St Albans Civic Society Newsletter | Autumn 2016

www.stalbanscivicsociety.net

Where’s my Programme card?

Members may be expecting their new Programme of events card with this edition. It has been decided that it will now appear with the December newsletter and feature 2017. Your attention is drawn therefore to the following events for the rest of 2016:

- 8-11 September Heritage Open Days
  The Society has once again stepped in and produced a local guide in association with the Heriets Advertiser. St Albans Council is giving its support this time. Copies of the guide can be found at the Tourist Information Office in the Arena, the Clock Tower at weekends, and the Cathedral’s Information Desk. Enjoy this year’s bigger, better and more varied programme of attractions as part of a Roman and National heritage festival.

Saturday 8 October
Autumn coach visit to Cheltenham
Details and booking form are available with this newsletter for members. Non-members may also apply for seats, so bring your friends.

Tuesday 11 October
Annual Awards Evening
A celebration for members and invited guests. Wine, canapés – and music! One of the Society’s highlights of the year. Come along and see who and what wins! Doors open 19.30 for 20.00 at the Maltings Arts Theatre. FREE for paid-up members.

Thursday 17 November
‘Scandalous St Albans’
A talk by Elizabeth Eastwood. We look forward to the entertaining stories this excellent speaker has to give us this time 20.00 at the Cross Street Centre, (Upper) Dagnall Street Baptist Church. FREE.

Answers to Quiz 2

New LED Street lights

The current season continues to see an increase in visitors. However, we do need some more volunteers. Are there any students out there who would be willing to give a few hours of their time? This could help boost their social skills and local knowledge – all good on a CV.

The Tower was used for the launch of the Heritage Open Days programme on 25 August.

One of the 606 seats in the District currently being freshly painted. (Ray and son jet are doing the hard work.)

News from the Clock Tower

In order to avoid any possible confusion or misunderstanding members are respectfully asked that, should they be involved in any meeting or activity where they declare they are a member of this Society, they make it clear that their attendance and any opinion expressed does not necessarily represent those of the Society’s Committee. The Committee can always be contacted for advice, information or support as required by any member. Equally the Society wishes to make it clear when it is consulted about any item this should not be automatically deemed as leading to consent.

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

- Austin Txuen Associates
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- Debenhams Ottaway
- National Pharmacy Association
- St Columbia’s College
- TABB (St Albans) Ltd

The shame of it

President: Geraint John
Chairman: Tim Boustoun (01727 560074)

This edition has been prepared by Eric Roberts (Committee member) and Peter Prevelyan (Awards Team). If you have any comments, please write to the Editors at 3 Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN or email prevelyan@aol.com

NEWS & COMMENTS

We welcome new members who have joined the Society during the summer, including Austin Txuen Associates (Corporate) and those from the Larks in the Park event. The Society had a stall and an entertaining quiz, which is published here for you to try your hand.

The AGM on the 30 June had a good attendance, with a good opportunity afterwards, organised by the Chairman, went down well!

We draw members’ attention to Heritage Open Days 8—11 September, the visit to Cheltenham on 8 October, and the Annual Awards Celebration evening on 11 October. More on this in the articles concerning the 2016/17 programme card.

National planning – we were encouraged to see that the new Planning Act is in favour of keeping the Green Belt. However, this is already being challenged. A report by the London School of Economics is advocating houses should be built on what the authors designate as ‘ugly’ parts. This totally ignores the overriding principle of Green Belt status which is to ensure settlements remain distinctly and do not become merged into one large agglomeration. It is not just about the land looking ‘prety’.

There are still thousands of hectares of derelict or brownfield land, especially within London, that should be protected for housing and which are within reach of existing services and infrastructure. It is accepted we need to raise annual house building from last year’s 145,000 to nearer the 200,000 target. The Government should take measures to ensure that sites where there are existing approvals are developed and that house building firms are not land-banking, which invariably sees them seeking to grab more areas of the Green Belt. Incentives should be given to kickstart brownfield building.

Local planning – sadly, the Pemberton Building, in the grounds of St Albans City School, has now been lost. The Cathedral’s new Welcome Centre has been approved, despite an eleventh-hour recommendation to refuse by the Council’s planners. With a wing and prayer, some might even say with an element of divine intervention after the Dean had spoken in favour. Councillors gave permission, thereby enabling this Heritage Lottery Grant Project to proceed.

The Society hopes that once this new building is in place, the external appearance of the Cathedral will no longer be despoiled by inappropriate and plain ugly temporary and transient structures; such as the frequent portakabins and that ice cream van!

In the last newsletter we urged members to become involved in the proposed development by Anglo Property for the Civic Centre South Opportunity Site. Anglo held a public consultation on 13/14 May which many members attended. The timescale was that comments would be reviewed during the summer with a planning application being lodged this autumn. Then, in July, the Council announced, with LookSt Albans, a series of workshops and public meetings on 9, 10, 11 and 16 September (www.stalbans.gov.uk/planning/policy/pcs1805). It is not clear if this is an alternative or parallel consultation process, or whether this might in some way prejudice Anglo’s expected planning application. This is all rather confusing. The CCOS is extremely important. Nothing has happened for several years and then, just as one project was awaiting for a bid, two (consultations) come along almost together! Moreover, the chosen dates clash with the already advertised, Heritage Open Days, which is unfortunate because many potential participants might well be interested in both.

Let us not forget what the previous exercise has already established for the site.

The City Vision study led by Urban Practitioners, December 2009, identified the CCOS as a priority for early development and included a high level conceptual masterplan for the area. This proposed a mixed-use development that included a hotel and supermarket, further retail and restaurant uses, a cultural and community hub, potentially comprising library, gallery space, cinema and museum to be accommodated on the site.

St Albans City Vision, although a non-statutory document, forms an essential part of the evidence base for the emerging Core Strategy, not least because of the extensive consultation in its preparation. It is of direct relevance to the future of this site.

OTHER NEWS

Railfreight. Apparently, Hecklestown is now known as SEGRO. In July, they announced that they had done their own timetable work purporting to show how the terminal and freight trains would fit into the Midland Mainline schedules. This has been given to Network Rail. Since when has SEGRO obtained timetable expertise and the application needs to be certified.

Continued over page
**The Shame in Verulamium**

St Albans Council should be ashamed not to allow Verulamium Park’s lake to be used for a second summer, foul smelling polluted eyewaters. Indeed, we should all be ashamed of this image of our city. There have been repeated articles and letters in the local press expressing concern, disgust and dismay at the state of the lake and the death of wildlife. These have been like water off a duck’s back (pardon the pun). The responsible Council Officer and spokespersons have seemed almost in denial about the seriousness of the situation and the anger and upset caused, plus the need to do something quickly. 

Promoted in February 2016, by an alleged remark of a Councilor, that there had been no actual letter of complaint received (that is hard to believe), the Civic Society soon remedied that: An official complaint was made to the Chief Executive, James Blake, with a copy to Council leader Cllr Julian Daly, and the Portfolio Holder responsible for the park Cllr Chichester-Miles. This brought an official response on the 7 March on behalf of the Head of Community Services, Richard Showe, listing the various options the Council was evaluating (some may sound procrastinating) to address the problem. The fact the Council had all last winter to have done just this seems to have eluded them. A timebomb had been left ticking away since last summer’s pollution waiting to explode into the lakes this year.

Surprise, surprise! Summer 2016 arrived. The weather warmed. The stagnant silt weed and enormous water hyacinths, which had coalesced into an aquatic carpet of duckweed and fleeing insects, were now foaming black smelly scum covering the surface of the lake. A foul stench emanating from the lake and spreading all around the park would be enough to cause the feet to move. This took place 27 July to 30 July. The worst weather is often present.

Editors’ note: on a happier note: efforts to protect the Roman Wall, which has been much invaded by our Chairman, Tim Boatwright, look to be coming to fruition. New low-level railings are to be installed. (So why remove them in the first place?)

**Noisy Skies!**

Aircraft noise over St Albans has increased recently – and it could get worse. The prime culprit is Luton airport and the moving south of the Harpenden flight path over St Albans. Pete Lilly MP is advocating a further rerouting of planes towards west of St Albans – that would mean noise over the Cathedral and Verulamium. Mr Lilly has got a cheek to dump on St Albans like this. Ann Main please liaise with him and stop this nuisance.

People need to act now. There is some evidence of links between aircraft noise and health problems. St Albans house price values may be affected. Luton airport plans further expansion. Why should this council-owned airport in Bedfordshire be pushing its aircraft noise down into Hertfordshire?

What you can do:  
- Visit www.stalbanssky.org  
- Complain to the Civil Aviation Authority at airspace.policy@caa.co.uk  
- Copy in our MP and both Local and County Councillors, and your Councillors.

They all need to be doing more about this.

Jack Wills has had a good paint job. Coating the end of the roof tiles looks wrong, and is asking for trouble.

**Letter box freshly painted - looks great, shame about the poor preparation!**

**Larks in the Park quiz**

From the stall in Victoria Playing Field on 26 June:

1. St Albans’ based Arthur Melbourne-Cooper was a pioneer of what?
2. Which St Albans street is said to have had ‘a tuberculosis’ side and a ‘chronobiosis’ side?
3. Today’s Odyssey Cinema has had two previous names. Name them (half each point).
4. What was the Clock Tower roof used for during the Napoleonic Wars?
5. Holywell House was the home of which famous lady?
6. Kingsbury Barn was built in? (Nearest decade will do!)
7. A former Archbishop of Canterbury is buried on the north side of the Cathedral. Who?
8. Batchwood Hall was originally the residence of.
9. What did the then Duke of Cambridge open in St Albans in 1894? (Neither a door or window will do!)
10. Today’s Café Rouge was originally what?

Answers on the back page.

**Night Time Economy**

The Society responded to the Council’s online Night Time Survey. However, it considered the format rather restrictive and therefore sent the following additional comments, as it did seem somewhat biased towards just young people and drinking. The city centre should be for all age groups.

1. Why just the focus on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays? This gives the impression that the survey is only considering the current night time economy emphasis on licensed activities.
2. Consideration should be given to create a more inclusive evening economy. For example, provision of a civic space for performance / public events, eg music - perhaps consider for the new development proposed east of St Peters Street (CCSOS).
3. As well as No 2, build on the new Town Hall Museum and Gallery given the potential to create a truly cultural hub for residents and visitors to enjoy evening events. This would finish c. 22:00-22:30 giving the opportunity for patrons to use nearby facilities such as cafés / restaurants and traditional pubs (off Licence), without feeling intimidated by the excess drinking atmosphere. 
4. A recent survey by Lancaster University found that the relaxation of licensing hours created by the 2005 Act had not created a more continental café culture but had fuelled binge drinking with the associated consequences on city centre environments, health, additional pressure on A&E, police and councils (costs of administration and cleaning).
5. St Albans has a high number of city centre residents that continues to increase with the recent conversion of offices into residential dwellings. These are occupied by commuters and young families whose amenities need to be recognised and met.

At present there appears to be an emphasis on attracting an outside clientele who have different needs. The local resident groups need to be better catered for and their need for an undisturbed night’s sleep protected otherwise the current tensions that exist between residents and some late night establishments will be exacerbated.

The Council is invariably drawn in to have to try and sort out the problems which should not have been allowed to arise in the first place.

6. Until the present clash of city centre night time interests is resolved, any Purple Flag accreditation is going to be jeopardised.
7. The recent further downgrading of the temporary Tourist Information Office is unhelpful. We trust this is not a prelude to ongoing cut backs in this activity. The restoration of a proper Tourist Information Centre with full facilities (offering events, performances and travel ticketing) and fully trained staff into the revamped Town Hall building is essential. Otherwise a great opportunity will be lost to promote the city’s economy both the day time and night time.

**Rita Waldron and Eric Roberts**

On behalf of the Society’s Committee.

Editors’ note: Do members have any further views? Please let us know.

**St Albans Art Society Annual Exhibition**

This took place 27 July to 50 July. Winner of the St Albans trophy (donated by Society member Mary Newberry) was ‘Sleeping on St Albans Cathedral’ by Michele Head. Our President, Geraint John (left), presented the award.