near the M11's new junction 7A, social services, and water supply, wastewater impacts on the River Stort, storm water management, solid waste management, public transport and parking. Future developments in communities in Uttlesford District that look to Stortford for these services, and over which EHDC has no say also add to these pressures (see also Stansted Airport).

Transport and Parking

Aim: To enable the growth planned for Bishop's Stortford and its surroundings to be accommodated by the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for transportation and parking.

Consultations: Hertfordshire Eastern Area Growth and Transport Plan

In March 2021 we partnered with the Bishop's Stortford Climate Group to comment on the draft of this GTP prepared by Herts Highways for the transport corridor from Bishop's Stortford to Harlow. Our main concern was that the Plan made no new analysis of the traffic impact of the many new developments in the area – and beyond, into Uttlesford District. Instead, for Bishop's Stortford, it sifted and prioritised minor projects taken from the 2017 Transport Options Study which was never subject to public



consultation or adopted by any of the relevant councils have been reviewing public and key stakeholders' comments with a view to revising the document for adoption by the Authority in July as we finalise this Newsletter]. However, our comments on the strategy, objectives or packages of projects for the town have not been considered or included in the revision. It also takes no account of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan where the same approach on transport policies which we recommended for the GTP have been endorsed by the Examiner (see below). We have raised these issues with committee members and asked that the EAGTP is not adopted until they are resolved.

The consultation has however also highlighted the differing concerns of Herts Highways and concerns of the community on specific major developments with potential traffic impacts such as Lidl's development of the existing Gates site on Stansted Road and the Employment Area on BSS. Increasingly, Herts Highways new "Transport User Hierarchy" prioritises measures to support pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport (in that order) over motor vehicles, while measures to improve or manage the capacity of the road network and reduce congestion resulting from new developments are discounted. Indeed, Herts Highways now say it 'is no longer a capacity authority'.

Whilst, with the Climate Group, we strongly support measures to reduce travel demand and promote sustainable travel, this approach has resulted in virtually no highway improvement or traffic management projects to mitigate the impacts of new development. We believe that such measures can not only manage network capacity but also calm traffic and create opportunities for walking, cycling and, particularly, improved public transport services.

Our approach is now supported by the revised NPs. Indeed, as already noted, the revised NPs have now been reviewed and the Examiner has recommended that they be adopted, endorsing in particular the approach set out in the transport policies – prepared by BSCF and Climate Group members. The Examiner also did not share Herts Highways' views on the NPs that "there is not an appropriate balance between concerns over congestion, and the objectives for sustainable modes of transport". Instead he endorsed the NPs' new headline transport policies on the need to 'assess transport impacts and mitigation of development on traffic congestion and resident amenity'. We will support community groups to use the revised policies when commenting on planning applications and other development consultations.

East Herts Housing Strategy and Public and Open Spaces Strategy

We commented both these strategies. To date there is no sign of any revised or final documents.

Town Centre

Aim: To support the continued prosperity of the town centre for trade and commerce and support initiatives which enhance its attraction as a retail and leisure destination

Jackson Square – Redevelopment to accommodate TK-Maxx

We are pleased that new plans submitted for the development in February 2021 show that step-free access from Bridge Street will be provided. It will be closer to the library though, which is not as convenient for users as the present entrance. It will also not look like a mill building, so it will be less 'iconic'. We commented on the application in December 2021. It is still to be decided, after more than a year.

Shaping Stortford Steering Group (SSSG) / The Stortford Partnership

SSSG went into an extended hibernation period in July 2021, associated with Herts Highways inability to deliver their parts of projects SSSG wanted implemented. Reasons for this ranged from inadequate legal powers to deliver some projects to financial constraints. A new, reformed group has recently emerged



though- the Stortford Partnership. Its Terms of Reference are being finalised but the focus is now on projects the town and district councils can implement without needing Herts Highways' involvement. The pedestrianisation of South St – Market St is one major initiative affected by this situation, mainly because of legislative constraints. When these are resolved BSCF will resume its efforts to get this project realised in an appropriate way. The core members comprise an elected member from each council, an executive officer, the Bishop's Stortford BID and BSCF. Other organisations will be invited in as appropriate. Herts Highways will remain as an observer.

The Committee is not of one mind about BSCF continuing to be a member of this new group, with some members urging that we leave, and that we do so sooner rather than later. It is therefore quite possible that if delivery of at least a few of the above projects does not commence soon we will at least suspend our membership until delivery of some of the projects begins.

Stansted Airport

Aim: To minimise the adverse environmental and social impacts of the Airport and its operations on the town and surrounding area.

Planned Expansion

Uttlesford District Council (UDC) was not granted leave by the High Court to appeal against the decision to grant Stansted Airport's application to expand capacity to 43 million passengers per annum or the award of costs against UDC. It will face a bill of about £2m as a result. The manner in which UDC's case was presented at the public inquiry last year may well have contributed to the government's decision to put the Council's planning function into special measures. It is therefore no longer able to determine anything other than minor planning applications (developments of 10 houses or less). For the time being central government will determine any other applications.

With the airport's capacity limits fixed for the foreseeable future Stop Stansted's Expansion's (SSE) name has been changed to SAW (Stansted Airport Watch) and its focus changed to concentrate on monitoring the airport's existing activities - which are still well below pre-pandemic levels, and the Government's emerging policy for the aviation sector. BSCF is supporting SAW in these activity changes .

The Currey Award

Aim: To recognise high standards of design of buildings, landscape, and the environment.

BSCF makes this award annually to recognise what it considers to be high standards of design of new buildings, landscaping and the environmental projects in the town. Sadly though, because of the lack of worthy projects, it has not been possible to make an award since 2017. We were therefore pleased to find a number of projects completed in 2021 that we considered worthy of the award. They comprised:

- i) St. Mary's School – refurbishment of Windhill properties
- ii) St. Joseph's School – replacement school building
- iii) No. 11 Windhill – refurbishment Bushel House, Windhill
- iv) Redevelopment Waterside Stortford – Information boards and signage
- v) Avanti JMI School at St. Michael's Hurst
- vi) The Residence, Wickham Hall

A panel of judges, kindly chaired by Gill Champion, a 20-year resident in Bishop's Stortford, looked carefully at all of them. They considered, amongst other things, what they had started as, as well as how they had finished and their contribution to the town.



As always, choosing the winning project was not easy. As a result, two projects were selected for an award. The winner of the Currey Award was Bushel House, Windhill. Windhill itself is a prominent street in the town and to transform what was three rather characterless garages fronting the street, with a room above, to a high-quality residential home in keeping with its surroundings, was seen as a great improvement to the townscape and Conservation Area.

Waterside Stortford was also considered worthy of special mention. So much work goes on behind the scenes to improve the usage of the river and its environs, by many individual organisations and groups. In this case Bishop's Stortford Town Council, the Environment Agency, EHDC, Hertfordshire County Council, the Canal and River Trust and a number of other stakeholders, including BSCF, came together under the umbrella of Waterside Stortford to realise the project. In appreciation of their work the group was awarded a Special project award.

If you have a suggestion for a suitable project for consideration for the 2022 Award please e-mail BSCF at stortfordcf@gmail.com.

Open Spaces and Recreation

Aim: To retain and enhance all existing open amenity spaces in the town for the well-being of the residents and visitors to the town.

Small green spaces on Thorley Park

We have continued to object to private landowners' attempts to develop several small green spaces near Sainsbury's on Thorley Park. To date, and in all but one case, we have been successful, or the application has been withdrawn. We intend to continue our stance on these applications, aware of the precedent that would be set if any of them were granted planning permission.

Other Activities

BSCF Facebook Group

The BSCF Facebook site continues to attract new members. Although you can view all the posts and comments without being a member, to comment you must join. We have a daily mix of local news topics which can bring lively debate and informational posts to assist the community - with members adding useful insight from their own experiences. Our present membership is nine and a half thousand. The team administrators Emma Mulhall, Jill Wade and Deborah Munro maintain a consistent approach in ensuring the site is inviting for all to use.

Revised BSCF Website

We have reviewed the site and set clear parameters of what is available to viewers, keeping in mind that although the archives are important, readers like to view up to date subject matter.

The enhanced site's accessibility on a phone and equally a sharper presentation on all other media makes for an easier, informed read. The pages are straightforward to manoeuvre through and it is intended that as information becomes available regarding 'site specific development' and local matters we will update readers.

Any thoughts on the new site will be greatly appreciated by the site team via stortfordcf@gmail.com.

Bishop's Stortford Flyer

Since September 2021 we've been trying to have an article about some of our recent activities in the BS Flyer every month. We've not always succeeded in this but hope you've seen the articles we have been successful with and have found them informative.