

**Championing a town
designed for healthy living**
Our primary aim is to
counter threats posed
by inappropriate building
in our Garden City.
wgcsociety.org
info@wgcsociety.org

The Welwyn Garden City Society

Members' Magazine

Autumn/Winter 2023
Issue 5: Food and drink
Broadwater Road
Planning update
Poster booths
The creative lens
A taste of history
Feeding the family
Moderation in all things
Bridge Road Restaurant



Photographs from Welwyn Garden City Photographic Club

Top Autumn Bounty by Alannah Hebbert © Alannah Hebbert **Left** Autumn by Richard White © Richard White
Right Painted Garlic by Paul Evenett © Paul Evenett

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Issue 5 Food and drink
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Planning

- 3 Broadwater Road redevelopment
Clive Wilson

- 20 Planning update
Anneke Bambery

Town centre

- 7 Poster booths update
Ruth Sykes

Clubs and societies

- 8 The creative lens
Alannah Hebbert

Industry

- 10 A taste of history
Angela Eserin

Shopping

- 14 Feeding the family
Anneke Bambery

Eating and drinking

- 16 Moderation in all things
Geoffrey Hollis
- 19 The Bridge Road Restaurant
Anneke Bambery

Do you have views about topics featured in this magazine? We welcome your thoughts - send them to the editor at magazine@wgcsociety.org.

The theme of the next issue is local nature and wildlife. All opinions in this magazine are the authors' own, and unless stated, they do not represent the views of the Society.

Join the Society and help to improve the future of our town! If you're reading this and you're not a member of the Welwyn Garden City Society, it's easy to join - just contact the Membership Secretary at membership@wgcsociety.org. Please forward or pass on this magazine to friends and family, and help spread the word.

Your executive

Chair David Doughty
Secretary David Doughty (acting)
Treasurer Paul Taylor (acting book-keeper)
Membership Secretary Gerry Crux
Ordinary Members Clive Wilson, Elahe Taylor, Alan Gray

A message from the Chair

For the past seven decades the Welwyn Garden City Society has been a strong voice in standing for things that make Welwyn Garden City special. The rush to cram too many small flats into what were previously employment sites threatens the environment of this town. We need more members to get involved!

Please help to keep your Society running the way it should. We need a new Chair or Secretary, Membership Secretary and Treasurer. The minimum term is only one year, and the commitment is definitely NOT onerous. Brief job descriptions are available, and full training will be given.

This is a critical time for your Society. For some years now we've been running the Executive with a minimum number of officers, due to lack of support. We need additional people on the Executive. Our primary aim is to counter the threats posed by inappropriate building in our Garden City, rather than complaining after the event. This needs foresight and resources. Of immediate interest are blocks of flats which are too high, especially on Broadwater Road.

Can you spare some time to enable the Society to carry on its valuable work? You'd attend a monthly (evening) Zoom meeting, and fully participate in the friendly discussions. If you can take on one of the key roles above, that will help. We would very much like to fill all these roles. We're also short of ordinary members to sit on the Executive. Ordinary members quite often have a specific interest which they enjoy and keep the Executive up to date in their area of expertise. Contact us on info@wgcsociety.org.

Thank you!

David Doughty, Chair and acting Secretary

The Editor and the Designer write:

This edition of the magazine opens with an important article by Clive Wilson about the continuing problems besetting the regeneration of Broadwater Road. By now the sites should have been fully redeveloped with many new homes, yielding economic benefits for the town. Instead, the increasingly dilapidated Shredded Wheat silos stand in a wasteland. The article considers what the future could hold for this area. And as usual our regular planning update covers other aspects of planning in the town.

Ruth updates us on the progress being made to refresh the content and refurbish the fabric of the poster booths in the town centre. A small team from our Society is working on this, and we are very keen to attract new volunteers to this effort. We'd love to hear from you if you can spare just a little time every month.

The magazine also carries an article by Alannah Hebbert about the Welwyn Garden City Photographic Club, illustrated by some stunning examples of its members' work. Indeed, our front cover features Alannah's beautiful photographic still life "Autumn Bounty" along

with photographs from fellow club members Richard White and Paul Evenett.

For its feature articles the magazine takes food and drink as its theme. Our contributors have given us fascinating articles, accompanied by delightful and often little-known images.

Angela Eserin considers the rich history of food processing in our town, while Geoffrey Hollis describes the Utopian thinkers, including Ebenezer Howard, who shaped the town's approach to pubs and alcohol. Anneke had fun exploring the town's trade directories, and found hints that the Welwyn Stores didn't have food retail completely stitched up in the inter-war period - there was competition! We thank all our contributors, who have given their time and expertise to make this such an interesting issue.

The next issue of the magazine will explore local nature and wildlife. Please get in touch with us at magazine@wgcsociety.org if you want to contribute an article, a short piece or a picture. We'd love to hear from you!

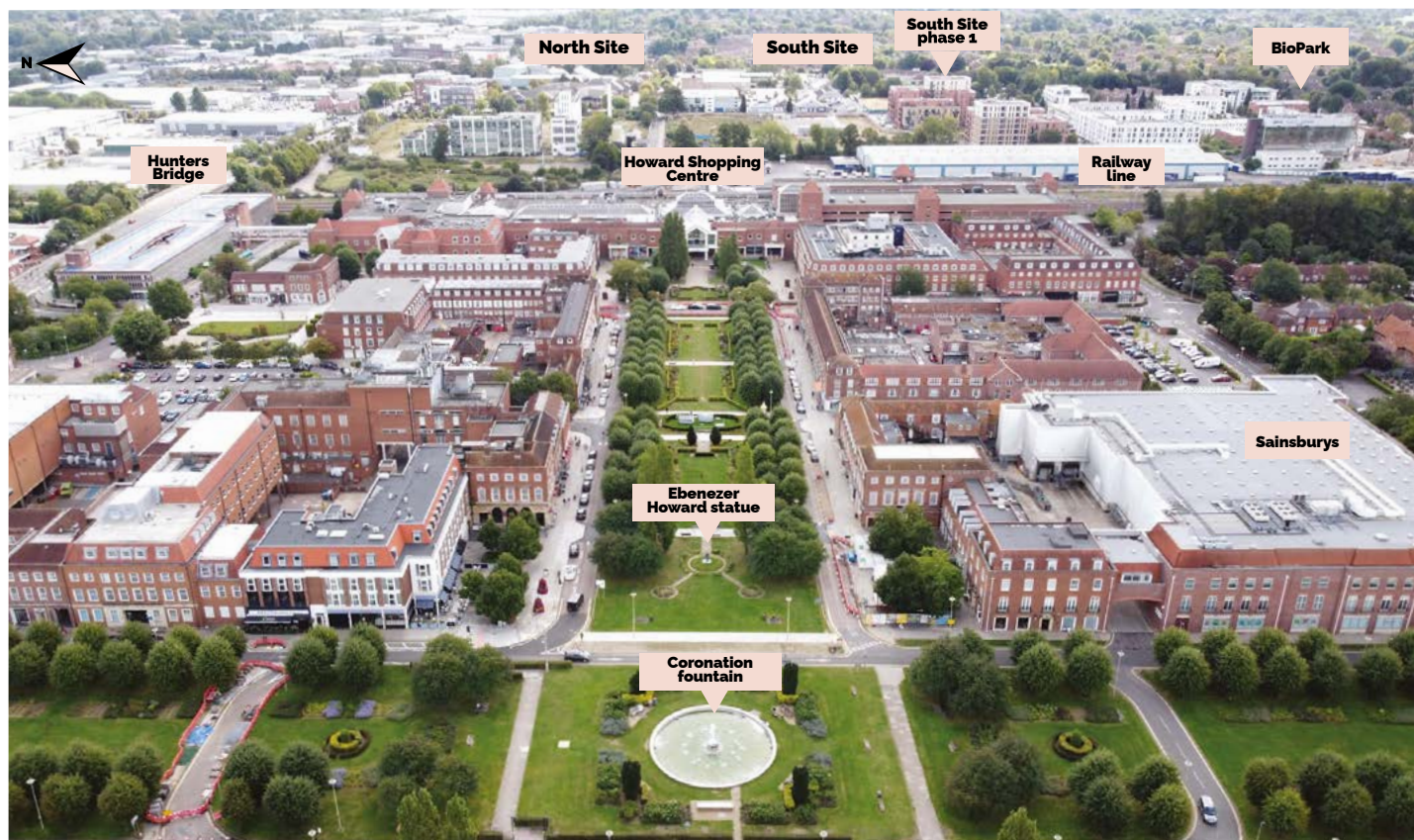
Anneke Bambery, Editor
Ruth Sykes, Designer

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We hope you like this Welwyn Garden City Society magazine. We'd love your feedback - please send it to the editor at magazine@wgcsociety.org. Our magazine is produced by volunteers who donate their time to support the work of the Welwyn Garden City Society.

Broadwater Road redevelopment

The long-running problems surrounding the regeneration of this area are a concern to us all. It seems the market solutions are not working. Clive Wilson looks into the history and suggests it is time for a strategic review.



Area	Planning permission for dwellings			Previous owner	Current owner / comment
North Site - "Wheat Quarter"	Total	Built	Unbuilt	Previously owned by Tesco/ Spenhill, then The Wheat Quarter.	Competitive tenders were due to be received in February 2023. The outcome is still awaited.
	811	0	811		
South Site	Total	Built	Unbuilt	Previously owned by The Wheat Quarter.	Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association (MTVH).
	643	208	435		
Totals North + South Sites	Total	Built	Unbuilt		
	1,454	208	1,246		

The Broadwater Road saga is now approaching its 16th year since the Shredded Wheat company left its factory on the North Site. To put that in perspective the site was vacated when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister, which was a very long time ago. The ensuing dereliction is unsatisfactory to all – so what has happened and how could it get resolved? The Broadwater Road (West) site, pictured in fig. 1 above, is complicated. The table above is a simplified summary of the various parcels of land, whilst a timeline of events over the period 2008 to 2023 is shown at overleaf.

Summary of the current position

At the Council's Development Management Committee (DMC) planning meeting back in December 2018¹ the people of Welwyn Garden City acquiesced to a very large planning scheme submitted by The Wheat Quarter developer. This scheme, for both the Broadwater Road North and South Sites, is termed "the Existing Planning Permission" in this article. Almost five years later there is

little to show for it. The much-needed social infrastructure improvements have been delayed. Many of these should have been implemented by now, including the railway footbridge with disabled access, highways improvements and more. The lost economic benefit to the town is considerable and the dereliction is unsightly. This article considers the issues and what might happen in the future to resolve the deadlock.

Some of the factors which may affect future development on the North and South Sites

The former Shredded Wheat silos and production hall on the North Site are historic listed structures. They have statutory protection so they present challenges for any development scheme. The structures appear not to have been well maintained and they have deteriorated over time. This is being followed up by Together for Welwyn Garden City². It is understood that there was a requirement on the owner to regularly clean and paint the listed structures³. Indeed, the facade of the production building appears to be beyond repair and is likely to have to be replaced by new cladding.

Photograph
Figure 1
View looking east over Welwyn Garden City.
Original photograph
© Robert Gill

2008 Feb	Tesco/ Spenhill buys Shredded Wheat North Site ¹⁵ .
2008 Dec	Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the area published by the Council. This identifies a maximum height of five storeys.
2012 Jan	Broadwater Road North and South: Tesco/ Spenhill planning permission refused ¹⁶ .
2017 Mar	Broadwater Road North Tesco/ Spenhill proposal given planning permission. This proposal was unlikely to have been built as Tesco/Spenhill withdrew from the development. The scheme was branded "unviable" in the 2018 planning permission application.
2017 Jun	Broadwater Road North and South Sites bought by The Wheat Quarter ¹⁷ . At some point MTVH joined up with the Wheat Quarter.
2018 Jan	Partial demolition of the Shredded Wheat silos on the North Site ¹⁸ .
2018 Dec	Broadwater Road North and South Sites planning permission granted at the Council's DMC planning meeting.
During 2019	North and South Sites split into two, and MTVH acquires the South Site, The Wheat Quarter retains the North. This adds considerable complications to the project delivery.
2021 Jan/Mar	Increased schemes submitted for both North and South Sites by The Wheat Quarter and MTVH.
2021 Apr	Ebenezer Howard statue unveiled: the primary sponsor was The Wheat Quarter ¹⁹ .
2022 Nov	Broadwater Road North Site developer The Wheat Quarter goes into receivership.
2022 Dec	Broadwater Road South Site Phase 1 completed (208 dwellings).
2023 Feb	The funding bank deadline for informal offers from prospective developers for the Broadwater Road North Site. The result is awaited.

The listed structures make Welwyn Garden City special, providing character and a sense of place which must not be lost. Even the developers could see the value of having a unique selling proposition for marketing purposes. However the dilapidation is considerable and it will not be a surprise if it is "discovered" that the structures have become unstable or economically unviable to repair. Whilst a reconstruction is not the preferred option, it may have to be considered in order to move forward - particularly if, in the planning balance, there is an upside for local people. It may also make the structures more useful. For example, the developer has proposed that space in the production building could be allocated to a motorcycle museum. Using part of the building for homes instead could reduce the building heights of surrounding blocks.

There are precedents for reconstructions, such as the chimneys of Battersea Power Station which were rebuilt and now contain a lift and viewing tower ⁴. Ultimately, it will be for the authorities and local people to decide if any changes are in the public interest. It should also be noted that the listed building obligations have a huge influence on the height and format of the development, and it is understood that they release the North Site developer from delivering any affordable housing requirements on the North Site.

Local infrastructure improvements are contributions by the developers, made under the terms of the planning permission ⁵. These include improvements to roads, healthcare, education and so on. These contributions are made at predetermined trigger points in the development process, which means their delivery is often delayed. There

are a number of important infrastructure improvements which are due at Broadwater Road ⁶. They include the overdue improvements to the eastern section of the railway bridge (including disabled access), a new road roundabout, funding contributions towards healthcare provision, a new school, and more. Some trigger points (including pre-occupation of the 100th dwelling) appear to have been activated but not delivered on. The sale of the South Site to MTVH has complicated the funding of social infrastructure because of the apportionment between the two sites.

Public response to the recent planning application for the nearby BioPark site showed that local people object to excessively bulky building proposals. In September 2021 the Council refused HG Group permission to construct a proposed scheme for dense high-rise apartment blocks on the BioPark site. After an appeal by HG Group a public inquiry was held in July 2022. It was important that the Society and other local groups fought against this proposed over-development to demonstrate the strength of local feeling. Sadly a disappointing outcome emerged when the appeal was allowed for a number of reasons, including previous Councils' failure to finalise the Draft Local Plan. However, there are a number of advantageous factors constraining over-development on the North and South Sites, including the fact that the site capacities are capped in the Emerging Local Plan. (The Draft Local Plan has progressed and now has this new title.) The Society is well prepared for a future public inquiry if a developer intends to go for a bulkier, higher development. In our view, any developer trying to revise the Existing Planning Permission on the North or South Sites would be judged to be greedy.

National planning policy creates the context within which developers operate. The Conservative Government made an announcement in July 2023 to clarify its planning policy ⁷. It is caught between the need for new homes and the pressure from (mostly Conservative voters) in the so-called green belt areas. The announcement appears to suggest piling more homes into urban areas. However with a general election coming no later than 24 January 2025, the electorate will be able to make its voice heard.

Local policies also play a part. The Council scheduled a meeting on 28 September 2023 to finalise its Emerging Local Plan. The Local Plan sets out a local authority's priorities and objectives for future development in its area. It determines the number of new dwellings permitted on sites earmarked for development, like Broadwater Road. The Emerging Local Plan caps the current capacity for development at the level of the Existing Planning Permission.

Abortive costs have arisen from the receivership of the North Site and from other factors, including complications, delays and the (in)actions of the developers. These costs may not be covered by the increase in the project values. They are not transparent to the public, but they will be a factor influencing future decisions.

Splitting the development into the North and South Sites has presented additional challenges. The original



Figure 2
The former Shredded Wheat factory on the North Site of the Broadwater Road development area. Photo from the Welwyn Garden City Society photobank.

permission was for a single site. The split into two parts presents complications, including to the trigger points for the delivery of local infrastructure improvements. The limitations of the Existing Planning Permission mean that the proposed development needs to conform to the particulars that were stipulated almost six years ago. A recent legal case⁸ constrains departures from the Existing Planning Permission.

The local housing market for flats is adversely affected by the present economic conditions, where price inflation and interest rate hikes prevail. There is also a preference for houses over apartments. Indeed, the Council has identified family homes as the greater housing need in the borough, not flats⁹. We understand that many of the flats in the South Site Phase 1 remain unsold. The market conditions will influence the appetite of potential developers.

There is a lack of pressure on developers to build.

Currently the only legal imperative for developers to actually deliver on a planning permission is to make a “meaningful start”. The South Site Phase I of 208 constructed homes is part of the Existing Planning Permission, so it fulfils this requirement. This lack of incentive to build anything beyond the “meaningful start” is holding back housing delivery. Future governments may consider other incentives to prevent land-banking of planning permissions. For example, they might levy council tax demands on developers by a reasonable date, whether or not they built the project in their approved planning permission.

So why was the current planning permission for the North and the South Sites not built in full?

As previously explored, the sites present a number of complications. These (and possibly other factors too) have created delay.

The Wheat Quarter developer stated in January 2018 that the proposals were for “immediate delivery” (their underlining)¹. We understand the delay was caused by several factors including Brexit. There appears to have been a previous over-reliance on foreign funding, which would have been severely dented by currency revaluation arising from Brexit - but that was back in 2016.

The receivership of the North Site brought the development opportunity to the open market¹⁰. It is not

clear why a buyer has not been forthcoming. The presence of listed structures with unclear risks¹¹ is likely to have dissuaded many prospective developers. This means the options for the site need to be more urgently reviewed.

In the first quarter of 2021 both the North Site and South Site developers submitted revised planning applications¹² to increase the size of the proposed developments that were previously capped by the Existing Planning Permission. The revised plans increased the bulk of the scheme by the infilling of green spaces and by adding extra floors to the proposed buildings. The developers appeared to claim that the Existing Planning Permission was unviable: in other words they would not be making enough money. These revised proposals have no date for being heard by the Council’s DMC planning meeting.

The Emerging Local Plan was scheduled to be finalised at the Special Council Meeting on 28 September 2023¹³. We understand the Plan now limits the current site capacity of the North and South Sites to the level of the Existing Planning Permission. The number of homes allocated in the Plan will be important if there is a future public inquiry.

The future

The delivery of the Existing Planning Permission is long overdue. The sites should now be satisfying the urgent need for new homes and should be delivering economic benefits for the town. The town’s retail offering would be rejuvenated, and tax revenues would increase. Council tax income alone would exceed £2 million per annum (before costs). Some people may understandably want the Existing Planning Permission to be reduced, but it has set the current legal level of future development whether one likes it or not.

We are still awaiting a new developer to take on the North Site. The marketing to date does not appear to have produced a result, but hopefully this may change. In the meantime the need for a review to identify future options is becoming more urgent. The South Site is understood to have issues arising from the Existing Planning Permission⁸, complicating the links to triggers for the delivery of infrastructure improvements.

The number of permitted dwellings on both sites is consistent in the Emerging Local Plan and in the Existing Planning Permission. However, the revised bulked-up planning applications are still awaiting review at the Council’s DMC planning meeting. These exceed

the allocation in the Emerging Local Plan and are not acceptable to many local people. If nothing more is built on the North and South Sites, the infrastructure improvements will be further delayed and the listed structures will continue to deteriorate. We await an updated structural/viability report from the Council on the listed structures, and Together for Welwyn Garden City has also progressed this issue. This report may have been part of the North Site tender documents that we have not been allowed to see¹⁴. If necessary, enforcement action may be required from the Council to secure the viability of the listed structures.

The available options appear to be those set out in the table below:

Option	Current position	Possible way forward
1. Build Existing Planning Permission.	North Site stalled by lack of a buyer. South Site stalled waiting for North Site.	Appears to be held up by lack of market appetite to build on the North Site.
2. Review options for Existing Planning Permission.	As above.	Review the blockages and propose ways forward.
3. Deliver on bulked-up revisions to Existing Planning Permission.	Exceeds the numbers set by the Emerging Local Plan and is not acceptable to many local people.	Likely to be rejected at the Council's DMC planning meeting. Review all options on existing permission before moving forward.
4. Continue to wait for a solution from the market.	Deteriorating listed structures, loss of local economic benefits.	The time for waiting appears to be over.

In the interests of progressing the discussion, we proposed that the Council summarise the position on the sites and consider organising a forum for interested parties and local people (known as a planning charrette). This would explore ways of progressing the Existing Planning Permission and identify the blockages and options for overcoming them. Ideally the future North Site owner and the South Site owner (MTVH) would play an integral part in the charrette. The Council has agreed to produce further information, and a strategy for the way forward is being considered. Look out for announcements from the Council.

If you have any questions or views on the future of Broadwater Road, or if you wish to be updated on developments, then please contact the Society and Together for Welwyn Garden City, and let your councillors and MP know your views. Any questions on the developments should be directed to the case officer William Myers via email w.myers@welhat.gov.uk.

The author acknowledges the help provided from many sources in the writing of this article. It is intended to be a starter in the discussion to secure a suitable outcome for the people of Welwyn Garden City.

FOOTNOTES

1. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website, planning application 6/2018/0171/MAJ "Delivering the Wheat Quarter".
2. Together for Welwyn Garden City is the name of the new group formed when The Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust and Keep the G in WGC recently joined forces. The new group endorses this article.

We have received this statement from Ward Councillor Russ Platt:

"Thank you to the Society for compiling this article on an issue that is critical to the town's future. I know that the new leadership of the Council is actively monitoring the situation regarding the long overdue development on this site. From my perspective I plan to update residents on what is happening on this, and the many other current and proposed town developments at a forthcoming resident's forum (date and details TBC). Please be assured we will do what we can to make the development the best it possibly can be for the town. Any questions in the interim should be directed to the Case Officer, but I am also happy to help wherever I can."

3. <https://www.welwyngarden-heritage.org/news/open-letter-to-cllr-fiona-thomson>
4. <https://nineelmslondon.com/news/battersea-power-stations-iconic-chimneys-rebuild-complete-using-original-methods/>
5. Community infrastructure improvements were formerly known as "Section 106", which is now replaced (for new developments) by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). See "Guidance, Community Infrastructure Levy", Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, HM Government, updated 4 January 2023. See section on "spending the levy" for infrastructure improvements. The CIL replaced Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
6. Full list in Section II.2 and Appendix I of the Planning Officer's report from 2018. <https://planning.welhat.gov.uk/Planning/Display/6/2018/0171/MAJ>
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66287810>
8. <https://www.addleshawgoddard.com/en/insights/insights-briefings/2022/real-estate/hillside-parks/>
9. Source: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan Main Modification 2022, MM18, p.29.
10. See Deal Flow Register: https://www.cbcredealflow.com/handler/modern.aspx?pv=Z-I9J549zUFsSziesRAUlnk_1e-KtrWueaYnLs7J-926tuhRYRIeqUTP6n3NaH6b#_top
11. We don't know whether or not prospective buyers were provided with a structural/viability assessment of the listed structures.
12. <https://planning.welhat.gov.uk/Planning/Display/6/2021/0181/MAJ>
13. <https://democracy.welhat.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=186&Mid=1588>
14. We approached the estate agents for the site (CBRE) to obtain further information. Their response was as follows: "I have now had instructions from my client. The image you refer to is not available for use and we are not able to share any of the documents used in the marketing process which are private & confidential. In terms of an update please refer to the below statement: 'Tim Perkin and James Graham of CBRE UK were appointed fixed charge receivers of the Wheat Quarter North Site on 3/11/22. The fixed charge receivers have since appointed the Development Land Agency team at CBRE UK to market the property for sale and we expect to conclude a sale in the near future.'"
15. Welwyn Hatfield Times 13.2.2008
16. <https://c20society.org.uk/100-buildings/1926-shredded-wheat-factory-welwyn>
17. <https://www.whitimes.co.uk/news/22468391.fresh-plans-nearly-1-500-homes-welwyn-garden-citys-shredded-wheat-site/>
18. <https://www.whitimes.co.uk/news/22459722.farewell-shredded-wheat-silos-pictures-demolition-work/>
19. <https://www.whitimes.co.uk/news/22364425.iconic-new-statue-eben-ezer-howard-unveiled/>

Poster booths update

Ruth Sykes shares the latest poster booth news

New posters in production

In the last issue of our magazine we asked members to suggest new ideas for the posters in the booths on Howardsgate (right).

We are delighted to report that many wonderful ideas for new posters were sent to us. Not just ideas: contributors have written text, and found photographs. A huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to this amazing response.

The topics for the new posters now in development are: Welwyn Garden City railway station; The Cherry Tree restaurant; distinguished garden citizens (with a separate poster on Richard and Celia Reiss); Digswell House, and Digswell Estate. We are now working on turning the fresh content into new posters.

There's still room for more ideas! Please do let us know if you have an idea for a new poster by emailing booths@wgcsociety.org. If you'd like to create a poster, we'd be delighted to hear from you, and we'll send you our simple guidelines.

Call for volunteers for the poster booth team!

We need more volunteers to help look after the poster booths. Please let us know if you'd like to get involved. The poster booth team does lots of things, including organising the cleaning, maintenance and repairs of the poster booths, and liaising with authors and editing the texts. Please email: booths@wgcsociety.org.

Here's some useful information for those interested in contributing to the poster booths project, either by making new posters and/or maintaining the booths.

Background The poster booths were designed in 1951 by Louis de Soissons. Following a long period of dereliction and misuse, they were refurbished by the Welwyn Garden City Society in 2020. Originally designed to carry advertising posters, their purpose now is to tell the story of Welwyn Garden City using text and photographs or illustrations. For more background information, there's an article about the poster booths in a previous edition of the Society magazine here: https://howardcentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WGCS_Mag_AutumnWinter_2021.pdf. The article about the poster booths is on page 10.

The current posters, which will be replaced, cover the following topics: The Story of The Poster Booths; A Marriage of Town and Country; The Henry 'Tim' Birkin Story; The New Town Agricultural Guild and the Model Dairy; Welwyn Film Studios in Welwyn Garden City; Ebenezer Howard 1850 – 1928, and The Town Plan.

Suitable topics for posters are anything related to the story of Welwyn Garden City, appropriate for an audience of all ages and backgrounds. Photographs and illustrations are particularly welcome to help make the posters visually impactful. Unsuitable topics include currently politically sensitive issues and advertising.

If you have an idea for a poster, please contact the team to discuss it first, at booths@wgcsociety.org. Guidelines for creating posters are available online at: <https://wgcsociety.org/creating-a-new-poster-booth-panel/>

New-look paving

You may have noticed the new paving laid around the poster booths by the Council (pictured). It's great to see smartened-up paving around the poster booths. It's interesting to note that the paving slabs have a pattern related to that used on the new paving in the Stonehills development, the history of which was discussed in issue 2 of our magazine.



New paving around the south poster booth. © Ruth Sykes

Poster booth in the "Stepping Through Film" photography project

One of the poster booths was spotted on the BBC news website recently (at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-65985827>) in an article about photographer Thomas Duke's photos of movie stills taken in the exact location the film scene was shot. The photo on the BBC website shows a still from Simon Pegg's comedy film "The World's End", from a scene shot by the poster booths. Both the film, and the photo of the film still, were shot prior to the restoration of the booths. The film was shot ten years ago, and it's interesting to see the photo booths were then in their green phase.



Thomas Duke holds a photographic still from the film "The World's End" to show exactly where the scene was shot. © Thomas Duke

If you happen to have any photographs or footage of the poster booths from times gone by, we'd love to reproduce them in the magazine. Let us know on booths@wgcsociety.org.

The creative lens

Our town has many talented photographers. Alannah Hebbert describes the activities of the Welwyn Garden City Photographic Club.

A selection
of members'
photographs:

Right Don't be Fooled
by Dan Adams
© Dan Adams

Bottom right Painted
Garlic by Paul
Evenett
© Paul Evenett

Bottom left Autumn
by Richard White
© Richard White



Autumn is loved by photographers. The beautiful changing hues in the trees, the opportunities to catch the sunrise later in the morning, and the golden tones at the end of the day. At Welwyn Garden City Photographic Club it also marks the start of our new season, which runs from September to May.

The roots of the club can be traced back to the early 20th century when photography was rapidly gaining popularity as an art form. In 1937, a group of passionate photographers, led by Mr John Chear FRPS, came together with the intention of fostering a creative community dedicated to exploring the medium.

The organisation quickly garnered a reputation for its dedication to both the technical and artistic aspects of pho-

tography. Through regular meetings, workshops, and exhibitions, members shared their knowledge and exchanged ideas. The club's ethos revolved around nurturing creativity and encouraging photographers to explore new perspectives of the medium.

Over the years, the club evolved and adapted to the changing landscape of photography. From the early days of 16mm cine film and darkroom processing to the digital revolution, the club has embraced technological advancements. The transition from film to digital cameras opened up new possibilities, enabling members to experiment with different techniques, explore post-processing software, and broaden their creative horizons.

As with most organisations, 2020 saw a lot of changes to the club. We tempo-

rarily moved our weekly meetings online to Zoom, making changes to ensure that we could continue to hold competitions, host renowned speakers and chat about all things photography. The meetings were a good antidote to lockdown – creativity proved to be a fantastic outlet for us all. We even managed to hold a successful exhibition online, expecting to appeal to locals, but also managing to attract views from around the world!

Whilst this was a positive and easy way for members to stay in touch, we missed the sociability of in-person meetings. Once lockdown was over, we reverted to a mix of both online and local meetings at our venue, Christchurch Baptist Church on Tewin Road.

And we continue to thrive. The club fosters a friendly and supportive community of photographers of all ages, embracing everything from smartphone pho-



A selection
of members'
photographs:

Left Swamped by
Iain Houston © Iain
Houston

**Bottom left Autumn
Bounty** by Alannah
Hebbert © Alannah
Hebbert

Bottom right Moored
by Stephen Baldwin
© Stephen Baldwin



tography to “point and shoot” cameras, to modern DSLR and mirrorless. Whether you are a seasoned professional or an enthusiastic beginner, we offer a space to learn and to connect with like-minded individuals, through workshops, digital and print competitions, lectures and photo walks. You will find members who specialise in landscapes, wildlife, still life and portraiture, and there is always something new to learn.

In addition to weekly meetings in Welwyn Garden City, members often get together for photography day trips to locations such as London, Ely and Cambridge. These provide ample opportunities to practise your skill whilst being part of a welcoming community.

The club is a member of the East Anglian Federation of Photographic Societies, which in turn is a constituent

founding member of the Photographic Alliance of Great Britain (PAGB). This gives us access to the fiercely fought inter-federation competitions, including the Annual Colour Print, in which WGCPC member Iain Houston won the PAGB colour ribbon this year with his image “Swamped”, (above). A fantastic result, given the number of federations which entered and the standard of photography on show.

We also saw some exciting results in the Cambridge Inter-Club competition, where our member Dan Adams won the Roy Pitman Award with his portrait, “Don’t Be Fooled”. The club as a whole received 98 points in total, coming second overall.

If you are looking for creative inspiration this autumn, we invite you to attend

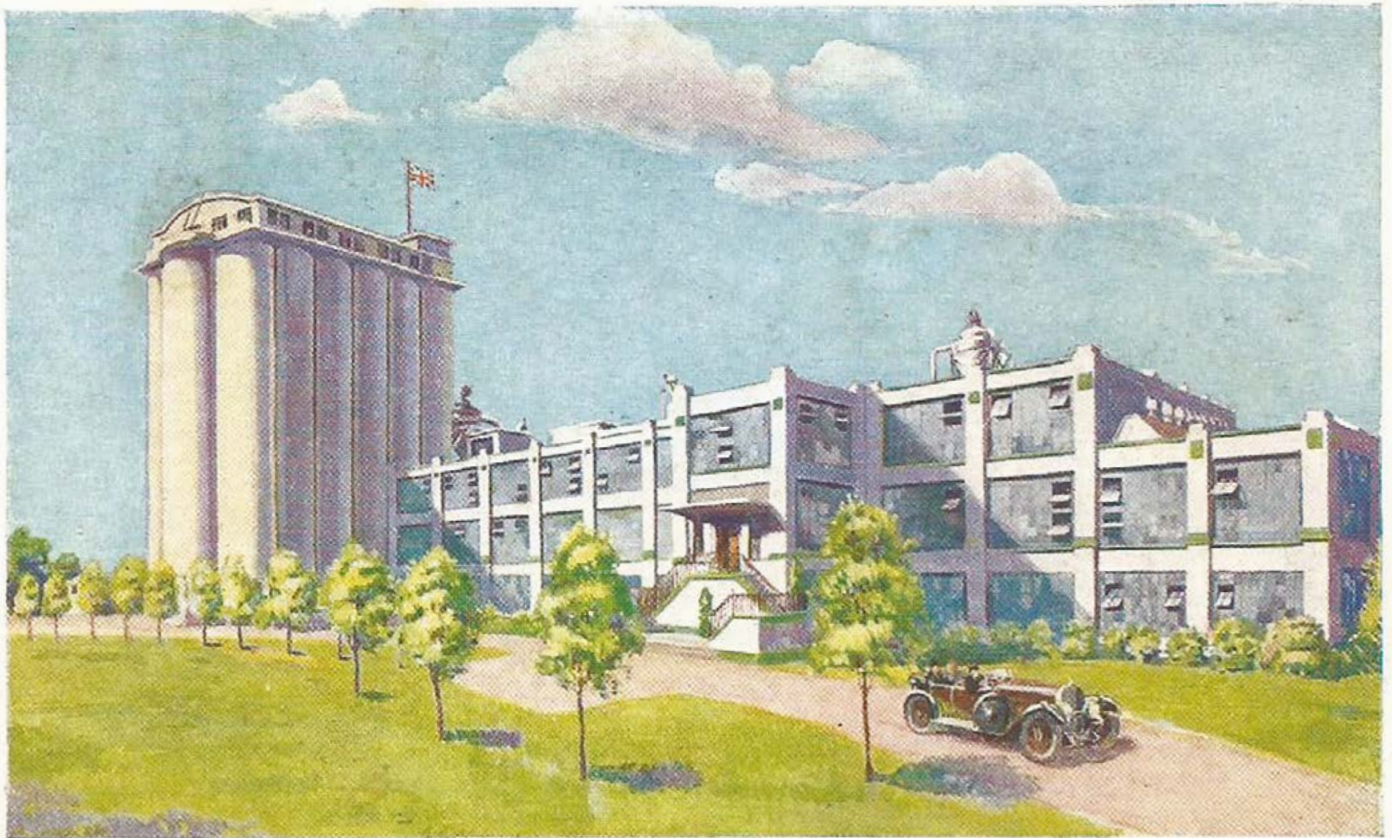
one of our meetings as a free ‘taster’. Joining the club is a simple process. Visit the club’s website or reach out to the membership secretary (via the email membership-secretary@welwynphoto-club.org.uk), who will guide you through the steps to becoming a member.

We look forward to welcoming you at one of our meetings!

Alannah Hebbert is publicity secretary of the Welwyn Garden City Photographic Club.

A taste of history

Many food products have been made in Welwyn Garden City. Many were well-known, others were novel, and in some cases ground-breaking technology was used, as Angela Eserin relates.



The Shredded Wheat Model Factory at Welwyn Garden City (open to the public during all work hours).

Figure 1
A rather idealised view of the Shredded Wheat factory on a postcard.

“Welwyn Garden City is ideal for food manufacture, clean air, neat and tidy town, trees and flowers, clean factories. Visitors are favourably impressed.”

So wrote the wonderfully-named Bickiepegs company, explaining why they came to Welwyn Garden City from London in 1927, but their words illustrate the attraction of the town for any food manufacturer in the early decades.

“a palace of crystal, its great walls of glass held together by slender white tiled columns of concrete”.

Bickiepegs made three types of rusks in one of the first sectional* factories in Broadwater Road (fig. 2). Developed by a doctor for babies and children, they worked on the theory that daily chewing of hard foods is essential to the health and proper development of the teeth and jaw.

Bickiepegs, a teething rusk for babies, was a smooth neatly moulded biscuit about two inches long with a ribbon attached. According to the Welwyn Times it was as hard as one of the bricks

made by Herts Gravel and Brickworks and about as tasty, but apparently small babies love them! Chu-Chus were slightly softer wholemeal rusks for babies from eight months onwards and there were Raisin Rusques for older children. Bickiepegs have certainly been a success, receiving the royal seal of approval from the late Queen Mother and being mentioned on the TV programme “Call the Midwife”. They are still made today but now in Aberdeenshire, as the company moved from Welwyn Garden City in the 1970s.

Bickiepegs were the second food manufacturer to arrive here, following the most famous of all: Shredded Wheat. Shredded Wheat chose Welwyn Garden City for their UK base in 1924 for very similar reasons. As their managing director, J.W. Bryce said,

“Food for human consumption should be manufactured under the most rigid sanitary conditions and amongst surroundings that are clean, healthful and pleasant. In selecting a location for



Figure 2
Inside the
Bickiepegs
sectional factory.

the site of the British factory, Welwyn Garden City was chosen as more nearly conforming to these ideals than any other of the sites offered."

Attracting such a huge company to the town was a great coup for the Welwyn Garden City Company, and also a great relief. Without industry the town would not survive and during the early 1920s the Welwyn Garden City Company often verged on bankruptcy, only kept afloat by large bank loans, personally guaranteed by the directors. No wonder then, that the new Shredded Wheat building was positioned to be easily

visible to anyone travelling by train, and was designed by Louis de Soissons to make a statement about Welwyn Garden City as well as to be a fully functional modern factory (figs. 1 and 5).

On the official opening by the Marquis of Salisbury on 12 March 1926, the elegant white building was described by one newspaper as "a palace of crystal, its great walls of glass held together by slender white tiled columns of concrete". (Probably best not to think of how it looks today.)

Inside all was clean and modern and working conditions were excellent. A free midday meal was provided and staff worked a five day week, unusual at that time. Surrounding the factory were extensive green areas with football pitches and tennis courts, which could also be used by non-employees. The Bryce Hall was built for staff social events. The annual sports days became a much loved fixture and the company was a landmark, both literally and in the sense of contributing greatly to the developing community.

In the 1930s Shredded Wheat was acquired by the National Biscuit Company of America, hence the name change to Nabisco. Success continued and

in 1938 more silos were added to store the 400 tons of wheat being processed each week. World War II brought its challenges as food production had to continue. The silos were painted in camouflage paint and the Shredded Wheat Home Guard was formed.

Extensions to the factory in the 1950s allowed for greatly increased production but sadly swallowed up the recreation ground. In 1988 Nabisco was producing over 500 million Shredded Wheat biscuits a year, still using largely the same process but with more automation and at a greatly increased speed.

Twenty years later in 2008 the factory was closed as the then owner, Cereal Partners, part of the huge Nestle group, chose a site in Wiltshire over Welwyn Garden City. The factory and its land were sold and we are still left wondering what the future will bring for one of our town's iconic buildings [see "Broadwater Road redevelopment", p. 3].

Over the years, Welwyn Garden City was a good place to work in if you had a sweet tooth, as there have been five different confectionery firms here. Andrew Buchanan was a Scot who, with his four sons, established a successful business in 1930 making all kinds of toffees in a factory in Broadwater Road. Local children soon learnt that if they were passing on a Friday afternoon after school they were often given a free bag of sweets. At the start of World War II the building was requisitioned by De Havillands, which was a disaster for Buchanans, as keeping the business going without a factory was impossible. They did get it back in 1946 and managed to restart production. For a few years things went well, ironically helped by rationing when there was less choice of sweets on the market, but by the mid 1950s it was decided to sell up and production in Welwyn Garden City ceased.

The Garden City Candy Company, which employed about 80 people, was a short-lived but unusual

The new Shredded Wheat building was positioned to be easily visible to anyone travelling by train, and was designed by Louis de Soissons to make a statement about Welwyn Garden City

Below Figure 3 In the Crown Macaroni Company factory. Long spaghetti and long macaroni being made on the only machine of its type in the UK at that time.

Bottom Figure 4 Inside the rather space-age factory of Atomised Food Products.

venture. It was owned by Latvians and made unusual sweets and chocolates with recipes that had never been seen in the UK before. Apparently their packaging was also novel and attracted a great deal of interest when their sweets were displayed in Welwyn Stores in 1938. Sadly I have been unable to find any pictures. When a number of the Latvians who had helped to set up the company returned to the parent company in Riga, a farewell dance was held at Pear-tree Clubhouse, which was decorated with Latvian and British flags. The outbreak of war in 1939 affected this company too, making things too uncertain for it to continue over here.

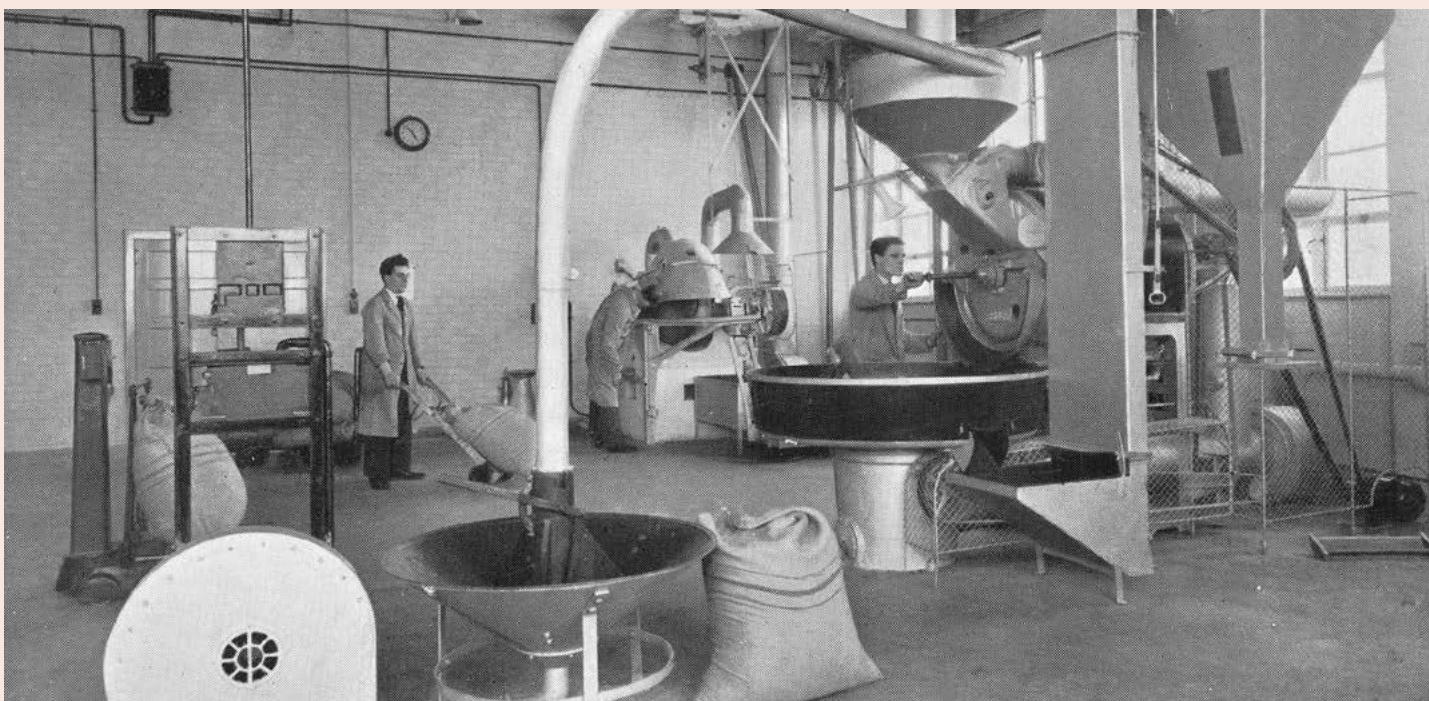
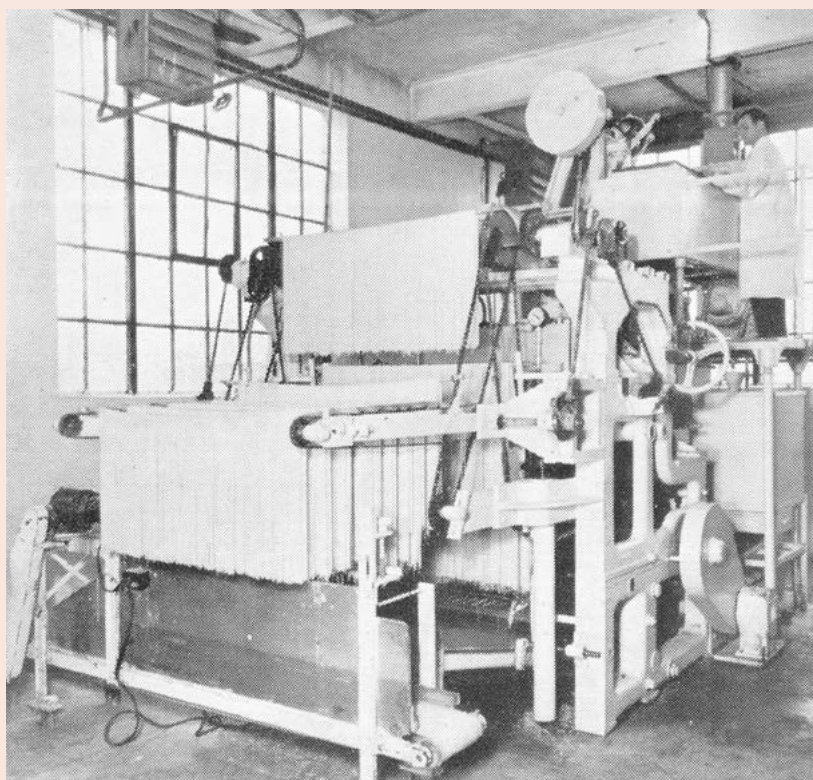
Two more foreign sweet manufacturers have had premises in the town. Fred W. Amend and Co. were

from Chicago and well-known in the USA for their soft jellies sprinkled with sugar, known as "Chuck-les". Originally made from his own recipe by Fred Amend, a sweet salesman, as a cheap alternative to chocolate bars, they are still manufactured and marketed in America. Suchard, the Swiss chocolate maker, had a large factory in the town for twenty years from 1956 to 1976.

Just as Howard's garden city concept was something new and different, Welwyn Garden City has attracted some ground-breaking manufacturers. The intriguingly named Atomised Food Products arrived in 1938 to a brand-new factory designed by Louis de Soissons and described by the Welwyn Times as being like an H.G. Wells fantasy (fig. 4). It was formally opened by the Brazilian ambassador, as the process conducted there was to "convert raw Brazilian coffee beans into a remarkable atomised powder which can be used commercially as a flavouring or dissolved in water or milk to make a beverage without the slightest trace of coffee grounds". Today we call it instant coffee and take it for granted, but in 1938 "Mireem" was the only preparation on the market which could be used in a dry form to give coffee flavouring.

Later on another form of dried food was made in Welwyn Garden City by Anglo Swiss Food Products with their workforce of over 200. Their Knorr dried soups were manufactured converting the raw ingredients including "chickens from Denmark, peas from England and spices from India" into the packaged dried product. Apparently the tomato flavour was not very popular in Britain as it tasted so different from Heinz tinned soup.

Pasta is a staple of most diets today but it was certainly not so familiar as a term or as a product when the Crown Macaroni Company set up in Welwyn Garden City in 1939, so they too were a ground-breaking industry. They were attracted to our town "because of its character as a garden city,





THE BAKING OVENS
Heated by Smokeless Fuel

Figure 5 The Shredded Wheat Company ovens. Clean air was important even to industry in Welwyn Garden City.

with its many trees and grass verges, and the absence of slums". The Welwyn Garden City Directory of 1954 contains an advert for Crown Macaroni which begins, "Many people have wondered what macaroni is precisely and whether it is grown or manufactured". The company used several types of machine which were unique in this country (fig. 3). They obviously did well and in 1959 a new 147,000 square foot factory was

In the first decades, the industrial zone was an integral part of the whole town, something developers and planning inspectors today seem to prefer to forget.

built in Broadwater Road, which also housed an associate company, Cromac Biscuits.

The citizens of Welwyn Garden City have always needed bread, so one of the Welwyn Garden City Company's earliest subsidiaries was Welwyn Bakery, which was originally housed in a cramped corner of Welwyn Stores. As the town grew, larger premises were needed and a purpose-built new bakery opened in Bridge Road East in 1926. It was state of the art for its time and attracted great interest within the baking trade, with frequent visitors. The bakery manager, Arthur Curry, won many cups and medals in the 1920s and 1930s. Bread and cakes in great variety were sold in Welwyn Stores, some with intriguing names such as Almondines, Friends, Pink Patience and Petit Tonis. When the Jewish refugees came to the town the bakery made a special rye bread for them as they were unused to our style of loaf. By 1949 the bakery had been extended to four times its original size. In 1954 it was sold to Allied Bakeries and production ceased in 1974.

The examples above hopefully show the variety of food manufacturers, both large and small, who were attracted to the town over the years.

In the first decades this was due in no small part to the town's planner Louis de Soissons, who gave as much attention to the layout of the factory area as he did to the residential streets. The industrial zone was an integral part of the whole town, something

developers and planning inspectors today seem to prefer to forget. He insisted on green space around a large factory and always used trees as screens. This, together with the Welwyn Garden City Company's policy of controlling factory emissions and waste disposal, ensured a clean, green environment very different from existing older manufacturing towns.

That the second garden city was recognised internationally made it attractive to bigger foreign companies, something the Welwyn Garden City Company exploited with a professional advertising campaign. Sectional factories encouraged small industries, as they could rent a portion of a building without needing to make a huge commitment. Being close to London has always been an important factor, especially in the late 1930s, when war loomed and Welwyn Garden City offered a comparatively safe haven for firms like Danish Bacon.

As a post-war New Town, the Welwyn Garden City Development Corporation built on the earlier success, and the 1950s and 1960s were a boom period for industries of all kinds. Inevitably the economic downturn of the 1970s and the decline in manufacturing in Britain meant that things are now very different. Yet it is still worth remembering that household names in the food industry like Knorr, Suchard and of course Shredded Wheat helped to raise the town's profile and demonstrate that a garden city really is "a town designed for healthy living and industry".

** Sectional factories were single-storey industrial units that could be divided internally according to the tenants' needs. There are still some surviving examples on Broadwater Road.*

All images are from items kindly donated to the Welwyn Garden City Heritage Trust (now Together for Welwyn Garden City).



Feeding the family

What was it like to go food shopping in Welwyn Garden City between the wars, and where did the food come from? Anneke Bambery finds out.

Before World War II most British people grew their own vegetables if they had a garden or an allotment. Welwyn Garden City's houses were planned with generous gardens, but of course other kinds of food still had to be bought. Between the wars, most towns and some villages had a variety of food retailers, but shopping in our town was a bit different. Welwyn Garden City Ltd, the company which developed and managed the town, sold food to the new residents through its subsidiary company, Welwyn Stores Ltd. Welwyn Garden City Ltd had initially tried to attract an established retailer to the town, but both Selfridges and the Co-op refused¹, leaving the company to set up its own retail outlet. Besides food, the Stores sold a very wide range of goods, from hardware to haberdashery and much besides. It also managed the distribution of milk from the company's Model Dairy to people's homes, using horse-drawn milk carts. The Stores, situated at the corner of Bridge Road and Parkway (see illustrations), opened in October 1921, and in the early years they appear to have had a near monopoly of food retail in the town. Apart from the Welwyn Stores, the Welwyn Garden City Directory (WGCD) for 1931 lists no food shops at all in its commercial, professional and telephone pages. And the Stores themselves had

expanded by this time. In August 1925 they had opened a branch in Peartree for the new residents there, and in 1929 this branch had been enlarged. The Stores' advertisement in the 1929 WGCD (p. 58) proudly announced a "new building [at Peartree], four times as large as the old premises". It offered "shop windows [with] rapid service in Fish and Greengrocery ... from outside the Store". Besides these two outlets the Stores were by 1931 managing their own Model Bakery in Bridge Road East and a Model Dairy in Handside Lane.

But did the Stores really have a monopoly of food sales? The advertisements in the local trade directories for the inter-war years reveal lively competition from the shops in neighbouring villages. A Welwyn butcher, Harry Gray, advertised in the 1928 WGCD (p. 38), claiming that his business had been established for "upwards of 100 years", so he was probably located in Welwyn village. He offered "Home Killed English and Scotch Meat" and "Daily Delivery in Welwyn Garden City". Another shop apparently situated in Welwyn village was Coulson's Stores, which advertised in the 1929 WGCD (p. 84). Describing itself as a "High-Class Grocer, Baker and Confectioner", it claimed to deliver daily by van to Welwyn Garden City. Of course not all the residents in the new town could afford to visit shops in neighbouring places, and arrange for deliveries, and the less well-off must have had to rely on the Stores for their food. The Stores, for their part, countered the competition with earnest and pressing advertisements promoting their own products and services. The health benefits of their foodstuffs were emphasised, as well as some modern scientific production methods. One example is a fascinating advertisement in the 1933 WGCD

(p. 54). Headed "Sunshine Bread", it states that "All bread sold by the Stores and baked in their model Bakery is treated with Ultra-violet rays by a most ingenious device while it is actually being mixed. As a result Stores bread is saturated to the last crust with vitamins."²

Ebenezer Howard's vision encompassed food production on the outskirts of the ideal garden city, and an agricultural belt was accordingly introduced at Welwyn Garden City. It's interesting that the 1925 Yearbook for Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, Welwyn and District splits Welwyn Garden City into zones. The "Industrial Area" (p. 43) had a small number of businesses, whilst under the heading "Agricultural Belt" (p. 44 - 45) the residents there are listed with their addresses. The agricultural belt included, amongst others, the following areas: Digswell, Digswell Water, Black Fan, Hatfield Hyde and "20th Mile". (The last-named must have been the area around the Twentieth Mile Bridge, so called because it is a road bridge which crosses the East Coast Main Line 20 miles north of Kings Cross. It now carries the A6129.) These districts are now all part of the post-war town, and their listing in the "Agricultural Belt" reminds us how much smaller the built-up area was in 1925.

As mentioned above, our town was managed by Welwyn Garden City Ltd. A separate organisation, The New Town Trust, had been

The Welwyn Stores seen from The Campus. On the corner with Parkway is an extension, opened in 1923 and called The Parkway Hall. This contained the Parkway Cafe, where by 1930 shoppers could enjoy a "shilling lunch". The Hall was also used in the evenings for meetings, dances and from 1924 onwards, film shows too. Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies LC4152



Town plans of 1929

Top The then location of Welwyn Stores, just south of the Campus (circled). At the bottom right of the plan is a site evidently intended for the Stores' future building. In the event they built the shop we now know as John Lewis, on The Campus. **Bottom** The location of Welwyn Stores' Peartree Branch on Peartree Lane (circled).

founded in 1918 as the Pioneer Trust Ltd. It was formed by a group of Quakers with a connection to Letchworth, who wanted to support the creation of a new town. They were unable to find a site suitable for the foundation of their ideal settlement, and so in 1921 the Trust's directors joined forces with Welwyn Garden City Ltd. In 1922 The Pioneer Trust became The New Town Trust Ltd, and by 1932 Welwyn Garden City

Ltd had a controlling interest in it.

In 1921 The New Town Trust took a tenancy of 500 acres from Ebenezer Howard, and set up the New Town Agricultural Guild

to manage the food production for Welwyn Garden City. Pig and poultry farming, bee-keeping, fruit growing and market gardening all took place in the agricultural belt. In 1924 the Guild took over Digswell Lodge and Digswell Water Farms. The first chairman of The New Town Trust Ltd (and of the Agricultural Guild) was the Quaker Edward Backhouse (1876 - 1922), who tragically died in a climbing accident in Switzerland. Welwyn Garden City's first Quaker meeting house, the Backhouse Room, was named in his honour. This building is the old timber-framed former cart shed on Handside Road.

The Barn Theatre is another splendid old timber-framed building on Handside Road, but in the early 20th century, well before it was used as a theatre, it was a barn belonging to Lower Handside Farm. Around 1920 the barn became Welwyn Garden City Ltd's Model Dairy, with its own herd of pedigree dairy shorthorn cows. Around 1927

the cows moved out because the town was growing. But the milk processing continued in the barn, using milk from outlying farms. Some of these farms were quite distant from the town. An advertisement in the 1933 WGCD (p. 34) states "Again for another twelve months the Stores Dairy has contracted to take the whole output of milk from the Prize Guernsey Cattle Herd of Messrs. C. Norman's Model Farm at Much Hadham". The quality of the milk is underlined in this advertisement's strapline, "Watch the Cream line in the Stores Milk": at that time the more cream, the better the milk! As with food retail, there seem to have been other milk producers competing with Welwyn Stores. An advertisement in the 1928 WGCD (p. 52) promotes Linces Farm Dairy, Welwyn, and its "Milk from Guernsey Shorthorn Cows", while the Marden Dairy Farm near Tewin claimed in 1933 (p. 2) to be "Welwyn's Safest Milk". Milk processing by

Welwyn Stores Ltd moved from Handside Lane to the Stores' new premises when they opened in 1939. This 1939 building is now occupied by John Lewis, who bought it in 1983.

Everything changed after World War II. In 1948 Welwyn Garden City became a New Town and the urban area grew significantly. New food shops appeared in the town centre (although the Co-op and some other shops had already arrived by the mid 1930s), and more neighbourhood shopping centres like Shoplands were built. In 1951 the Welwyn Department Store Ltd, now owned by Howardsgate Holdings³, created an offshoot company to run their own supermarket. This was the first ever Fine Fare supermarket. In that same first year ten new small Fine Fare supermarkets were created, five of them in Welwyn Garden City. By 1962 Fine Fare Ltd had over 200 shops across the country. The chain was sold to Garfield Weston's Associated British Foods in 1963⁴. Later on the large supermarkets arrived in our town: Morrisons⁵, Sainsburys in 1961 (becoming self-service in 1967) and Waitrose in 1990. Now we can buy food every day of the week, from early morning to late at night, and of course we can order online for home delivery. Many people, however, are finding it a struggle to afford food to feed the family. These extremes of plentiful supply alongside serious food poverty seem a world away from the days of the Welwyn Stores.

In these times of food poverty and the cost of living crisis, we should remember that many Welwyn Garden citizens struggle to put food on the table. We'd like to remind readers that there are a number of deserving local charities running food banks and combating food waste. Search "food banks near me" on Google for more details.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Mark Clapson, *Live, Work and Play, A Centenary History of Welwyn Garden City*, (Cheltenham 2020), p. 64.

2 Bread is still sometimes treated with UV today. UV radiation can be applied in order to convert ergosterol, which is present in bread as a result of yeast fermentation, to vitamin D2.

3 When Welwyn Garden City Ltd was wound up in 1948 the Howardsgate Trust Ltd took over the company's two successful businesses: Welwyn Stores and Welwyn Builders. See Clapson, op. cit., p. 140.

4 For a wealth of information about Fine Fare Ltd visit <https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/places/shops/fine-fare>.

5 I haven't been able to discover when Morrisons established their supermarket on Black Fan Road. Can any reader help?

Moderation in all things is the best policy

Welwyn Garden City's attitude to pubs and alcohol was shaped by Ebenezer Howard's ideals. Howard was one of a number of Utopian social reformers, as Geoffrey Hollis describes.



Top
Figure 1 The Skittles in Letchworth. By kind permission of WGC Together.

Above
Figure 2 The first Cherry Tree Restaurant opened at Easter 1921. It was a wooden structure and stood close to the temporary railway station. Four acres of woodland provided an idyllic setting. By kind permission of WGC Together.

Welwyn Garden City is a brave attempt to create a Utopia – an ideal community. The word was coined by Sir Thomas More in a political satire of the same name published in 1516. More wanted to imply that perfect conditions could never really exist, so named his fictional island by combining the Greek words ou (“not, no”) and topos (“place”).

In late Victorian times several successful industrialists sought to prove More wrong by building Utopian model villages, inspired by a combination of religious conviction, paternalism, and self-interest. Among them were Port Sunlight on Merseyside, Bournville near Birmingham, and New Earswick

near York. They had one thing in common – their founders detested alcohol.

Port Sunlight was founded in 1890 by William Lever, later Lord Lever, for his employees manufacturing Sunlight Soap, which he had made famous by clever advertising. He created a beautiful and comfortable estate, which combined visual appeal and social purpose.

William was a life-long teetotaler following the model of his father James, who was a Congregationalist, teetotaler, non-smoker, and principled business man.

William ran Port Sunlight on paternalistic lines and workers who lost their jobs could be quickly

evicted. On the other hand, he was keen to allow its residents a degree of democratic control. In 1900 he opened The Bridge Inn which of course sold no alcohol. Within two years the workers became restive and sought to change its status to a licensed house. Lever announced that he would not impose his own views, and that the issue would be decided by a referendum, insisting somewhat unconventionally for that time that women should take part. Being a sensible man, realising that referenda (like marriages) should not be undertaken carelessly or lightly, he stipulated that The Bridge would only become a true British pub if a majority of 75% was in favour. He probably felt



Left Figure 3 In 1932 this new, more spacious building replaced the first Cherry Tree Restaurant. In the foreground is the bowling green. By kind permission of WGC Together.

Below Figure 4 The Cherry Tree Restaurant seen from Hunters Bridge in 1959. By kind permission of WGC Together.



confident that the outcome would support his abstemious sentiments, but in the event more than 80% voted for an alcohol licence.

Bournville's creators were the Quaker brothers George and Richard Cadbury, who started building in 1898. Their father John was a teetotaler who had built up a thriving business in drinking cocoa, motivated by a desire to provide a healthy alternative to alcohol

which he saw as a major source of social problems. Gin shops were popular, promising "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two pence". John believed that the man who abstained from alcohol could afford a joint of beef on a Sunday. Naturally no alcohol was allowed to be sold on the Bournville estate, a restriction which still holds true today.

New Earswick model village was started a little later, in 1902, by

another Quaker philanthropist, Joseph Rowntree, who also ran a successful chocolate business. In 1899 his second son, Seeböhm, had carried out a rigorous study of the conditions of people living in poverty in York; Joseph determined to improve their lot. He set up the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust

The original Cherry Tree was replaced in 1932. The second building was destroyed in 1991 but its facade was retained for the Waitrose supermarket now occupying the site.

Ebenezer Howard proposed that the provision of services such as pubs should be decided by public ballot.

(which still exists) to buy farmland and build housing for people on low incomes, giving them access to decent homes at affordable rents. Access was open to all, not just his workers. Like the Cadburys, Rowntree would not countenance pubs there – still the case.

He recruited two young architects, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, to design the layout of the village and its houses. In 1901 they had jointly written “The Art of Building a Home”, which advocated the Arts and Crafts style, and this was used throughout New Earswick. In 1903 they were invited

to enter a competition to design Letchworth, which they won. Both went on to become nationally famous.

During this period Ebenezer Howard was promoting his own Utopian ideas. In his famous book published in 1898, “Garden Cities of Tomorrow”, he devoted a section

to temperance reform. Being basically a puritan, he too was not keen on alcohol. However, he did not favour banning it completely, instead suggesting that profits from its sale should be diverted to building “asylums for those affected by alcoholism”. He proposed that the provision of services such as pubs should be decided by public ballot.

Letchworth’s early settlers (which included Howard, Parker and Unwin) were idealists seeking Utopia and were far from conventional. George Orwell somewhat sweepingly described the new town as attracting every form of “crank: fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal wearer, sex maniac, Quaker, ‘Nature-Cure’ quack, pacifist, and feminist”. (“The Road to Wigan Pier” p. 152.) This was a tad unfair – there is no evidence of sex mania there – but the image stuck.

As recommended by Howard a ballot was set up to decide the provision of pubs, in which both men and women took part. The residents of Letchworth were somewhat different to the manual workers of Port Sunlight and a majority voted against, apparently because most women were opposed. Letchworth was therefore a dry town until 1960 with just one

inn, The Skittles, set up in 1907 (fig. 1). This sold only soft drinks and so was the legendary pub without beer; it was soon also without skittles as the locals shunned the game.

The directors of the company building Welwyn Garden City were keen to avoid the cranky image of Letchworth, while maintaining its noble objectives. So a “wet restaurant” was set up called The Cherry Tree. It was a modest wooden structure, designed by Louis de Soissons in 1921, and licensed in 1922 (fig. 2). A larger public house replaced it in 1932 (figs. 3 and 4), which was demolished in 1991. The facade was retained for the Waitrose supermarket now occupying the site.

At the onset of World War II there were still only two pubs in the town “which some people still thought too many” according to Stephen Ward in his 2018 book “The Peaceful Path”.

There already were pubs in the area around the new town. The Beehive in the small village of Hatfield Hyde dated from the early 17th century, although it was only given a licence in 1842. Owned by Lord Salisbury it became a favourite destination for early garden citizens to walk to across the fields on a nice summer evening. Once

Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City were chosen as locations for “The World’s End”, an apocalyptic science fiction comedy film from 2015. It tells the story of five middle-aged men on a nostalgic pub crawl which gets disrupted when they discover that the locals have been taken over by aliens.

Figure 5 The Beehive Pub on Beehive Lane, now sadly closed.
© Anneke Bambery



the QEII hospital opened it was popular with hospital staff. It closed in 2020 as it was losing money and now looks very sad and empty (fig. 5).

Somewhat perversely Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City were chosen as locations for “The World’s End”, an apocalyptic science fiction comedy film from 2015. It tells the story of five middle-aged men on a nostalgic pub crawl which gets disrupted when they discover that the locals have been taken over by aliens. Their aim had been to visit twelve pubs, finishing at one called of course The World’s End. The lead actor and writer, Simon Pegg, lives in Hertfordshire and said that he chose the two garden cities as examples of pleasant modern towns. He must have been aware of Letchworth’s reputation as a mostly dry town with few pubs so perhaps this was all part of the joke. To make up for the lack of pubs some buildings including Letchworth Station had to be camouflaged as pubs.

The provision of pubs in the centre of Welwyn Garden City remains a sensitive matter. Some years ago Wetherspoons bought one of the large houses on Parkway, near the fountain, and sought a licence for a pub to be called The Cherry Tree. This was hotly contested, ostensibly as being in the wrong location but more probably as being the wrong sort of pub. [This wasn’t the Society’s position – see below*.] Planning permission was refused twice and in 2021 Wetherspoons threw in the bar towel and put the building up for sale. The building is now a children’s nursery – so no danger of underage drinking.

For those interested in Ebenezer Howard’s convictions and religious views, the Oxford University Press has just published a new book “Ebenezer Howard: Inventor of the Garden City”, by Frances Knight, Emeritus Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Nottingham.

** Editor’s note: The Society objected to the application by Wetherspoons because 22 Parkway is on the west side of the road, where currently the retail sale of goods and the sale of food and drink are absent. We didn’t want the zoning in the town centre to be compromised by this application, but we did suggest that Wetherspoons might successfully set up a pub on the ground floor of the former Debenhams building.*



Members of the public enjoying a meal in one of the chain of British Restaurants established during World War II, London, 1943. © IWM D12268

The Bridge Road Restaurant: a British Restaurant?

Anneke Bamberg discovers a “wartime community feeding station”

In 1939 a new restaurant, called the Bridge Road Restaurant, opened in Welwyn Garden City¹. It was situated at the corner of Bridge Road East and Peartree Lane, and you can see a photo of it in Tony Rook, “Welwyn & Welwyn Garden City Through Time”². Rook states that it was the town’s British Restaurant. In 1940, during World War II, the Government set up “community feeding stations”. Their name soon changed to British Restaurants, and they served cheap nourishing meals, aimed at helping people who had been bombed out of their homes, or who had run out of ration coupons. By 1943 there were 2,160 British Restaurants across the country, serving 600,000 meals a day. They were often set up in church halls or similar venues, and volunteers helped to run them. (It’s interesting to note that during the war private commercial restaurants were still allowed to trade, and weren’t subject to rationing, although no meal could cost more than five pounds or consist of more than three courses.)

The British Restaurant scheme was officially wound up in 1947, but the Civic

Restaurants Act of that year permitted former British Restaurants to continue as Civic Restaurants run by the local council. This was part of the post-war Labour Government’s drive for greater social equality, making eating out affordable for more people. If Civic Restaurants operated at a loss for three consecutive years they needed ministerial approval to continue. Tony Rook states that Welwyn Garden City’s British Restaurant continued to trade until 1955. However, the 1959 Welwyn Garden City Official Handbook and Directory still listed (p. 37) “Bridge Road Restaurant, Bridge Road East (Peartree Corner)”. This establishment offered “Lunches 12-2pm. Suppers 5-6.30pm. Closed Saturdays. Open Sundays 10am-6pm”. We may imagine that the weekday trade came from people who worked in the factories and businesses nearby, but the weekend hours are harder to understand. Perhaps a reader can shed some light on these? By 1962 the restaurant had apparently closed, as there is no mention of it in the Handbook of that year.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ 1939 *Welwyn Garden City Directory*, p. 111. This is the first appearance of this restaurant in the trade directories.

² Tony Rook, *Welwyn & Welwyn Garden City Through Time*, (Stroud, 2013), p. 44.

FURTHER READING:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Restaurant.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/>

Planning update

The Emerging Local Plan A local plan sets out a local authority's priorities and objectives for future development in its area, and it has to be approved by the inspector appointed by the Secretary of State before it comes into force. The Council has been working on its local plan for over ten years, at a cost of over £10m. After certain recent modifications a round of public consultation ended in February. After this the Inspector issued a schedule of proposed Further Main Modifications to the plan, and consultation on this closed on 30 July. The Inspector then began work on his final report on the plan, which was due to be considered by full Council on 28 September – just after we went to press.

The threat to B&Q The Council's rejection of an application by the developer Thrive Homes to build flats and evict B&Q from their site is to be challenged at a public inquiry. The Society is upholding the Council's position. We have initiated a new group, "Community for B&Q", which will be able to participate in the proceedings of the public inquiry as a Rule 6 Party. This new group gives the community a chance to formally express its strong opposition to the threatened loss of this much-loved retail facility. The land is designated in the Council's Local Plan as an employment site, and B&Q provides over 50 jobs. Furthermore, the community believes that this area doesn't need even more flats.

Campus East The developer Bellway Homes has submitted a full planning application for (we understand) 313 flats to be constructed on the site of the Campus East car park. The Society objects to this because it is far too dense and much too high. There is currently no date scheduled for this application to be considered by the Council's Development Management Committee (DMC).

Land north of Bradmore Way, Brookmans Park In February the Society made representations to the public inquiry into this site. The developer, Aurora

Properties (UK) Ltd, was appealing against refusal of permission to build 125 homes, and we supported this appeal. To our great disappointment the Planning Inspectorate has now upheld the appeal. Failure to build new homes in suitable locations like Bradmore Way puts undue pressure on the rest of the Borough, particularly Welwyn Garden City.

73 Bridge Road East This outstanding planning application was due to be considered at DMC in June, but in the event it wasn't discussed. Last year the developer won planning permission on appeal (with conditions) for two new buildings, to provide 111 apartments. The Society was disappointed at this outcome because we consider the proposal too big for the site. The developer Network Homes has now bought the site and plans to deliver on the planning permission. They state it will be a "100 per cent affordable housing scheme". It will consist of one and two bedroom apartments, 18 of which will be for social rent, 37 for affordable rent and 56 for shared ownership, with funding from Homes England.

5G telecom masts The Society continues to monitor applications for these masts, and we object to those we consider to be proposed for inappropriate sites. Council opposition to one application was overturned at a recent appeal. Please contact us at info@wgcsociety.org if you can help us to monitor these applications. It just means a weekly check on the Council website, and your help would greatly assist us to keep on top of this constant threat to our streetscape.

The town centre Readers who live in Welwyn Garden City can't fail to have noticed the town centre works this year. The aim of the project is to improve the experience of pedestrians and cyclists (<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/roadworks-and-road-closures/major-roadwork-projects/active-travel-fund.aspx>). The Society has made representations to County Councillor Fiona Thomson about the slow pace of these works and their impact on shoppers.

Some issues were clarified but the work still progresses slowly. Other town centre issues concern us too. The Society has been asking Welwyn Hatfield Council to resolve the vermin problem in the town centre, and the appalling state of the Howardsgate service yards. The matters are complex, and we hope to issue an update in due course. And of course the empty units in the Howard Centre continue to be a cause for concern.

John Lewis The Society recently wrote to John Lewis with a number of suggestions that may help to maintain their presence in the town. We put forward ideas for ways the store might get the credit for a sale when a customer views items in store and subsequently orders online. However, the reply from the Head of the Branch suggests that the company sees any kind of sale as valuable, and the role of the store is to drive those sales.

Mill Green The Gascoyne Places development in Mill Green is completed and is now being occupied (<http://www.gascoynececil.com/news/mill-green-update/>). The development includes nine new homes together with the renovation of The Green Man public house and other community spaces. The houses have been carefully built following the traditional design and appearance of cottages previously built by Gascoyne Places, and include the high standards and attention to detail set by the Estate's Pattern Book ("The Pattern Book", Gascoyne Places, 2020) and its design codes. Traditional high quality features have been incorporated as well as the latest technology, including sustainable air-cooled heat pumps. Mill Green shows that a local landowner with a long-term approach can offer significant enhancements over high volume private sector developments. We will be looking at this development in our Spring 2024 issue and seeing how the features will be delivered at scale on the Estate's forthcoming development of more than 300 homes at Creswick (<http://www.gascoynececil.com/news/creswick-consultation/>).

We hope you like this Welwyn Garden City Society magazine. We'd love your feedback – please send it to the editor at magazine@wgcsociety.org. We look forward to publishing your opinions, stories, photos and letters.

The
Welwyn
Garden City
Society
Members'
Magazine

Championing a town
designed for healthy living

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