



News and events

- Our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 15 July** when Philippa Parker will present on **Industrial Letchworth, the first garden city 1903-1920**.
- **The Second Herts Archaeology Festival** will be held on Saturday 18 July from 10.00 to 5.00 at Welwyn Roman Baths. There will be stalls, activities, talks and visits to the baths. For details, go to <https://tinyurl.com/nhjahs9p>

Housing

A shortage of housing has been a problem in this country for centuries but it was not until after the First World War that state-sponsored council housing made a serious effort to tackle the problem. A succession of schemes has followed and Wheathampstead has experienced them all.

The desire to build “Homes fit for Heroes” after the war led to The Housing Act (1919), better known as the Addison Act, which provided local councils with funds to build houses. In Wheathampstead, the result was two rows of houses, one on Lower Luton Road, the other on Brewhouse Hill.



In the 1930s, government policy focused on slum clearance. Two areas in Wheathampstead were particularly targeted – the Red Lion pub and the cottages behind it, where the Post Office block now stands, and the old workhouse and cottages in the High Street. This is now Bank Chambers, the row of shops from the Chinese takeaway to CopperTop. Many of the people who lived in those cottages moved to council houses on the south side of Marford Road in 1936.



Following World War II, devastation of the housing stock and the “baby boom” prompted a massive state-funded programme of house-building. This included the “Swedish houses”, timber-framed prefabs of which about 5,000 were imported from Sweden. Of these, eight (four pairs of semi-detached) were erected in Marford Road, at the bottom of Conquerors Hill.



At the same time, 1946-47, St Albans District Council built houses in Conquerors Hill,

Sandridge and Sleepshyde. They all followed the same basic plan – open space in front and large back gardens in which people could grow their own vegetables or maybe keep chickens.

Terry Pankhurst recalls moving into one of the houses in Sleepshyde Lane as a boy in 1947. “Our house was typical of other houses in the road. It was a large house with three upstairs bedrooms and a large bathroom with bath, sink and toilet. On the landing was an airing cupboard with a boiler. Downstairs, there was a large front



room with a coal fire and a back boiler to supply more heating, and a smaller dining room with a two-bar electric heater on the wall. There was a large kitchen with sink, cooker and fitted cupboards and a walk-in pantry. A passageway from the front of the house led to the back door with a washroom, the coal store and a downstairs toilet. It was a small mansion but it was cold, with ill-fitting metal-framed, single-paned windows; in winter there was always frost on the inside of the glass. The roof was lined only with felt and plasterboard – no insulation.”

The peak of publicly funded housing was in the 1960s, towards the end of which and into the 1970s the Hilldyke estate was built. By the late 1970s, nearly a third of all households in England were council tenants.

This situation was transformed by the 1980 Housing Act which introduced the *Right to Buy* whereby council tenants could buy their homes at a substantial discount. At the same time, central funding to local councils to build new homes was drastically reduced. Housing Acts passed in the 1970s and 1980s set up the system of housing associations, funded partly by government and partly by private finance. There are several examples of such housing in Wheathampstead today.