

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Newsletter Winter 2010/11

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This edition has been prepared by Peter Trevelyan (Vice-Chair) and Eric Roberts (Committee member). If you have any comments, do write to the Editors at 3 Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN or email ptrevelyan@aol.com.

Editors' Notes

The Society's annual Awards Evening was held at the Maltings Arts Theatre on October 20th, 2010. The projects considered were those completed in 2009 and were those which were thought to contribute to enhancing the environment, culture and community of the city.

The number, range and quality of this year's contenders presented a challenge to the awards committee, but after much debate a shortlist of six was selected. Five were commended and received certificates. The sixth project, in St Paul's Place, was awarded the Society's plaque.

The awards were presented by the Mayor of St Albans City and District, Councillor Maxine Crawley, who summed up the evening

“The Civic Society excelled themselves again with an inspiring Awards Evening, celebrating good architecture and design in our District. I thoroughly enjoyed the very professional presentations of 'near-misses', the schemes that won commendations and the overall winner, St Paul's Place. The event was warm and friendly but with a serious message highlighting the importance of good design.”
(Herts Advertiser 28 Oct 2010).

St Albans Civic Society Award Winner

1-8 St Paul's Place, Hatfield Road. *Client: Aldwyck Housing Group. Architect: Kyle Smart Associates. Builder: VE Parrott (Oakley) Ltd*
This small development of eight rented flats for single elderly people is a partnership between St Albans Council and the Aldwyck Housing Association.

We thank the new Awards Team of Janet Ouston, Margaret Grover, Michael Dunkley and David Lloyd for all their hard work.

The Westminster Lodge issue is still very much with us. Our complaint to the Standards Committee on the interpretation of the Council's Code of Conduct has been rejected. The Society is taking steps to pursue this further through the Local Government Ombudsman.

On the subject of trees, the Society has been asked to attend a meeting to explore the relaunch of the Tree Sponsorship scheme and its Book of Remembrance. This is all well and good but, as highlighted in the last newsletter, and bearing in mind near demise and uncertain future of the London Road plane, we will be also seeking assurances that existing stock will be better protected.

Look out for a new book 'The Remarkable Trees of St Albans' by member Kate Bretherton, £14.95 in the shops, but £12 direct from Kate on 01582 791912.



Editor's Notes - continued

The ODEON has now become The ODYSSEY! The new name was announced in the cinema on Heritage Open Day Sunday when some two thousand people came to view. A splendid turn-out again, 'ODEON calling' is now dead. R.I.P. However, let us not forget the role the Civic Society played in keeping this building alive. We continue to liaise with the new owners.

The long-awaited street scene audit of the area around the Clock Tower and Market Place took place on 1st September. It is clear that many things are out of control and it is difficult to establish who is really in charge of keeping up the appearance of the City. The article in this newsletter highlights some of the problems and the recent erection of completely inappropriate new road signs in highly sensitive locations adds to the clutter and increases our concern (see photo). The District Council has a Corporate Policy that seeks to improve the street scene. Unfortunately, there are forces working in the opposite direction. What a mess!



*Who's responsible, and who cares?
(location: Sumpter Yard, Holywell Hill)*

The Council has a hotline for graffiti and related matters - 0845 125 8000. It is said to get results, why not try it?

The Rail Freight judicial review is expected to take place in the New Year. The Society has donated £500 to support STRIFFE's on-going efforts.

Regional Spatial Strategies have made a come-back as a result of a recent High Court case. Planning Inspectors have been advised (as of 13 Nov 2010) that the decision to abolish has been quashed and as a consequence, the Strategies as they stood form an ongoing part of the development plan. The Council, however, in its draft of the new consultation document states "the previous housing target of 7,200 homes is no longer a required local target." Who are we to believe?

The Council presumably hopes to be able to rely on the Government legislating to abolish the RSS. Its public consultation document will be published in mid December 2010, with the consultation period lasting until early February 2011.

Meanwhile, the shortage of school places is a continuing worry to families and is leading to some premature applications to build on Green Belt land. Another fine mess!

St Peter's Churchyard project. In partnership with St Albans District Council, local conservation organisations and the local community, St Peter's plans to renew 'God's Acre' as a living churchyard. The vision is for it to become:

- a peaceful place for reflection and contemplation
- a green space of shelter and nurture for wildlife
- a focus for cultural and educational activities

Alison Chant, committee member, is the Society's representative on the project working group. She writes "all of this work requires funding and we are about to launch 'The Friends of St Peter's'. A series of cultural events are programmed through the winter months and all are invited to join."

Too many blackspots

If you've been to Norwich, the chances are you would have visited one of its most attractive parts, known as Elm Hill. Some years ago there was a plan to demolish all the old buildings there for redevelopment. This got turned down at a council meeting by just one vote. A close call indeed!

Today, Elm Hill is one of that city's main attractions, with fine examples of sixteenth century urban architecture, cobbled streets and sensitive landscaping.

Recently a utility firm came along and dug up parts of the street. Some of the old cobbles mysteriously 'walked' – a bit like those York paving stones here down by The Fighting Cocks.

Workmen then filled in the resulting gaps with tarmac – and left.

Fortunately, many folk in Norwich care about their city. There was uproar. With the help of the long-established Norwich Civic Society, promises were extracted from the Council that the cobbles would be restored once suitable ones had been found.

Lucky Norwich. If only things could be the same in St Albans.

Actually, where the first part of this story is concerned, they are. Utility firms and others certainly dig things up here, then finish off with tarmac. And so they remain.

There are sadly all too many examples around the city. Even those expensive St Peter's Street surfaces are not immune, nor the distinctive blue brick pavements, where countless dollops of the black stuff offend the eye.

There needs to be a lot more pride taken over the look of our streets and public

Award Commendations: The Abbey Station



Henley House, Lattimore Road



Kingsbury Barn





Tarmac in the High Street



Tarmac on the kerb

spaces. It really comes down to attention to detail, with penalties enforced on those who mess things up, St Albans Council, and in particular Herts Highways, please take note.

The Civic Society remains on the case, and continues to press for improvements. Why not join us, and show that you care too, just like those Norwich folk, for whom caring led to ultimate success.

Eric Roberts

Editors' comment. The cobbles in Norwich were restored after eight weeks by the electric utility company. This shows it can be done, so why not here in St Albans?

Maltings conundrum

So what is happening at The Maltings Arts Theatre? Ever since last year when a trail of reports issued by the Council, suggesting that it should be turned into a mainly film venue at the cost of half a million pounds, a big question mark has hung over the future of this intimate live performance space.

Things weren't helped when a suddenly-implemented policy had the theatre closed for most of the time, and the ticket sales system cack-handedly moved to the Tourist & Information Centre. At the time of writing, it still isn't in operation – something about a printer coming from Holland...

(Editors' comment. Yet another fine mess!)

Meanwhile the latest report, which could seal the Theatre's fate, due to come before the Council Cabinet in October, has been delayed until November, then December and now possibly January.

It's a glimmer of hope that events are currently being booked at the venue until the end of July 2011, and the newly-appointed (short contract) programmer has hopefully taken on board the fact that the local group 'fansofstan' managed to fill the place with a Stan Tracey gig three years running. Given the chance and the imagination, this joint really can jump. But after July, what? Sadly it is in the lap not of the gods, but of our Council.

Marion Hamant

Editors' comment. Will The Maltings still be available for us to hire for the Society's annual Awards Evening in 2011, and will there be enough seats?

What café society?

It's abundantly clear that the promised Café Society that should have transformed our town and city centres at night-time after the Licensing Act of 2005 hasn't actually happened.

Instead, a drink-fuelled economy with yobbish behaviour has developed, so the family groups and older citizens who were to have been attracted to join in simply stay away.

Binge drinking has emerged as one of the nation's social problems. It cannot be a coincidence that this has got worse since 2005.

It's certainly costing us dear - £13 billion is the estimated annual figure for policing and health care alone. That's £600 per household whether you drink or not. For too many of the young, that good night out is judged by how plastered you can get. Pre-loading with cut-price supermarket booze helps get things going. And for either sex now, there's no shame if you fall in the gutter, or pee in public.

A recent BBC TV News programme featured nearby Watford, where cameras caught drunken mayhem in the streets. They then moved to Watford Hospital's A & E Department. On some nights all beds were full with excess drinkers sleeping it off or being rehydrated – tasks once carried out in police cells. Now the change of venue was blocking beds for any genuine cases brought in - that could be you or me. Furthermore, there's been a reaction to the programme from Watford police

Continued on the back page

West Hall, Napsbury Park



White Stuff, Market Place



What café society? - continued

authorities. Now street patrols look out for those who appear pre-loaded, and they are banned from the town. Where could they go? Here, perhaps. So we should be doubly worried.

Disturbing images of St Albans, still on YouTube since 2007, and with nearly 30,000 hits to date, do the city no favours. The new government's review is not coming too soon.

There can be no quick fixes for what is one aspect of a centuries-old culture. But any reappraisal should consider a 'polluter pays' tax on late-night venues, greater recognition of residents' concerns, and more powers to shut unruly premises. Meanwhile, the Society will continue to play its part at Licensing Hearings and participate wholeheartedly in any review of the Act.

Eric Roberts



Current campaigns include:

Picking up on the 'What Cafe Society?' theme above, the Editors note that Civic Voice is working with a network of civic societies and residents groups and the Institute of Alcohol Studies to strengthen the Coalition Government's proposals for licensing reform.

At the beginning of November, Civic Voice put out a press release saying that towns and cities will continue to be blighted by the effects of irresponsible drinking without a stronger say on alcohol licences being put in the hands of local communities.

The group is urging the Government to:

- Address these wider impacts of 'passive drinking' on public health in the same way as attitudes to passive smoking have been transformed in recent years
- Simplify licensing regulations and improve publicity for licensing applications
- Allow anyone with an interest in the quality of life of an area to influence licensing decisions not just local residents
- Strengthen local councils' hands in requiring all applicants to show how their alcohol licence will contribute to and not damage the local area
- Support local communities concerned about the multiple impact of different licensed premises on an area
- Tackle the loophole of temporary notices which gives freedom from all licensing conditions for up to 96 hours for commercial premises

Good for Civic Voice!

Peter Trevelyan

Membership Matters

For up to date information on events and other Society matters go to the Society's website www.stalbanscivicsociety.net

Forthcoming Society Events - 2010/11

(free to members)

Wednesday 15 December 2010

Historic street furniture and features in St Albans & District

Brian Adams (local historian) The Cross Street Centre*, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm Refreshments & hot mince pies afterwards

Wednesday 19 January 2011

Magic lantern to multiplex

Richard Gray (Cinema Theatre Association) The Cross Street Centre*, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm

Saturday 29 January 2011

Residents First Weekend - Clock Tower Opening

Hot punch, shortcake, views and music. Free - 2.00pm to 4.00pm. A chance to promote the Society.

Wednesday 16 February

The Old Town Hall, St Albans - George Smith's building and what's happened since

Chris Green (Museums & Heritage Officer, St Albans District Council) The Cross Street Centre*, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm

Wednesday 16 March 2011

The Abbey Line: progress to date

Alissa Ede (Abbey Line Light Rail Project Manager, Hertfordshire County Council) The Cross Street Centre*, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm

Wednesday 13 April 2011

New and exciting building projects in city centres

Architect to be announced. In conjunction with Hertfordshire Architects Association. The Cross Street Centre*, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm. Refreshments afterwards

Saturday 21 May 2011

Spring visit to see the Olympic sites with a guide (Diane Burstein) - details to be announced

Friday 1 April 2011

Clockateers' party

(invitation only) Drinks and refreshments. St Michael's Centre 8pm

*Disabled parking only at The Cross Street Centre

To join or renew membership

Subscriptions are renewable on 1 April each year

Individual Members	£10
Family Membership	£15
Pensioners/Students	£7
Residents' Associations	No charge
Corporate Membership	£50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Hanlon, tel: 01727 851734.

The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support from the following Corporate Members:

- T&B (St Albans) Ltd
- Debenhams Ottaway
- Rumball Sedgwick
- DLA Town Planning Ltd
- National Pharmaceutical Association