



## SIGN UP – for a greater community

WDPS has proposed that a campaign to improve signs in Wheathampstead should be included in the Village Plan being launched by the Parish Council. The heart of the proposal is that local signs should be distinctive, reflect the fact that we are a village, and help encourage a sense of local community.

The Parish Council is currently creating a Plan to identify ways of improving the local community and influencing future priorities – see *Putting Plans into Perspective* on p.3. The WDPS proposal is intended as part of the Plan.

### What's wrong with our present signs?



*Sign on the approach to Wheathampstead from St Albans*

At present the signs in Wheathampstead are of a type that could exist anywhere – other villages, towns, even major conurbations. They do nothing to reflect the qualities that make Wheathampstead the historic village that it is.

There is no overall approach to how and where signs should be positioned. The result is often a higgledy-piggledy jumble of signs. This is not only very ugly but also potentially dangerous as it can leave a motorist confused and unable to distinguish the signs that really are important. Some of the signs contributing to this clutter actually appear to be out-of-date.

### And what's good about them?

In 2006 the Parish Council approved in principle the erection of a village sign that would act as a focal point in the centre of the village. The only difficulty is that this is not being actively pursued.

New signs have already been erected displaying maps and

for local notices. Some other elements of street furniture have also been much improved, with the introduction of basket planters, hanging baskets and traditional lampposts in the centre of the village.

No encouragement is given to local businesses to erect signs (or shop fronts and grilles) that reflect their presence in Wheathampstead. Shops, pubs and other local businesses are free however to erect temporary signs, including oversized 'To Let' signs, without regard to the visual impact on the village as a whole. And as noted in previous Newsletters commercial sponsors are allowed to erect signs on roundabouts that add to the welter of signs yet provide no direct benefit to the community.

### How could things be better?

But we only have to look at other communities to see how much better things could be. Many villages nearby have impressive village signs, either at the centre (such as Codicote and Batford) or on the main roads leading in (as at Harpenden).



*Village Sign in Codicote*

A clutter of signs can often be made easier to read and more attractive by carefully positioning them, perhaps on the same post. Some villages, including nearby Flamstead, have installed traditional sign posts. Flamstead has also erected a special board about the history of a village and about its historic buildings.

Other ideas include distinctive street name signs, standardised signs outside public buildings and encouragement to shops to erect signs (and shop fronts) that are in keeping with the character of the village.

### What should we do in Wheathampstead?

The WDPS proposal is that a number of ideas should be considered and costed as part of the Village Plan. These are listed on p.2.



## Annual General Meeting: Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2008

8 pm, Memorial Hall, Marford Road, Wheathampstead. All are welcome

Our guest speaker will be **Simon West**, St Albans District Archaeologist, who will talk about Turners Hall and the late Iron Age and Roman landscape

**Sign Up –for a greater community** (*cont'd from p.1*)

1. Resurrect the idea of a village sign in the centre of Wheathampstead.
2. Erect smaller village signs on the main roads into Wheathampstead.
3. Replace standard directional signs (not governed by highway legislation) with classic signposts.
4. Review all signs in the village to remove redundant signs and reposition those that are required in the interests of safety and visual appearance.
5. In consultation with local businesses and the District Council, establish guidelines for shop frontages (including signs, fascias, grilles and any other forms of advertising..
6. Establish guidelines for signs outside public buildings.
7. Erect and encourage signs providing information on Wheathampstead and the surrounding area (for example, about specific historic buildings).
8. Redesign street name signs so that they are individual to Wheathampstead and reflect the qualities of the community.

It will be important to establish costs and determine priorities. Care must of course be taken that any new signs represent value for money and as far as possible are vandal-proof.

The benefits could be enormous. By promoting Wheathampstead's individuality we would increase the sense of community and allow residents to take greater pride in their village. Visitors would be attracted, benefiting local business.

We hope the Village Plan launches this and other exciting initiatives. We shall keep you posted.

**Village Day Thanks**

We enjoyed another successful Village Day back in July. Many people visited our stall to play the games, buy raffle tickets for the lovely hampers packed with local produce and look at the displays showing our current projects and campaigns.

Many thanks to everyone who rallied round with local produce and purchases to fill our hampers.

**Former Helmets Site (King Edward Place)**

Developers who bought some of the land and building on the former Helmets site (see report in our June 2007 Newsletter) keep trying to get planning permission to develop the site.

Hammersmatch Ltd's appeal against the refusal by St Albans District Council of permission to build a large office block on the site of the former canteen building and part of the walled garden, to which we submitted objections, will be the subject of a Hearing conducted by a Planning Inspector starting at 10am on 15 January at the Council offices, St Peter's Street, St Albans. Members of the public are entitled to attend.

Hammersmatch's recent application to convert the Old Rectory building, which is listed, from offices to residential use and to incorporate part of the walled garden as residential garden was also refused by the Council.

We will continue to try to ensure that the character of this site is not damaged by over-development.

**Subscriptions for 2008**

Please note that membership subscriptions of just £5 per household are now due for 2008. A form is enclosed with this Newsletter.

To make paying each year easier, you can now pay us by Standing Order. It has been quite time consuming in the past sending out reminders throughout the year and it will now be possible to pay by Standing Order - hence the enclosed form for you to transmit to your Bank.

**Every member is another voice to be heard – so please continue to support WDPS.**

Also enclosed is a Nomination Form for Committee Members. Several new Committee Members have joined this year but we would always welcome more new blood!

**5 Years Ago**

*From WDPS Newsletter, November 2002:*

Tesco have just announced that they are to buy up T&S, the owners of Dillons, One Stop, Day and Nite and Supercigs and to re-brand many as Tesco Express stores. We do not yet know the implications for the store in the village. More info on the Tesco website: [www.Tesco.co.uk](http://www.Tesco.co.uk)

*We're still waiting for the re-branding...*

## Putting Plans into Perspective

During the past year there have been public consultations on a range of plans and proposals by various public authorities, which never seem to reach a conclusion. This can be very confusing for the ordinary person, and leaves the impression that it's all a public relations exercise and there's no point in responding because "they" won't take any notice anyway.

Here, *Rick Sanderson* tries to put it all into perspective ...

The **East of England Plan**, or Regional Spatial Strategy, is still being considered by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, but is expected to be published in its final form early in 2008. This Plan sets the policy framework for development in the East of England Region (which includes Hertfordshire) up to 2021. The first draft of the Plan was produced by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) in December 2004 – nearly three years ago! An Examination in Public of the draft Plan was held in late 2005 – early 2006, and the Inspectors submitted their recommendations for changes to the Government. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Plan were published in December 2006 for a three month consultation period.

The Proposed Changes contained a number of proposals affecting our part of Hertfordshire, including:

- 7,200 dwellings to be built in St Albans District between 2001 and 2021;
- 12,000 houses to be built in and around Hemel Hempstead, including 5–6,000 extending into the Green Belt in St Albans;
- an additional 4,200 dwellings in Welwyn Hatfield, many of which would extend into St Albans District.

We submitted comments on these Proposed Changes to the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East).

Further Proposed Changes to the Plan, to take account of the European Habitats Directive, were published recently for public consultation by 18<sup>th</sup> December. These are relatively minor changes to make sure that nature conservation and wildlife sites are adequately protected.

When the East of England Plan is finalised, local planning authorities (in our case, St Albans District Council) will have to make sure that their plans, known collectively as the Local Development Framework (LDF), comply with it. This means that they will have to allocate sufficient land to build the number of houses specified in the Regional Plan. Local planning authorities have been preparing their plans for some time.

The **St Albans Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation document** was issued in July 2007 for consultation until September. This set out, amongst other things, how the requirement to build 7,200 houses in the District by 2021 might be met. The Council assumes that anything up to 2,000 dwellings may have to be provided for outside the existing settlements. Eight areas of search were identified, none of them directly affecting Wheathampstead.

The next stage of the Core Strategy will be the Preferred Options, expected to be issued in early 2008 for public consultation. This could contain different options to those put forward so far, so we must remain vigilant. The final document will then be submitted to the Secretary of State and be subject to a public Examination by an Inspector, with adoption expected in 2009.

Other LDF documents are also being prepared, with Site Allocations & Development Control Policies documents expected to be issued for consultation in 2008.

At the more local level, Wheathampstead Parish Council is now considering producing a **Wheathampstead Village Plan**. This is different from the kind of plans referred to above, in that it is intended to identify local problems that need to be tackled and show how distinctive local features and character can be conserved. The Village Plan should be built up from a consensus of views of local residents, put forward through a series of public consultations. If the final Plan is adopted by the District Council as supplementary planning guidance, it can influence future planning decisions and the way local services are delivered. It is important, therefore, for us all to contribute ideas to the Village Plan. See website: <http://www.wheathampstead.net/parish/villageplan.htm>



## River Clearance next to the Bull

WDPS is undertaking a project to clear the section of the River Lea by the Mill Bridge immediately adjoining the Bull. The work will include clearing the channel that empties excess water from the street into the river, and also planting reeds.

The plan is to carry out the work in January, and we shall need plenty of volunteers. If you are interested, please phone Nigel Oxley on 823900 for information.

## Nomansland gets the Treatment

**Three Valleys Water** have been granted planning permission to erect a water treatment works on the edge of Nomansland Common. But following meaningful arguments and objections to their first planning application by WDPS and others, they have been obliged to modify their original proposals, and the plant will now be housed in a lower building, and be more effectively screened by trees and bushes.

Three Valleys identified the site, just off Drovers Lane and immediately adjoining the eastern edge of the Common, as a suitable site for extracting water from the ground. This need arises because water extracted across a large area further south has become polluted as a lasting consequence of the chemical works that used to operate in the centre of Sandridge. The attraction of the Nomansland site lies in the relatively high permeability of the chalk below ground and the possibility of preventing further flooding in Sandridge.

As anyone who has visited the area in recent months cannot fail to have noticed, a borehole has already been dug, and a pipeline laid which will carry the water all the way to Sherrards Park Reservoir in Welwyn Garden City.

WDPS, along with local residents, objected not to the extraction of water, for which there is a clear need, but to the siting of a treatment plant on the edge of Nomansland Common. In their application Three Valleys gave no reason for locating it within the Green Belt and adjacent to the Common, which is designated a Landscape Conservation Area in the District Local Plan.

The original application was refused by St Albans District Council on 20 August. It was interesting to note how much more notice the planners took of WDPS letter than of the various letters from local residents: an illustration of the power of the collective voice.

Three Valleys then submitted a revised application, to which WDPS again objected. Some concessions had however been made. The building housing the proposed treatment plant was now reduced in height from 7 to 4 metres and located towards the centre of the site, allowing more effective screening from all directions. They agreed to work with the community to come up with the best way of camouflaging the building and to listen to suggestions.

Three Valleys have also provided an explanation of why they believe the water treatment plant should be where they are proposing. There is, it seems, insufficient space at Sherrards Park Wood for a further building, and access to it would be difficult. The plant cannot be built underground at Nomansland because of the risk of



*The approach to the site from Drovers Lane – fly-tipping is already a problem.*

flooding. And taking advantage of the slope of the land – by sinking the base of the building down to the level of Drovers Lane and thus reducing still further the overall height – is felt to be impracticable because of the predominance of gravel below the surface of the ground and the implications for the foundations.

Three Valleys plan to start work very soon and to complete the work by the end of February. In the meantime, fly-tippers have already begun to dump rubbish on the slope leading up from Drovers Lane – and are likely to continue doing so once the treatment plant is in operation because of the large site entrance that Three Valleys will need.

This is at least a partial victory for all those who wish to preserve the Green Belt in the Wheathampstead area. Building on the Green Belt should be allowed in only the most exceptional circumstances, and if in the interests of the local community it is genuinely unavoidable, every effort must be made to minimise the visual impact on the surrounding area.

## The traffic may get even heavier

**You may have heard** the news that the Department for Transport is considering whether to allow even larger, heavier lorries on our roads. Longer and Heavier Lorries (or LHV's, as they are known) are up to 30 metres long and weigh between 60 and 84 tonnes.

Although the promoters insist LHV's will be used mainly on motorways and other major roads, their journeys will begin and end wherever the warehouses are. And like other traffic they will have to be diverted whenever a motorway is closed.

If you wish to object to the trial of LHV's, please let us know your views. You can also write to the Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt. Hon. Ruth Kelly. The address is: Department for Transport, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR.