

The Welwyn Garden City Society Magazine

Championing heritage
to improve the future
of our town

● The booths
are back!

- The ups and downs
of Broadwater Road
- Cities of the future
- A new statue of
Ebenezer Howard
- Members' photos
- Planning update



Welcome to the first issue of the Welwyn Garden City Society Magazine, full of fascinating information and fabulous photographs of our town. We hope you find it interesting!

The magazine replaces the Society's newsletter. It will be published twice a year, in October and April. We thank the editor of the newsletter, Shaun O'Reilly, and Sheila O'Reilly, the designer, for their many years of sterling work in these roles. Their act will be very hard to follow.



Anneke Bambery (left), editor
Ruth Sykes, designer
wgcsociety@live.com

Contributing Society members



Stephen Bensley
Articles (p. 5 & 10)



Will Davis
Photographs
(cover & p. 10)



John Fogarty
Photograph (p. 9)



Robert Gill
Photographs
(p. 7 & 9)



Bryn Jones
Photograph
(p. 11)



Paula Waspe
Photograph
(p. 11)

of our town sent to us by Society members Will Davis, John Fogarty, Robert Gill, Bryn Jones and Paula Waspe. We hope more members will send photos and articles to us for future editions!

Each issue of the magazine will aim to provide a round-up of the news issued in the preceding e-bulletins, and of course to provide any updates. The news e-bulletins will continue to be sent to you on a monthly basis.

To celebrate the launch of the magazine, we're sending every member a paper copy of this first edition. Future editions will reach you electronically, unless you used to receive a paper version of the newsletter. Please let us know if you haven't yet opted to go paper-free, and you'd like to have the magazine sent electronically from April 2022 onwards. Digital copies save the Society money.

We hope you like your new magazine. Please send us your feedback on this pilot issue, and do let us have your stories, opinions and photos. This is your magazine! You can contact us at wgcsociety@live.com.

Anneke Bambery & Ruth Sykes

The Welwyn Garden City Society Magazine

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www.wgcsoc.org.uk

The Welwyn Garden City Society is the town's civic society. If you are reading this and you're not already a member, please consider joining us. Go to www.wgcsoc.org.uk and select Membership Offer.

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Anneke Bambery



The new statue of Ebenezer Howard, page 6

Above photo © Ben Twiston-Davies. Cover photo © Will Davis. Contributors supplied their portrait photos. John Fogarty's portrait was taken by Adam Waring.



Photo from the Welwyn Garden City Society photobank

The ups and downs of Broadwater Road

A past threat averted, but a promising scheme unfulfilled

by Anneke Bambery

The disused Shredded Wheat silos stand forlornly on land on Broadwater Road which has been in need of regeneration for many years. A look through the Welwyn Garden City Society's newsletters from a decade ago shows that two successive planning applications for this area were put forward around this time: the first a highly controversial one, which the Society vigorously opposed, and the second a housing scheme which we supported with enthusiasm.

2011 campaign

The first proposal, for a large supermarket on the site, was being considered in 2011. Tesco had first revealed their plan for a superstore on this land in 2008. The scheme, which envisaged amenities such as a swimming pool alongside the supermarket, was vigorously opposed by the Welwyn Garden City Society, along with the Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust and many other objectors. Our Committee undertook a massive and energetic campaign which involved reading and commenting on a vast amount of

documentation, conducting house-to-house interviews to gather residents' views, lobbying organisations and individuals, and much more. A petition led by the Society resulted in a highly impressive 14,121 signatures after our members and others had staffed an information stall in the Howard Centre every Saturday for 37 weeks, and had talked to residents in neighbourhood shopping centres and many other locations. The expense of all this activity necessitated the creation of a "Broadwater Road Fighting Fund", and local people gave generously.

Public feeling ran high, and in early 2012 hundreds of residents attended the dramatic Council meeting to consider the application. Even before the meeting it was clear that the then council chamber would be too small, and so the Hawthorne Theatre was used. All 360 seats were filled, and well over a hundred people stood outside, unable to get in, but bearing NO TO TESCO placards made by the Society. The meeting started confidently and it was obvious that the Leader thought the application would be approved. The packed audience was not allowed to say anything, but the gasps and

sharp intakes of breath soon conveyed the thoughts of the assembled throng. People could see the elected members slowly changing their minds, and the outcome was a vote of 13 to one, with one abstention, against the application. Malcolm Day remembers: "Never have I seen a public meeting at which the feelings of attendees had so amazingly swung the meeting. Tesco senior management at the meeting were gob-smacked at the change in the Council." Shaun O'Reilly recalls a Tesco manager descending the stairs after the meeting, saying to a colleague: "How could we have got that so wrong?"

It is interesting to look back at the Tesco superstore proposal and to recall how the Society successfully responded to this. There are parallels and differences between the threats posed by the Tesco scheme, and those presented by the current applications for high-rise apartment buildings along Broadwater Road.

Successful objections

Ten years ago the Welwyn Garden City Society put forward the following objections to the Tesco proposal.

We argued that the location of a superstore outside the town centre would threaten the integrity of the centre which has a concentration of shopping within a triangular area stretching approximately between John Lewis, Sainsbury's and the Howard Centre. This existing configuration is in line with Ebenezer Howard's concept for the town, but to introduce a very large new retail store elsewhere would draw shoppers away from the centre and threaten its vitality and ultimately its viability.

The Society was very concerned about the traffic implications of the proposals, feeling that the scheme would result in congestion. The proposals might have seen the first introduction of traffic lights (other than pedestrian lights) into the town centre, thus irrevocably shifting the balance between pedestrians and vehicles, and spoiling the park-like ambience of the town.

The Tesco proposals included some housing, the density of which the Society felt to be unacceptable for a garden city. The scheme also involved

Planning

a piazza where public events might take place, and the Society opposed this idea, arguing that it would create a rival town centre.

Tesco already had their large store at Oldings Corner, although the company contended that this was in Hatfield, and was anyway inadequate to meet demand from both towns. However, the Society believed that Tesco's application was to a large degree motivated by fear of losing market share to the then new Sainsbury's store in Church Road. We argued that a large new Tesco store would threaten in particular the viability of the Morrison's store in Black Fan Road, and also that of the various neighbourhood shopping centres in the town, putting in jeopardy the well-spaced distribution of food retail across the town.

Excellent solution

As we know, since 2012 the site has continued to languish, awaiting an appropriate regeneration scheme, and of course today we are once more facing a number of wholly unsympathetic development plans. However, it might have been otherwise. After the defeat of the superstore scheme Tesco submitted a housing scheme for 850 homes and some community facilities – a proposal which would have been an excellent solution for Welwyn Garden City. The Society was keen to see this implemented and saw it as fitting the needs of the town, in tune with garden city principles, and sympathetic to the listed Shredded Wheat buildings. You can see a fly-through visualisation of these proposals on YouTube: search *Old Shredded Wheat Factory Scheme Fly-Through*.

Unfortunately, despite gaining permission, Tesco did not build anything and soon afterwards the company sold the site to ZM Land and Capital Ltd. In 2018 this developer obtained consent to erect 1454 apartments on the land. For two years nothing happened, but then the site was divided in two. The Wheat Quarter Ltd (WQL) took over the land north of Hyde Way where the silos stand, with permission to build 811 flats. Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association (MTVH) had the land to the south with permission for 643 apartments. In the spring of 2021

WQL and MTVH applied for consent to increase their numbers to 1220 and 929 flats respectively – a very big percentage increase in the number of dwellings.

If successful, these proposals would result in a massive high-rise apartment city with its own civic square and various public buildings, and the Society has objected strenuously to these latest planning applications. Building work has already begun on the MTVH site, in line with the existing consents.

The Society recognises the urgent housing shortage facing the nation, and, as in 2012, we would welcome the redevelopment of the sites for dwellings. However, along with many other objectors to these schemes, the Society has grave concerns about the current proposals, and has put forward the following objections.

Society objections

We consider that the height (ten stories at the highest) and the excessive density of these residential blocks is totally out of keeping with the ethos of the garden city. Their altitude would make them clearly visible from the town centre, and this would have an extremely detrimental impact on a townscape with few high buildings. The height of some blocks would come very close to that of the grain silos, and that would adversely affect the setting of these listed structures.

The Society also objects to the undistinguished design of the proposed apartment blocks, and their total lack of affinity to the character of the town, despite the developers' assertions. The absence of significant green space in the proposals again shows no kinship with our unique town. The Council's Broadwater Road West Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that governs the development of the site states that schemes "should reflect the industrial character whilst also incorporating key Garden City principles into the layout", but unfortunately the current schemes fail miserably to meet this standard.

The Society has concerns, too, about the impact of the proposed high number of two bedroom flats on future housing demand in the town. As young families outgrow their apartments they will seek houses to move to, which the town's housing stock will not be able

to provide in sufficient numbers. We therefore question the sustainability of these proposals.

Promises, promises

The proposed development around the silos envisages community and commercial buildings such as a cinema, an "international art centre", a gym and restaurants. The listed Shredded Wheat production hall would be re-stored as part of this civic hub, and the silos themselves are optimistically designated for re-use. Part of the scheme involves an improved railway bridge link between the town centre and this location. The Society would welcome restoration and re-use of the heritage buildings, as well as improvements to the bridge approach. Nevertheless, the two schemes would severely damage our cherished town, and the Society has fought tirelessly to oppose them.

2000+ objections

Well over 2,000 objections to the schemes have been lodged with the Council, and the issue has reached the national press, with an article appearing in the *Economist* (17 April 2021). As we saw with the first Tesco application, public awareness and support is a vital element in any successful campaign. We await a decision from the Planning Authority later this year.

These sites along Broadwater Road offer great scope for modern dwellings close to the town centre and within easy reach of transport links. A well-designed scheme would provide much-needed housing and embrace Howard's vision for the garden city, thereby enhancing our town for all.

At the time of going to press the Council is considering a planning application for a high and dense housing scheme on the nearby BioPark site (see p.12 Planning Update), and this could become a worrying precedent for the WQL and MTVH sites. We are doing all we can to obtain a positive outcome ♦

I am indebted to Malcolm Day, Jenny McCann, Shaun O'Reilly, Elahe Taylor and Clive Wilson for their help with this article.

Cities of the future – connected garden cities?

Stephen Bensley



Photo © Florian Schmetz

Predictions suggest that the UK must house 20 million more people by 2050. If this is done on the current model of growth, traffic could increase by 51% (the worst case scenario), summer temperatures could rise by 5°C, winter temperatures by 4°C, summer rainfall might decrease by 45% and winter rain increase by 30%.

Pollution and congestion are minimal and access to countryside is maximised

Perhaps this is the time to look again at Ebenezer Howard's solution to accommodating population growth in a truly sustainable manner. Garden cities as envisaged by Howard contain housing, employment and community services in a walkable settlement within a one kilometre radius. Pollution and congestion are minimal, and access to countryside is maximised.

Howard envisaged 30,000 people living in his garden city to make it viable. So to house 20 million people 666 new garden cities would

be required. One option would be to make garden cities bigger, but it seems transgressive to suggest that the town should expand into the countryside surrounding it.

Instead we could go back to Howard's original idea that satellite garden cities be established some distance away from the original settlement, beyond the zone of countryside surrounding the town. A cluster of cities would be established. Inhabitants would have the experience of living in an intimate environment in a small town, but would enjoy all the benefits of living in a large city. Parliamentary powers would be required to ensure future development takes place in this way. It would require political will; possibly the agreement of all political parties.

Walking and cycling would become a viable form of movement

Residents of each garden city would be within walking distance of the everyday services they need. Rapid railway transport could be established to ensure that the more specialised services that people require can be obtained in a garden city somewhere in the cluster, with a journey of 12 minutes at the most.

The ConnectedCities movement is suggesting that Howard's cluster idea could be used to establish the settlement structure around existing railways. Groups of existing towns could form a federation. The largest would act as the central hub in Howard's cluster with the others no more than 15 minutes away by rail. Within each settlement all development would take place within one kilometre of a railway station. New stations could be built as a nucleus for new towns. Within the federation each location would provide an essential service: hospital, retail park, university, leisure centre and so on.

In addition to reducing congestion, pollution and global warming, this approach should improve people's health too. If all development is within one kilometre of a rapid transport station, walking and cycling become a viable form of movement. ConnectedCities envisages walk-

ways and cycleways linking housing neighbourhoods with the settlement centre. The town would thus become a safer environment. There would be a much greater chance of preserving a settlement's heritage and character. The cluster would preserve the idea of countryside surrounding each settlement, and would also establish green corridors between the satellite towns.

There would be a much greater chance of preserving a settlement's heritage and character

It is relatively easy to envisage ConnectedCities' idea working in Hertfordshire. For example, the Great Northern railway line between Welwyn North and Potters Bar could form a cluster, with development around existing stations. There would be plenty of scope around existing stations (for example Potters Bar golf course, Welham Green, Brookmans Park, Welwyn North) to accommodate the population growth expected by 2050. ConnectedCities have calculated that there is potential for population growth of 45,000 in this cluster, of which 33,000 would be best placed around Welham Green and Brookmans Park stations. If Transport for London takes over the Welwyn Garden City to Moorgate service it could use new technology (such as the European Train Control System) to become a smart railway, increasing the speed and frequency of trains between stations.

As residents of Welwyn Garden City we value the nature and character of our town. We can all see the benefits of replicating this throughout the country. Perhaps this is the only sustainable way for our population to grow ♦

I am indebted to Brian Q Love's presentation to the Welwyn Garden City Society in December 2020 for much of the information in this article. For more information about ConnectedCities visit: sites.google.com/site/connectedciestwo/home

Public art

The new statue of Ebenezer Howard

*Spade in one hand and bowler hat in the other,
representing Howard's ambition for a marriage of town and country*

by Anneke Bambery



Photo © Paul Hillary

Public art



Photo © Robert Gill

The photos on this page show the statue, by sculptor Ben Twiston-Davies, from different angles. The bird's-eye view (left) shows the text on the plinth. The wide-angle photo below shows the beautiful environment around the statue including the Coronation fountain and Henry Moore's sculpture "Large Standing Figure: Knife Edge" (1976), on loan from the Henry Moore Foundation in Perry Green, as part of Welwyn Garden City's centenary celebrations. The statue faces the Howard Centre.



Photo © Ben Twiston-Davies

Most members will now be familiar with the new commemorative bronze figure of Ebenezer Howard, standing on a low grassy mound in Howardsgate. Installed on 14 April 2021, this sympathetic portrait of the founder of our town faces towards the shopping centre that bears his name.

The sculptor, Ben Twiston-Davies, describes in a video (see www.wgc100.org) how he chose to depict Howard turning the first sod of our garden city, bowler hat in one hand, spade in the other, this garb representing Howard's ambition for a marriage of town and

country. The figure stands on a circular plinth on which are inscribed words from William Blake's poem "And did those feet in ancient time":

"I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land." *

(Blake, Milton: A Poem in Two Books, 1804-8)

* Verse shown as it appears on the plinth

Public art



Both photographs show the work being created in the studio. The full-scale (over life-size, 2.13 metres tall) clay model was built up on a strong metal armature. This provided the original from which moulds were made, and the final bronze version could thus be cast.

Photos © Ben Twiston-Davies

This poetic reference alludes to Howard's vision of a better world. The spade rests on the word "sword", perhaps recalling Howard's pacifist views. The figure has a genial and engaging expression, leaning forward slightly to convey warmth and enthusiasm.

The statue was commissioned by the Welwyn Garden City's Centenary Foundation, following a public consultation about ways in which the town's centenary should be marked. Acting on suggestions from residents for a sculpture of Howard, the Foundation chose Twiston-Davies to carry out the work. The artist lives in Hertfordshire and is a visiting lecturer in sculpture and drawing at the University of Hertfordshire. He is a figurative sculptor, creating public art and private commissions. Some readers may know his bronze memorial to Agatha Christie near Covent Garden, London (2012). Other work by Twiston-Davies includes a series of small, delicate clay models pictured on book covers, commissioned by the British publisher Orion, as well as numerous pieces of sculpture for the cruise liners of both Viking Ocean Cruises and Royal Caribbean International. Examples of Twiston-Davies' work are held in a number of private, corporate and public collections, including the National Museums of Wales.

Twiston-Davies describes in the video how the portrait of Howard evolved. He began with small-scale clay maquettes, in order to explore his ideas. A number of different proposals were developed in this way, and the Centenary Foundation chose one of them. Then a full-scale (over life-size, 2.13 metres tall) clay model was built up on a strong metal armature. This provided the original

from which moulds were made, and the final bronze version could thus be cast.

Not far from the new statue's location in Welwyn Garden City there is currently another, much bigger, piece of public art: Henry Moore's "Large Standing Figure: Knife Edge" (1976). This work in bronze stands five metres tall and soars above Parkway. It is on loan from the Henry Moore Foundation in Perry Green, as part of Welwyn Garden City's centenary celebrations. Moore, who like

The statue of Ebenezer Howard will remain a key anchor-point as well as a friendly presence in the townscape for many generations to come.

Twiston-Davies was born elsewhere but lived and worked in Hertfordshire, created this heroic, monumental work which provides such a contrast with the quiet modesty of Twiston-Davies' portrait. The semi-abstraction of Moore's statue, suggesting the human form but not explicitly representing it, also differs greatly from Twiston-Davies' treatment of his subject. The two works together make a wonderful contribution to the previously rather limited range of public art on display in the town.

The Moore will of course eventually return to Perry Green, whereas the statue of Ebenezer Howard will remain a key anchor-point as well as a friendly presence in the townscape for many generations to come. It is a work that masterfully encompasses the spirit of the town and the ideas of its founder. The artist has captured Howard's noble vision, his humanity and his integrity. It is a fitting tribute to the man who brought Welwyn Garden City into being, and it will delight many people both now and in the future ♦

I am grateful to Ben Twiston-Davies and Judy Glasman for their help with this article. Judy was formerly Dean of the School of Creative Arts at the University of Hertfordshire, and until recently she was Chair of Digswell Arts Trust.

Public art, public protest



Photo © Robert Gill



Photo © John J. Fogarty

Members' photographs of the statue



Top: This stunning aerial photo was taken by Society member Robert Gill in the summer of 2021. We asked Robert how he got such an interesting angle on the statue. He told us: "Last year I was given a drone for my birthday. (It) is small but fairly sophisticated and needs a Government licence to use it. There are a number of rules which I have to abide by. I have been taking a number of aerial photos in the town – which give a different perspective to what you normally see at ground level."

Middle: Society member John Fogarty took this attention-grabbing photo showing how the statue has become the focus for com-

munity expression. On 4 September 2021 residents gathered to express their concerns about the proposals for the BioPark site on Broadwater Road (see page 12). The event, organised by the Society, was attended by members of the Heritage Trust and supporters of Keep the G in WGC. The Ebenezer Howard masks were provided by the Society.

Left: The front page of the Welwyn Hatfield Times on 8 September features John Fogarty's photograph in their lead story for that week's issue. The article uses quotes from John and Society secretary Stephen Bensley to show the strength of community feeling about the Broadwater proposals.

The booths are back!

Against all odds the Welwyn Garden City Society saved the historically significant poster booths in Howardsgate from dereliction

by Stephen Bensley,
with contributions from
Shaun O'Reilly



Photos © Will Davis

Many of you will know that our poster booths were designed by the town's architect Louis de Soissons to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951. The bright red bodies and pale yellow roofs were intended to raise the spirits in austere post-war Britain. They came as a complete surprise to local people who had no idea they were to be built. Long-standing residents of the town will remember booths in some of the neighbourhood shopping centres and beside the site of the present John Lewis car park as well. Sadly, of the five booths we started with, just the two in Howardsgate remain.

The original owners were the New Towns Commission. By the 21st century this body was all but defunct, but during the Thatcher years the booths were sold to a local businessman as part of its required orderly wind down. When his business went into administration in 2006 the booths' ownership reverted to the Treasury and

ultimately to the Crown Estate who cancelled the freehold. This is the norm when no-one actually wants the property, though it is little known.

The Crown Estate stated that it did not intend to manage the booths or accept any liability for them in any way. Nor did the County or Borough Councils recognise any responsibility for their upkeep. So the booths lingered on, suffering flyposting and vandalism, and eventually three of them were removed. To prevent the last two remaining an eyesore, the Society decided that it must step in and oversee a renovation.

The problem then became our purchase of the booths. After some negotiation, and when the Crown Estate realised the little worth of the land beneath the booths, it indicated that it would be willing to sell us the title of the land on which the booths stood for a nominal sum. This was encouraging. But then it transpired that the legal

Members' photos and logo news

costs of transferring ownership would be high. So the Society made a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a grant to cover these costs as well as to pay for their refurbishment.

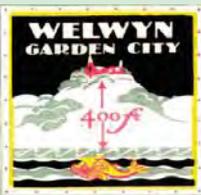
This was fraught with problems, not the least of which was getting an HLF grant before proving definitive ownership of the booths. The application to the HLF was a long drawn out process. It is fair to say that some members of our Committee lost heart and were full of doubt about the viability of this. But thanks to the persistence of Shaun O'Reilly the bid was presented and was ultimately successful in obtaining a grant and securing the booths' refurbishment. Our gratitude to Shaun and to Malcolm Day for the refurbishment itself cannot be too great. It was their achievement, a lasting testimony for over 14 years of work to improve our town.

One of the criteria for awarding the grant was involvement of the community, particularly the younger members of Welwyn Garden City. A schools' project was devised, revolving around exploration of the town centre with the poster booths as the centrepiece. Unfortunately, the pandemic has seen this aspect of the project postponed while schools limit their activities, but hopefully it can go ahead soon. In the meantime the poster booths are refurbished and looking good.

Inside them are illustrated information panels, each of which features a different aspect of the town's fascinating history. The Society intends to create new content for the booths as time goes on. They educate residents of and visitors to our town. Long may they do so!

The Society welcomes suggestions for future posters: please contact the Welwyn Garden City Society on wgcsociety@live.com with your thoughts.

A new logo for the Welwyn Garden City Society



Existing Society logo



Welwyn
Garden City
Society

Idea for a new logo

The Society currently uses a symbol taken from a 1920s illustration made to promote Welwyn Garden City (pictured left). It's a beautiful and historically telling design, but it's perhaps not completely suited to the modern day context. So we are considering a new logo for the Society. Pictured below left is an initial idea. It uses stylised drawings of poplars and lawns to spell out a 'W', with the Coronation fountain in the foreground. We want to create a symbol that members are happy with. Please let us know your views by emailing us at wgcsociety@live.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Members' photographs



Photo © Paula Waspe



Photo © Bryn Jones

Fabulous photos by Society members Paula Waspe and Bryn Jones. Top: Henry Moore sculpture in front of the Coronation fountain in Parkway, entitled 'WGC Centenary Year', January 2020. Bottom: 'Fairies Meeting Place'. This tree on Russellcroft Road captivated many residents on their lockdown walks.

Fun photo: *who is this man?*

He's a member of the Society's committee camping at a music festival in 1968. Answer on page 12. Have you got a photo of your glory days to share with other members? Let us publish your memories!



Send us your images, with your name and a caption to wgcsociety@live.com. By submitting your picture you are consenting to its publication in the Welwyn Garden City Society Magazine. We have set the theme of **trees** for members' photos for the next issue but we also welcome any photos to do with Welwyn Garden City or members' memories and will print as many as space permits.

Planning update

Anneke Bamberg

We hope that by the time you read this the epic story of the BioPark site on Broadwater Road will have been concluded. At the eleventh hour the Council postponed its meeting of 12 August to decide on this planning application, setting a new date of 9 September instead. Many of you planned to join us outside the Council offices on the evening of 12 August to demonstrate your dismay. The Council has subsequently explained the reasons for the last-minute postponement: it needed time to consider the many recent representations from the public; and in recognition of the large numbers of residents who wanted to attend the meeting it was considering an alternative venue.

Please object!

The developer, HG Construction, applied on 21 December 2020 to demolish the former Roche BioPark building on the site and to build six apartment blocks (the two tallest of which would be nine stories high), and eight houses, yielding a total of 289 residential units. Not only the height, but also the density of the development has attracted severe criticism, with the blocks crammed into a restricted plot, leaving little outdoor space for residents. The density and lack of green space fall woefully short of garden city principles, whilst the sheer bulk of the development threatens to dominate the town centre. The towers would also be visible from the West Side Conservation Area. With unconscious irony the development is called "Broadwater Gardens". You can see the details on the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website – go to Planning and search the application

number 6 2020 3420 MAJ BioPark. If you haven't already done so, and if the Council hasn't yet decided, please object – there is a suggested form of words on our website. Every objection helps!

The land along Broadwater Road, much of which has been awaiting regeneration for years, falls into a patchwork of different ownerships, and on page 3 of this magazine we discuss the two sites near the Shredded Wheat silos. The BioPark land is owned by yet another developer, and these three planning applications are currently under scrutiny by the Council. The fate of one will set a precedent for the other two, and indeed for any future developments along Broadwater Road. It seems the BioPark scheme will be the first to be decided. It is a critical moment for our town.

Leaflet campaign

The BioPark application has sparked objections from hundreds of residents and numerous organisations, including our Society, Keep the G in WGC, and the Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust. Our Society has distributed over 1,000 leaflets specifically targeted at those residents who had objected to one of the three Broadwater Road proposals, but not to this one. Keep the G in WGC is a new, Facebook-based pressure group which has sprung into being to combat all three current Broadwater Road planning applications, and it has distributed many hundreds of leaflets to raise public awareness. Over 220 new objections to the BioPark application were submitted in July and August as a result of these campaigns. Grant Shapps, Welwyn Hatfield's MP, has also publicly expressed his concern at the overcrowding and the height of proposals for Broadwater Road, whilst acknowledging that he has no formal role in local planning issues.

Our Committee has worked strenuously to fight the BioPark scheme, and it has presented Councillors with a list of 18 arguments for rejecting it. These are firmly rooted in planning reasons and refer to Government policy. They also bring in wider issues such as the needs of a post-Covid society. Members have received the 18-point list, and a summary of the headings is on the Society's website. We have worked tirelessly on publicity and media contact, and we have collaborated with other groups who oppose the applications. It has been a busy time, to say the least! We would appreciate assistance with further media input, so please contact us at wgcsociety@live.com if you can help.

Bridge Road East win

On a positive note, the Society is encouraged by the Council's recent rejection of a planning application for the site of the Land Rover showroom at 73 Bridge Road East. We objected to this proposal to build a seven-storey apartment block, which would have set a worrying precedent, and we were delighted that it was turned down on 17 July. However, there is no room for complacency: we noted that in Hatfield a recent flawed scheme to redevelop the Volkswagen Vans site was approved, albeit by a single vote. We must be vigilant. The Society hopes that the proposals for the BioPark site can be revised to be more appropriate. We have scheduled a meeting with the Council's Head of Planning to progress solutions to some of the wider planning issues, and at the time of going to press we are hoping for a positive outcome ♦

STOP PRESS On 9 September Councillors voted by a majority to refuse permission for the BioPark scheme.

We hope you like your new Welwyn Garden City Society magazine. We'd love your feedback – please send it to the editor at wgcsociety@live.com.

We look forward to publishing your opinions, stories, photos and letters in the magazine. The members' photo theme for the next issue is **trees**.

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Fun photo answer: the young man at a festival in the photo on page 11 is Society secretary Stephen Bensley!