

Note from the Editor
Hereford Civic Society

Each edition of this "News" from the Hereford Civic Society is edited by a different person selected by the News group; if you would like to organise an edition or contribute an article contact our secretary, details on last page.

news

hereford civic society

Late Spring 2010

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Market Hall Architectural Competition – River Crossing Options
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• Next Quarter's Meetings • Membership

Hereford Civic Society

c/o Packers House, West Street, Hereford. HR4 0BX

“WORKING TOGETHER”

A PRESENTATION BY

CHRIS BULL

CHIEF EXECUTIVE HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL
AND NHS HEREFORDSHIRE

*Herefordshire is the first place in the country to appoint a single
chief executive for both the council and the primary care trust*

Your chance to hear from the man who runs the county

7.30 p.m. Wednesday 26th May 2010

Shire Hall Hereford

VISITORS WELCOME

FREE ENTRANCE

Guest Editorial: John Bothamley

A property developer with an architectural degree; and chair of a charitable grant making trust

As the first guest editor of this new style newsletter I believe I have a special responsibility to set a positive tone to our society's comments and opinions in "encouraging high standards of architecture and town planning in Hereford."

I think we should restrict our criticisms to items of major concern; even on an acclaimed design it is possible to find some fault in a little detail. Further, I have some sympathy with our planners and developers struggling with an ever increasing number of policies and regulations designed to make our lives safer and healthier, and decisions better and more democratically drawn but, I fear, often the obverse is true.

We seem to be losing the ability to see the big picture, there are too many aspects to consider (see the report on our February meeting about the detailed environmental tests required for the second river crossing).

Too many strings pulling in different directions – money from Advantage West Midlands (good) – ill informed councillors (bad) – a public that collectively assumes that new roads means less congestion (bad) – members of Hereford Civic Society that have strong reservations about the proposed second river crossing (good). How can we ensure that we galvanise ourselves and influence others for the good? Nick Jones

suggests a very logical way ahead, in our main article, about what to do with a run down piece of the city centre, measured, cost effective and logical.

But it's hard to be positive about the so called consultation on the second river crossing; in both the "Hereford Times" and "Herefordshire Matters" the maps were illegible, the facts biased (why quote just the peak hour flows?) and there was no "do nothing" and no "improve the existing junctions on the A49 north of Edgar Street". We deserve better from our leaders.

Neglected Backwater by Nick Jones

Architectural writer **Nick Jones** is an ex-London 'immigrant' who has lived in the county for almost 20 years. A regular contributor to the *HCS Newsletter*, he also wrote an architectural column for five years for the regional listings magazine *Broad Sheep*.

Developers like green field sites; working within the existing fabric is time-consuming and less profitable. The results are rarely in sympathy with the surroundings, particularly in sensitive historic locations such as Hereford.

Commercial areas which have grown organically – The Lanes in Brighton, Chester's Rows, or Montpellier in Cheltenham – possess more character than Basingstoke High Street.

Back in the 1960s, Hereford City Council came close to pulling off a unique urban development partnership in the Maylord Orchards area, when over 90% voted in favour of a sensitively-designed scheme by the Duke of Westminster's Grosvenor Estates. For reasons which are now untraceable, the ruling administration chose a rival bid backed by Norwich Union.

Ignoring untapped potential

History is about to be repeated - the current administration is deaf to the objections of the Hereford Civic Society, the large student population and local shoppers. To say nothing of the 12,000+ who have signed It's Our City's petition opposing the ESG scheme.

Expanding the city's retail trading area northwards is unnecessary and economically and environmentally wasteful. The untapped potential of a prime site in the very heart of the city remains scandalously neglected.

The area, bounded by West Street, Broad Street, King Street and Victoria Street covers almost 8 acres - roughly two-thirds the size of ESG's much-vaunted Retail Quarter, and considerably more accessible.

Though no masterplan for the area has ever been drawn up, Herefordshire Council's 2007 Unitary Development Plan identified it as suitable for city centre 'comparison shopping', along with residential, leisure and commercial uses. The area's

regeneration would boost retail activity in the west of the city centre and support the shopping and commercial areas.

At present, this hidden city backwater has a couple of charity goods warehouses, a gym (closed and for sale), a doctors' surgery, motor repair workshops, a glass works, a snooker hall, a disco, one pub, and a handful of shops, cafés and offices.

The Quaker Meeting House, some 17th century almshouses (recently restored) and the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel (presently hiding behind the façade of the Gala Bingo Hall) are about the only notable architectural features. The poor old Chapel building has had a chequered career (unlike its namesake in Worcester's Crowngate Centre, which is now a delightful live music venue). It has been a piano showroom (the Beethoven Hall), a theatre, a cinema and even a rollerskating rink. With the demise of bingo as a social activity, what will it become next, one wonders?

The area is bounded by Saxon defences and is archeologically sensitive.

Excavations on the western side of Berrington Street in the 1960s and 70s established a complex series of defensive works from the 9th century, which partially sealed the remains of earlier buildings and a north-south road. The council-operated public car park in West Street which now covers one of the areas excavated, has a turf-covered mound covering the remains of the Saxon defences along its western boundary with Victoria Street.

For such a down-at-heel area - let's call it The Berrington Quarter – there are a staggering 350 off-street car parking spaces, though only about 20% of the money collected ever reaches the council. A veritable honeypot for drivers. Yet remarkably, fewer than 100 people reside here.

It sits at a pivotal point on the city's compass: metres away from



The Plough Inn: a typical 18th century hostelry, which survived on the corner of Aubrey Street and Little Berrington Street for over a century.

pedestrianised High Town and Eign Gate, and only a stone's throw from the soon-to-be-transformed Cathedral Close. Yet it is characterless: bereft of Church Street's bustling charm by day, and deserted after dark. As the late Gordon Cullen used to emphasise in his townscape teaching, it is the movement of people which 'animates' a locale.

The envisaged Berrington Quarter might be sub-divided into four sectors, with strict planning guidelines about building heights and materials to be used on facades and shopfronts.

There would be a broad mix of uses: low-cost housing (no more ritzy apartments), studios and workshops, cafes and bars, with the emphasis on small-scale shop units. Regeneration would be gradual and incremental, rather than the broad brush sweep of comprehensive redevelopment.

One major building group which stands out as an ideal candidate for conversion into an 'anchor unit' department store is 13-19 West Street. Dating from 1892, this was originally built as a model bakery for the India & China Tea Company.

Preserving the medieval street pattern

Apart from access for emergency services, the Quarter would be traffic-free, criss-crossed with paved pedestrian routes carefully following the medieval street pattern.

The area is considered to be part of the earliest planned layout of the city. The parallel streets of Berrington, Aubrey, Broad and the one now concealed underneath the defensive works, suggest that an early 'planning grid' was laid out within the city's defences, with Broad Street providing the main north-south route to the river crossing at the ford below the cathedral. Friars' Gate stood at the west end of what is now St Nicholas Street.



The Fryer's Motors unit and hotel car park behind the Green Dragon, circa 1910.

At the heart of the redevelopment (roughly where the Green Dragon Hotel's shabby roofless car park is) could be a civic square, enclosed by building facades. An informal and intimate open space, not geometrically-precise: Venetian rather than (Milton) Keynesian.

Here is the ideal place to relocate the controversial twice-weekly Commercial Street open market (it might even be the venue for a Parisian-style flea market on Sunday mornings). To give long-overdue recognition to a local war heroine, it could be known as Szabo Square*.

And if the city ever gets its new Library, and the Broad Street building's clumsy rear extension is removed - replaced, perhaps, with a stack of storey-height frosted glass 'cubes' - it could become the permanent home for the council's highly-regarded (but presently unseen) Costumes Collection. The Berrington Quarter would then have a strong tourism link. Imagine the area on an evening after a Three Choirs concert!

Opening up this neglected backwater would have another important 'knock-on' effect, which would be appreciated by existing traders in Broad Street and Bridge Street: 'foot-fall'. Since the demise of the Heijn's courageous Left Bank retail initiative and the effects of the recession, shopkeepers here have noticed the reduction in the numbers of shoppers venturing southwards from High Town. A revitalised Berrington Quarter would create that 'magnet'

And the dreaded motorcar? Easy! Redevelop the council-owned car park behind the old Woolworths building with a well-designed multi-storey car park. Yes, there are such things, though as an analysis of the RIBA Awards

shows, they're pretty thin on the ground. Even with the challenges of respecting the Saxon remains, such a building (a natural for a regional architectural design competition) could comfortably accommodate 300+ vehicles, bringing in four times what is being collected from the existing surface-level car park. So an even fatter milche cow for the Berrington herd.

There are three major hurdles to be overcome if this blighted area is to be successfully regenerated. Its labyrinthine maze of freeholds; its antique infrastructure: for years Welsh Water has been warning against high-density redevelopment, due to the age of its pipework; and its history: one respected local archaeologist has already warned developers that the ground beneath the Green Dragon's old car park would require at least six months excavation.

Then there's the thorny problem of who to entrust with the stewardship of the regeneration of this highly prized site. ESG? Thanks, but no thanks. A specially-formed trust along the lines of the late Sir John Smith's admirable Landmark Trust would seem to be the safest solution.



*French-born WWII special agent Violette Szabo GC (1921-45) stayed with a cousin at Wormelow between resistance missions in occupied France. Although the subject of a bronze bust which was unveiled on London's Albert Embankment in 2008, Mrs Szabo has no memorial in Hereford City.

Special thanks with the research for this article to Jean O'Donnell, Edward Pritchard and Ron Shoesmith. Images courtesy Derek Foxtan collection.

Opinion

Nick's proposals sound good to me, being a pragmatic and logical way of improving the city centre, and so close to the cathedral (soon to be fenced in!). But like most deep thinkers he wants to revive the medieval street pattern. Let's move on and improve the layout for today. So, how could this idea move forward? Why not get an architectural school to take it on as a major project, organise a charette (A) and have real action

planning? Draw up a masterplan, get the Council to adopt it and promise to improve the public realm (why not?) as the private sector buys up plots and starts to regenerate the Berrington Quarter. What a good job is planned for the almshouses - maybe my idea is already happening! It'll become the place to be. Well done Nick - now suggest the society funds the charette!

(A) charette: an intense period of design activity, usually involving all stakeholders, from the American "charrette"

JB

Recent Meetings

27th January 2010 - **Inspirational Solutions to Climate Change** - Richard Priestley

"The threat of Climate Change is real. We can and must build a better world based on the twin principles of ecological sustainability and global social justice."

Richard began by focusing on the challenge involved in switching the global energy mix away from coal/oil/nuclear to 100% renewables. Next he turned his attention to the need for Passivhaus standards through eco-retrofitting, super-insulation; photo voltaics and water heating, combined heat and power and district heating systems.

Suggestions were made for changes to transport infrastructure to improve the walk-ability and cycle-ability of towns, backed up by excellent public transport such as the bio-methane buses in Oslo; efficient electric trams; and the need for more ecologically sustainable cars.

Finally Richard talked about changes to agriculture using examples of community supported agriculture and ways of improving diet and community involvement with great social benefit as is being revealed by the work of Will Allen in Milwaukee, by carbon sequestration through better pasture management and tree planting, especially in tropical agro-forestry, and by the use of game changing technologies such as the seawater greenhouse.

A fascinating talk which demonstrated what positive, solution-focused thought and imagination is already achieving in its effort to move humanity out of "The Fossil-fuel Age" into "The Solar Age".

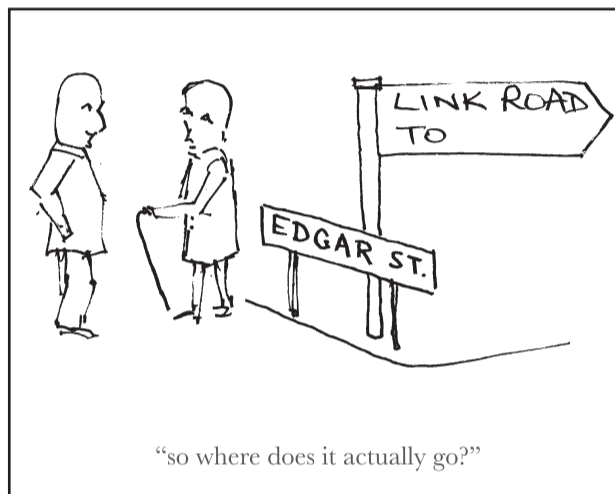
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22nd February 2010 – **Accommodating growth in a Historic City** - Bill Bloxsome – Conservation officer – Herefordshire Council

Bill gave a spirited talk reminding members that Hereford is a growth point and there will be 8,500 new houses in the city and a similar number in the county.

A massive amount of data is being collected and it was hard to grasp how it might all be collated, interpreted and used to practical effect. There was talk of 'rapid urban area characterisation, an urban fringe sensitivity analysis, a biodiversity analysis, historic environment development impacts and design studies, route corridor characterisation study and green infrastructure strategy'. However, one was left with an uneasy feeling that these jargonised terms meant, in reality, very little. There is a real danger that common sense will not be exploited; Herefordshire will continue its apparently inevitable progress to being another bland and undistinguished landscape.

JB



24th March 2010 - **The Work of CPRE in Herefordshire** - Bob Widdowson, Chairman of Hereford Branch of CPRE

CPRE - Campaign to Protect Rural England - was set up in 1926 to combat ribbon development along main routes. This was seen as a threat to the countryside, requiring restraint by appropriate planning laws and regulations in order to prevent its encroachment on our rural heritage. The Hereford branch was one of the first county branches to be established in 1931.

CPRE work focuses on Landscape, Development and Planning and Farming and Food. Though Landscape and its preservation has always been the main raison d'être for CPRE, Development and Planning have occupied an increasing share of its effort due to the increasing amount and complexity of planning law and regulations and to the threat which development poses to that which it wishes to conserve.

Herefordshire is seen as a sparsely populated rural county, affording much land and space for development. However, the amount of 'housing land' available in the county is surprisingly small if the areas designated as flood plain for our major rivers and the needs of agriculture are taken into account. This relative shortage is highlighted by the modern tendency to see 'growth' as the cure of all ills. Nobody is prepared to acknowledge that there must be a limit to growth eventually. In the meantime our most precious asset, our lovely countryside may have been consumed in the process of continued urbanisation.

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A fuller report is available on our web site www.herefordcivicsociety.org.uk

Membership Feature

If like me, you see decisions being made that affect your locality, your city, your life, and your children's ...then is it important for you to be involved? It would seem to be essential.

Just cast your mind back a few years, some of you may not realise what a significant role Hereford Civic Society played in facilitating local citizens/community groups in presenting their concerns to the decision makers over the proposed Flood Defence scheme. This influenced the outcome, albeit in some small but memorable ways, such as the retaining of the Memorial Gates along Hinton Road. It was only from experiencing first hand just what an amazing group of dynamic, inspirational, forward thinking individuals Hereford Civic Society is that I ended up joining. Truly a melting pot...

So if you feel you have ideas, thoughts that can help shape this City and carry it forward into the future then join Hereford Civic Society. Become part of and help to create a greater force

Phyllis Lewis



Next Three Meetings

Wednesday 28th April 2010

Delivering Housing in Herefordshire –Keith Parry, Enabler, Herefordshire Housing

Wednesday 26th May 2010

Working Together – Chris Bull, Chief Executive, Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire

Wednesday 23rd June 2010

How the Regional Spatial Strategy affects us – George Goodhall, Chairman WestMASA

All meetings in the Shire Hall commencing at 7.30pm

Violette Szabo Museum

r/o Cartref, Wormlow

usually open Wednesdays

1st April to 31st October

11-1 and 2-4

Check first on 01981 540477

Disclaimer

All work is the responsibility of the named writer or the editor and all views expressed are personal and not necessarily the view of the Society.

Correction

We apologize that in the November Newsletter the article entitled – Urban Extensions including Poundbury – was incorrectly attributed, the author was, in fact, Paige Mitchell.

Next Edition's Editor & Feature

JOHN FAULKNER IS A PAST CHAIRMAN OF THE SOCIETY, LONG TERM RESIDENT OF HEREFORD, AND A PRIME MOVER OF THE HEREFORD REGENERATION GROUP

The main theme will be "Regeneration or Degeneration". We will be showing how across the country there have been some inspirational regeneration schemes along with some quite awful examples of how not to do it. Hereford is at present in a 'regeneration' phase and needs to take heed of experiences elsewhere and to avoid the mistakes made elsewhere. Is it doing so? What will happen with a new government? How do we get real regeneration of the whole city?

Publication Mid July

HCS Contact Details

Our web site www.herefordcivicsociety.org.uk continues to provide latest news and downloads of all our reports and lobbying efforts.

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News...

The Esg Link Road Planning Application

Maintaining a positive view on this application is difficult; however many tons of concrete will be poured and much tarmac rolled and huge consultants' fees paid. All this despite what appears to be huge opposition from many quarters with solicitors appointed and hundreds of pages of criticism lodged with the council. It is difficult to understand the approach and the confusion in the designers' minds is apparent. Even Croydon has attempted to integrate train, tram and bus travel but there will be a four lane dual carriageway in front of the station! Is it a relief road, a distributor road or an access road to an as yet undeveloped site? The latter, it would seem, is the status quo, planning chief Andrew Ashcroft confirming that no applications have yet been lodged. Nonetheless on 30 March, the council's new central planning committee felt no constraints in voting by 11:3 (with three abstentions) to go ahead with the £14M Link Road, due to be opened in 2014. Rockfield DIY and 16 other established businesses look like being the main victims, though councillors were assured that 'traffic modelling' has confirmed that, even in 2026, the new 800m-long highway, will be able to cope with the city's east-west traffic flows.

The Second River Crossing and "Shaping Our Place" Consultation

The public consultation is now closed following the publication of illegible maps in worthy journals offering us four alternatives. Our editorial refers to the absence of a no action possibility presumably because our politicians are decided upon it, so why go through with a phoney consultation? One of the options is clearly best from an environmental viewpoint based on the numbers. And the numbers seem to have been selected to substantiate the politicians prejudices? Should a fuller assessment be revealed? For example the numbers travelling over the river bridge; if the numbers coming from the Tesco roundabout, Redhill and Rotherwas are added together and deducted from the number travelling over the bridge a huge number of journeys c10,000 start and finish in Belmont. That sounds impossible unless they are all parked in the underground flood water retention tanks? The results of the consultations are due in the summer but when work is due to start is anyone's guess.

Solicitor Makes Planning Decision

A little reported Appeal Decision (A) from the Planning Inspectorate referring to a site in Mordiford (B) appears to be a chancer's dream come true.

Getting planning consent to replace a derelict cottage with a new house twice as big was not sufficient for Mr and Mrs Maltby, they built an even bigger one in a different position and got away with it.

The legally qualified Inspector Sara Morgan (but no qualifications in planning or design) and the appellants QC Harry Wolton chose to wallow in legal contrivances rather than common sense. Wading through the decision letter and putting aside policy H7 (C) the distinguished Inspector chose to compare the impact of the "proposed" building (actually built) with that of the "permitted" building (not built) rather than the original dilapidated one.

Which means now we can submit an application for a replacement building in the countryside, hopefully obtain consent and then apply for an even bigger building. How many times could we do that? Until our funds to pay lawyers runs out?

(A) 9.11.2009 APP/W1850/A/09/2100596 and APP/W1850/C/09/2103145

(B) Haughley Cottage, Mordiford.

(C) Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan 2007 Housing in the Countryside

Architype Wins Civic Trust Award

Herefordshire based architects win the prestigious Civic Trust Award for the St.Lukes CE Primary School in Wolverhampton being the only award made in the West Midlands area. It is the first school in the country to achieve "Excellent" in the BREEAM rating environmental assessment scheme. More information from www.civictrustawards.org.uk and www.architype.co.uk

Hereford Buttermarket Regeneration Competition

Details of the RIBA organised competition for improvements to this city landmark were announced on 24th March 2010. www.inst.riba.org. At a cost of £35,000 this appears to be a strange decision from a cash strapped Council, although the funds are actually coming from Advantage West Midlands to Herefordshire Council to run the competition. While it is good practice to encourage the consumption of local food and restrict our carbon footprints here

we have a competition open to every architect in Europe. What's wrong with using one of our local practices? Or is this too parochial? Please see the report above about a local practice working out of a much praised converted barn with sound eco credentials.

Civic Voice

The demise of the Civic Trust organisation a year ago, an august national body, due to the withdrawal of some government funding, and possibly inept management has led to a year long debate about the future of the movement. Our own society was affiliated but had reservations about the benefits. However from the ashes has emerged Civic Voice and this was launched on 17th April, with some fanfare and heavy involvement of National Trust and CPRE, with a full day of debate about how it will operate. It is likely there will be some take up but there are signs there will be clusters of societies, either geographical or with shared attributes, such as seaside towns, who will network and work together as situations arise. Our own society has chosen not to join and to wait and see how it develops, which, perhaps, is not helpful to a nascent organisation.

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Street Pride Campaign

www.streetpride.org.uk provides details about this new initiative from Civic Voice about a campaign to rid our streets of clutter – bollards, signs, guardrails and posts. One can form a group, collect information, undertake a survey and probably greatly infuriate the highway engineers who so much enjoy corralling us into cattle pens as we cross the road. There appears to be some support for this proposal; however isn't this a situation where we have to decide on whether to do the job properly or not at all? There was talk of Ben Hamilton-Baillie's proposals for Widemarsh Street being rolled out across the whole City – a full on "shared space" proposal. Our secretary has further information if you would like to be involved.

More News...

Love Local Campaign

What is attractive, enjoyable and distinctive about where we live? Yes, another initiative of the new Civic Voice. There is a possibility of talking and committee overload; I would prefer to go out and physically do something as one of our unidentified members does at the crack of dawn. Fed up with the Council's ability to deal promptly with graffiti he or she goes out with a colour swatch of paint colours only to return a few mornings later with the matching colour to paint out the obscenities.

Council Offices

Brewer Heineken must have been chuffed by the pre-Christmas announcement of its £4-million sale of the former Bulmers HQ in Plough Lane to Herefordshire Council, who will share it with NHS Herefordshire once a major refurbishment of the building has been carried out. Around 1,600 council and health trust employees will be accommodated in what is being described as "a single-site admin HQ".

Amey plc seems to be the likely designer and builder for the as-yet-uncosted refurbishment which will not include a much-needed public-friendly council chamber. Democracy watchers will have to continue to suffer the privations of the 190-year-old Shire Hall also crying out for an update. See next edition of HCS News.

It comes with four acres of parking which suggests the Council is not serious about traffic matters.

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**Contact
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A Bridge Too Late

29 AUGUST 2012 will be a red letter day for all disabled people in Herefordshire. Not only does it mark the opening in London of the XIVth Paralympics, but at least one visiting country's team of athletes will be based at the Royal College for the Blind's splendid new Venns Lane sports training centre.

Sadly, the long-anticipated improvements to Hereford Station's disabled access facilities – in particular step-free platform-to-platform movement - won't be ready, listed building owner Network Rail, tenant Arriva Trains and Herefordshire Council having, between them, managed (or mis-managed) to miss this crucially-important target by a full 12 months.

Costumes Collection

Municipal skullduggery is soon forgotten in this county, and the subjects of the demise of Churchill House or the willful closure of the bespoke Hatton Gallery is seldom mentioned nowadays.

Though both the Costumes and Hatton Collections are still accessible (they are to be found in a former telephone exchange in Friar Street), they are hardly under the sort of spotlight which would bring visitors flocking to the city. If 'our elusive new City Library' (as one councillor sarcastically called it recently) ever becomes a reality, then there would be plenty of spare room in the 1874 building on Broad Street, to enable both of these important national treasures to be brought out of storage and mounted in purpose-designed galleries.

One small crumb of comfort on the Hatton front is that, thanks to the tireless campaigning of actress Miranda Richardson, the council's museum services has now made more than 80 works from the artist's collection available on line (www.herefordshire.gov.uk/brianhatton)

Hereford City Community Plan

Well the City Council is now claiming another first, the first city lead community plan in the country. Community First Herefordshire and Worcestershire and Hereford Voluntary Action have been commissioned to take the project forward with a "team of workers" and dedicated phone numbers but no email or web details!

Oh dear, another initiative for talking and discussing. This generation is turning us into a third world country burdened with regulations, consultations and barriers to real achievement.

It's our City

A vibrant Campaign Day in High Town on 10th April. Passers-by were treated to the sight of just how BIG the campaign had become with the petition against the Link Road and ESG retail development now totalling over 11,000 signatures; displayed on a board 10 metres long by two and a half meters high - it was an impressive sight.

It's OUR City! reported they received many more signatures during the four hours they were campaigning, with very few people disagreeing; in fact, people voicing strong support for what the campaign was trying to achieve in the face of incomprehensible Council stubbornness in continuing to argue for a regeneration project that is so manifestly unpopular. MB

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Footnote From Editor

The built environment of Hereford is important to us all - it stays for a long time. Join the society and try and make more sense of the procedures that create it. Our meetings encourage debate and if you would like to try your hand editing this HCS news call our secretary on 01432 343333