



Chair's Message

Welcome to this Annual BSCF Newsletter, for June 2022 – August 2023. Like last year this one has been a busy one. We've met nine times, in person or on Zoom, and have examined a number of developments, and commented on some of them. We've also been part of the Steering Group for the Old River Lane development, the St James' Park Community Liaison Group, the Neighbourhood Plans revision team, Stortford Partnership, the Friends of Water Lane Hall and Waterside Stortford.

We spoke at February's public meeting about a better vision for the Old River Lane development. It was attended by over 200 people. We've also spoken about BSCF's history and activities to the Stort Valley Rotary Club, the Chantry Community Association and Old Thorley and Twyford Residents Association.

We held our 17th AGM in April, in person. The speaker was Lucy Gravatt, Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Director of Partnerships and Communications. We were pleased to learn more about the LEP's work, as it's relatively unknown in this part of the county. Those who attended seemed particularly pleased to learn of its plans to expand its support to small, medium and innovative businesses, skills development and careers hubs. One part of this includes greater consultation with local partners, interest groups and beneficiaries, to find out what they want and where assistance will be of help.

Sadly, Angela Marshall, our secretary for 17 years, stood down at our AGM. We send her our sincerest thanks for all she's done for BSCF during those years and wish her well in her 'retirement'. Special thanks to Jill Wade too, who has been one of our Facebook page's administrators for 14 years.

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. Also, please note that we'll be setting up an automatic renewal facility.

The more members we have the greater the influence we can exert on planning, education, traffic and transport and other matters that affect our town. This is especially important as our new town and district councils have said that they want to hear and listen more than they feel the former councils did.

Finally, my thanks to my fellow committee members and our Facebook page administrators for their help and wisdom over this last year. This is a team effort! 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 that what follows is interesting and informative and shows that BSCF continues in its overall objective of working for the improvement of Bishop's Stortford and its surroundings.

With best wishes for 2023-24. 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.

Bishop's Stortford's Neighbourhood Plans

The town's two Neighbourhood Plans – which 4 BSCF Committee members were specifically involved in revising - were adopted in July 2022. The Independent Examiner commended the Plan as “well-evidenced, clear and well presented”, commenting especially that he failed to see how Herts Highways could excuse itself from mitigating traffic congestion. Bishop's Stortford was one of the first in the country to review and update its Neighbourhood Plans. The challenge now is to ensure developers, statutory consultees, the Town Council and EHC's Development Management use the Plans.

Bishop's Stortford South (BSS) – BISH5

Most of the housing areas now have planning permission. The total number of homes seems well on track to be about 850 homes, significantly more than the District Plan's 'around 750 homes'.

The industrial and distribution park is now in construction at the southeast corner of the area. We've objected to the Employment Area developer's application to remove the condition requiring HGVs from and to the south to use M11 Junction 8 and Stortford's bypass rather than the A1184, via Sawbridgeworth and Spellbrook. This would be of some benefit to Stortford but it would significantly affect the noise and air quality and vibration in these communities. We've therefore chosen to support them in their objections. This is now the subject of a planning appeal and the Federation has made further submissions to the Government Inspector.

Thorley House

We objected to this application for 9 homes on the southern corner of London Road and Whittington Way because while there are less than 10 homes the planned total floor area exceeds the affordable homes threshold. This seemed to be something other bodies had overlooked until we pointed it out. We are also concerned about the access and transport impacts so close to the Bishop's Stortford South development and the nearby bus stop and traffic lights.

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

In November 2020 EHC's Development Management Committee (DMC) resolved to grant outline planning permission to develop 223 homes on TBSHS's current site (compared to around 150 in the District Plan). The formal consent letter is still to be issued though, more than two and a half years later. We are told that this is because the S106 is still being negotiated but we believe this is an excuse by the prospective developer to avoid having to submit detailed 'reserved matters' applications which are normally required 3 years from the date outline planning permission was granted.

We have therefore asked EHC's new Development Management Committee to reform the master planning group to re-examine this development, especially in view of the very large number of new homes in the town likely by 2033, compared to the number in the District Plan.

The Goods Yard – BISH7

We have reported that a new outline planning application was submitted over a year ago for more homes on a smaller site, Network Rail having decided to keep its maintenance siding. We've asked EHC's new Development Management Committee to reform the development's master planning group to



re-examine the plans, especially in view of the larger number of new homes now proposed on whole this site, This is now 746, compared to the District Plan's 'around 600'.

A Transport Assessment was only made available in October 2022 after we requested that it was made publicly available, but we have found it highly inadequate, especially in the light of the Transport Assessment for ORL. We believe Herts Highways should now join a reformed master planning group – as required by the new Neighbourhood Plan transport policies - to discuss our concerns. Details of a new ramp to and from the station's main entrance from the eastern part of Station Road are now available. It's OK, in that it meets the legal requirements, but it's much steeper than the present ramp.

We have also commented on the failure to provide adequate Interchange facilities which were one of the main objectives of a development in this key location for the town's accessibility. Drop-off, waiting, taxi, bus interchange, pedestrian and cycling facilities have all deteriorated since construction started and planned provision is inadequate. Failure to open the new Sexton's Road for buses or car park access has significantly increased driving times from the south of the town and congestion in London Road and Bridge Street. We've commented on this and are waiting to see how the Planning Officer and Herts Highways respond .

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 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

The Old River Lane draft Supplementary Planning Document appeared in the summer and attracted over 400 comments. Revisions followed and the Final version was approved at the end of November. Its influence on the masterplanning of ORL is questionable though as Cityheart submitted an Outline application just a couple of weeks later. Public anger at the plans shown at a hastily arranged and brief public exhibition in October seemed to have little effect either. Two planning applications are now with EHC. One is to demolish Charringtons House and Water Lane Hall. The other is for outline permission for the whole development.

BSCF has objected to both applications, focusing mainly on their failure to follow the required procedures. The new DMC is expected to decide on them later in the summer. In the meantime BSCF has asked EHC to resume the master planning for this development, as only one meeting was held, instead of the more normal three. Also, that meeting largely comprised the developer presenting his plans – again!; rather than finding out the stakeholders' ideas.¹

There is also major concern over the traffic gridlock between Rye Street and Hockerill, revealed by the Transport Assessment; the inadequacy of the arts offer, compared to what was originally envisaged as the leisure use part of BISH8 and the SPD; and the increased number of homes planned, from around 100 to 225 – including 75 extra care units. The result of the latter is densely packed and high buildings in this historic and fine-grained part of the town, where most buildings are only two – three storeys.

Also, although not part of the ORL site, the new multi-storey car park (MSCP) at Northgate End, north of Link Road, is a key part of the development. It includes 15 residential units above several commercial units at street level. As reported in our last newsletter, efforts to halt or defer the MSCP's construction

¹ Cityheart withdrew both planning applications 06 September, but EHC fully expects new applications to be submitted. There is no news yet about the resumption of collaborative masterplanning.



were unsuccessful and it opened to the public on 13 June 2022. Until now use for parking is low, and the commercial units are being used by Launchpad, a business hub that was formerly in Charringtons House.

Water Lane Hall

The history of the Water Lane Hall was the subject of the talk at last year's AGM. It generated a lot of discussion, not least because of its likely demolition to provide Waitrose with parking spaces in return for giving up some of its existing spaces for housing. Hard and soft copies of a report on the hall's architecture and significance are still available. Please contact stortfordcf@gmail.com for a copy or visit: www.stortfordcf.org.uk or <https://waterlanehall.org/>.

In September 2022 BSCF succeeded in having the hall registered as an Asset of Community Value, requiring the ORL's developer to comply with District Plan Policy CFLR8, which requires better facilities locally before the hall can be disposed of, i.e. demolished. In October, with and on behalf of other community groups, BSCF registered interest in acquiring the hall for continuing community use – primarily as an arts hub to complement South Mill Arts, with SMA's support. This gave the Friends of WLH, which includes BSCF, six months to assemble an offer. Several studies have been commissioned to find out whether acquisition and community operation are feasible, which it appears to be. A business plan has also been prepared.

An offer to lease the hall was submitted to EHC mid-March. Since then the Town Council's been urged to be more supportive of the plans and representatives of the Friends have met two key EHC officers to present and explain the offers to them. It is hoped that discussions will continue now the elections are over. The Friends are also working with South Mill Arts to prepare an arts plan for the town.

We've put several questions to both the old and new town councils, trying to get their support for a community bid for WLH, and improve their participation in ORL's masterplanning. The new council has been much more responsive on both of these but it only has an advisory role for planning applications.

Additional homes

In July 2022 we received a response from EHC's Development Control confirming our estimates of the houses built were much the same as theirs. Other, more pressing matters, have prevented us doing more work on this. However, applications since then make it highly likely that Stortford will 'enjoy' as many as 6,000 new homes by 2033; 1200 more than the District Plan's 'around 4,800'. WLH and ORL permitting I hope we can soon resume a more active approach to this situation, especially with respect to the infrastructure needed to serve them and mitigate their impacts.

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.

Please see news about other planning applications for news on these important matters.

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

This application was finally approved in August 2022. We are pleased that it includes step-free access from Bridge Street. Sadly though it will be less visible, being hidden 'around the corner', near to the library. Sadly, too, it will also be less iconic.



BT Hubs

We've successfully objected to BT's application to install four of five IT hubs around the town centre, all in the Conservation area. Our objections were based on their size and orientation, which would have obstructed the footpaths, and their internal lighting, which is contrary to EHC's policy in Conservation Areas. It does mean the BT kiosk outside Greggs has not been replaced – something we'd probably not object to if BT could propose a hub that has less impact on the footpath and is externally lit.

The future of the fifth hub, outside South Street's B&M store, is not yet decided.

Other developments

Other town centre applications we've commented on include:

- Waterfront House, off Station Road. We objected to this on the grounds of over-development.
- 55 South St, which was refused planning permission in December 2022. A new, broadly similar application was submitted in March 2023. We broadly welcomed this new application but were again concerned about over-development of the site, access and traffic impacts.

The Stortford Partnership

As reported last year, Stortford Partnership is intended to focus on projects East Herts Council and the Town Council can deliver without the involvement of HCC, and Herts Highways in particular. Sadly that's proving to be somewhat 'pie in the sky', not helped by the lack of a Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for East Herts. (LCWIPs are now instrumental for obtaining central government funds for these projects.)

Work on the LLCWIP has now finally started. Hopefully it will incorporate the work the Town Council, BSCF and others put into planning 6 cycle routes into the town centre and the station under the auspices of the erstwhile Shaping Stortford Steering Group. The same applies to the plans to make South St, Potter St and Market St more pedestrian friendly, especially once HCC has powers to install Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras.

BSCF's Committee is still not of one mind about 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. So far though 'we're hanging on in there' and are now hoping that the new Green Party-Liberal Democrat led District Council, in partnership with the Liberal Democrat led Town Council will be able to finally get some of the initiatives delivered.

Stansted Airport

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

Passenger traffic at the airport has returned to nearly pre-pandemic levels. The only issue to note is that the passenger arrivals area will be enlarged by expanding the existing terminal airside, rather than by creating a separate arrivals building for which permission was previously granted. This will also entail the replacement of the existing people mover to the departure islands with moving walkways.



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, we were once more unable to present a Currey Award as we could find only one project to consider. We hope this year will be better.

If you have a suggestion for a suitable project for consideration for the 2023 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

As promised in our last newsletter, we have continued to object to several private landowners' attempts to take over small green spaces on Thorley Park. 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

www.facebook.com/groups/CIVICFED/

The Facebook site goes from strength to strength, giving us the opportunity to hear residents' views. With new members joining each week, present membership who can post items on a wide range of topics affecting life in Bishop's Stortford, and comment on them, is about 11,250, about 1,500 more than last year. Many more visit to read the posts though.



There are an average of 260 posts a month with 154 comments per day! On average there are about 167,000 viewings each month. The page is administered by Emma Mulhall and Deborah Munro We aim to ensure safe environment is. Special thanks to Jill Wade too (see Chair's Message), who was instrumental in setting-up the site in 2009 and has been one of its administrators since then.

BSCF Website

www.stortfordcf.org.uk

The content available on the website has been improved, with a 'What's New' page that allows updated information to be added to site/topic specific areas. Having a range of documents attached allows visitors to either read them online or download for later. Visitors can also ask questions and see regularly updated visuals on developments in Bishop's Stortford.

Another new feature is the ability to join and renew your membership online – see <https://www.stortfordcf.org.uk/join-us/> or use the QR code.



Tony Pook and Deborah Munro administer the site. Please don't hesitate to contact them via stortfordcf@gmail.com if you think of any improvements or there's news you'd like to be updated on.

Bishop's Stortford Flyer

We've continued to have news of some of our activities in the BS Flyer every month. Somewhat inevitably a large part of this year has been about the ORL development and Water Lane Hall. We hope you've seen the articles and have found them informative. Electronic copies of the Flyer can be found at <https://www.flyeronline.co.uk/category/bishops-stortford/>.

