Double standards over licensing?

The Society’s complaint concerning the Council’s procedure following an appeal to a recent licensing application has gone to the Ombudsman. Meanwhile, in the heart of the historic conservation area, another issue—also involving licensing—looms large.

The Society has been repeatedly told at licensing hearings that planning is a totally separate matter and does not influence licensing decisions. However, as recently seen over matters relating to the former Spotted Bull (now The Brickyard) in Verulam Road, certain Councillors sat on both planning and licensing committees. This raises questions about possible pre-determination, lack of impartiality and, at the very least, transparency. One Councillor not only sat on the licensing hearing, but attended the planning appeal and spoke in favour of the application. Thus he spoke against his own Council which was arguing that the application should be refused. It seems there is one rule for Councillors and another for residents. Residents in this part of the historic conservation area are wondering if their interests and amenities are really being looked after by some Councillors.

Again, members may to like raise these issues when candidates come a-knocking, and seek their views and promises.

George Atkinson, RIBA, OBE has died

Dennis Owen has kindly written: When the St Albans Civic Society was formed in 1954, George Atkinson was one of the first to join and put his name forward to serve on the Committee. He was a trained architect and his professional knowledge and experience became invaluable. Eventually he was to become Head of Design at the Building Research Station in Boreham Wood.

After retiring George and his wife Elaine lived in St Albans. There is no doubt that the city has been very substantially affected for the better in a number of ways over the years by his active contributions to the work of the Society. He always brought a mature judgment to discussions supported by endless research and investigation. In his later years his fascination with local and world affairs never dimmed and he would spend hours reading and writing about matters that interested him. His love of travel continued well into his nineties when he embarked on round the world cruises, taking photographs and relating the opportunity to experience other countries.

George was 95 years old – three months short of his 90th birthday.

The full text of Dennis’ appreciation can be seen on the Society’s website. The Society extends its sympathy to George’s family, as it does to those of Clare Ellis (former Councillor, Deputy Mayor, and Society member) who has also recently died.

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 automatically represent those of the Society’s Committee. The Committee can always be contacted for advice, information and update on any matter by any member. Equally the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is consulted about any item this should not be automatically deemed as leading to consent.

News from the Clock Tower

The Clock Tower will be open from Good Friday 3 April and every weekend until the end of September.

The two-hour opening for Residents’ First Saturday in January attracted 170 people, 42 being children. We are working hard to get the Council to come back on-board for Heritage Open Days this year, particularly as the Residents First opening was somehow left out of its programme.

Membership Matters

To join or renew membership

Subscriptions remain unchanged and are renewable on 1 April each year.

Individual Member £10

Family (2 or more) £15

Pensioner/Student/Unaged £7

Residents’ Association No charge

Corporate Membership £50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Harkin, tel: 01727 853734 hankoharkin@gmail.com or post to - 24 Monks Horton Way, St Albans AL1 4HA

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

- T&B (St Albans) Ltd
- Debenham Ottaway
- Runburl Sedgwick
- National Pharmaceutical Association
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- St Columba’s College

News and Comments

Membership: it is that time of year again when we remind members that subscriptions become payable on 1 April – unless you have recently joined after 30 September 2014. Prompt renewals will be much appreciated by our Membership Secretary so that he does not have to spend time chasing late payers.

Rates (see back page) remain unchanged yet again. So for around £2 a day, even less if you are a family subscriber, you can enjoy the benefits and support the work of the Society.

We welcome the many new members who have joined in the last few months. Do help continue this increase if you can. It would be good to get membership up towards the magic thousand!

Still on membership matters, the booking form for the 9 May visit to Rochester is now available. Cost £21 per person; members £22 pp for non-members.

Congratulations to Gerard John, our President, as the first Brit to receive the IOC Pierre de Coubertin medal for design and provision of facilities in Sport.

AGM date clarification: the 2015 AGM will be held in the Octagon Room at St Peter’s Church on Thursday 25 June followed by refreshments. Look forward to seeing you there. Start thinking about the election of a new Vice-Chairman and some committee members.

In this edition we feature a number of local issues affecting the city, such as licensing, the street scene and our train service. We must also comment on the press report that the recent Christmas Market lost £60k this year, coming on top of the £300k loss last year. It seems unlikely that this figure includes the cost of replacing the damaged York stone paving in Wax Sumper Yard - watch you step!

As always, we touch on the subject of planning, both nationally and locally. There have been reports that developers are ‘gaming’ the system to build on the countryside. This arises from the National Planning Policy Framework and the requirement for Councils to ensure a 5-year housing land supply. In St Albans and District, we are in a very vulnerable position. It also raises questions over the current progress being made on our Strategic Local Plan. Members may like to take up this issue as the May elections come along.

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 automatically represent those of the Society’s Committee. The Committee can always be contacted for advice, information and update on any matter by any member. Equally the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is consulted about any item this should not be automatically deemed as leading to consent.

Geography and History

Spring visit by rail to Rochester

Good Friday 3 April and every weekend until the end of September.

We are working hard to get the Council to come back on-board for Heritage Open Days this year, particularly as the Residents First opening was somehow left out of its programme.

Other events

Members only event: It is that time of year again when we remind members that subscriptions become payable on 1 April – unless you have recently joined after 30 September 2014. Prompt renewals will be much appreciated by our Membership Secretary.

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Thameslink woes — and they could get worse!

The standard of service on our vital Thameslink line is much in the news, and rightly so given the vast sums of money being expended on it. Any poor service affecting thousands of commuters and other passengers, and huge impacts on the commercial life not only of London but our own city.

There is much discussion over who is responsible for what. This was still being perpetrated as recently as 12 February in a letter to the Herts Advertiser. The Society believes that the Fuddled Farringdon tunnel (Network Rail) was dried out by the hot air from Govia’s (the train company/franchise holder) planning departm ent and Patrick McLoughlin seemingly determined to keep the depot running at cost. The news is not let this and other potential gem s be allowed to slip through our fingers and disappear for ever.

Cinema, at least as a building, was saved. Others joined in and supported the campaign. The young, like Alexandra H., and not so young, and from all walks of life, took up the cause for it to reopen again.

The building satisfied four key factors. It was architecturally important, specifically in its Art Deco style. It had history, both nationally and locally.

3. It could be put to an actual use with a viable economic potential.

4. Above all, THE PEOPLE SUPPORTED THE PROJECT.

The Odyssey has all these in spades.

People at the opening night interviewed by BBC News. shown on 1 December, said how much they liked the building, and how it was “bringing up the area”. The very things the Society said could happen.

So, never give up. Ignore critics and pundits. Practical conservation is at times more important than demolition. We now have a glorious cinema and one that surely merits being registered as a Community Asset.

We must make sure St Albans does not let this and other potential gems slip through our fingers and disappear for ever.

Editors’ Note: A shorter version of this article appeared in the St Albans Review as our January monthly column. The account is based on facts gathered from the false impression given by a letter in the 26 Feb Herts Ad claiming the Society somehow delayed cinema back in St Albans’ Quite extraordinary.

Mark it out and let the World know!