A good experiment in New England Street, but still erasure! This must not be used to replace St Albans’ existing distinctive blue-brick paving.

Despite a Council promise never to use tarmac to repair the damaged York stones in Wadhouse Gate, this has happened!

Litter Picks in Verulanium Park

Tony Mason, who represents the Society on Verulanium Park Forum, invites members to support Jessica Chivers’ ‘Litter Pick’ initiative. Jessica does a good job in organising each ‘pick’, and her monthly ‘little and often’ approach is to be applauded.

Meet Jessica Chivers at the top of the Causeway (King Harry end) at 9.30am on:
- Saturday 13 June 2015
- Saturday 11 July 2015
- Saturday 15 August 2015

Pickers, bags and gloves will be provided.

Margaret Morgan sadly died at the end of April. Margaret was a long-standing member who served on the Committee, attended speaker meetings and went on many of our visits with her husband, Michael, who was also a past Treasurer. Both were regular Clock Tower volunteers. The Society offers its condolences to Michael, his family and friends.

Membership Matters

To join or renew membership

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

- Individual Member £40
- Family £20 (or more)
- Pensioner/Student/Unserved £15
- Residents’ Associations No charge
- Corporate Membership £50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Hardon, tel: 07727 853774 hanlonbryan@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's Ottaway
- Runmill Sedgwick
- National Pharmaceutical Association
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- St Columba’s College

With this edition members will find details of the Society’s Autumn visit by coach to Salisbury on Saturday 26 September 2015. The Spring visit to Rochester was very successful. Rochester showed off its impressive Visitor Information Centre and facilities. Our Council would do well to visit to see this well-equipped and long-established tourist destination.

We noticed in the run-up to the election that certain national politicians declared that the licensing changes of 2005 for longer opening hours so as to create a café culture had been a failure. It was admitted that it had put extra pressure, and costs, on the Police, Councils and NHS, particularly A&E departments. Alcohol-related crimes now cost our hospitals £3bn a year. Will the public believe the claims made in the current election?

As to planning, all major parties were pledging to prioritise building new houses on brownfield land rather than let rip through the countryside. Whilst this was good news, we have had promises like this before. Notably, from the now-demoted Eric Pickles MP who back in October 2012 made the headline promise that the ‘Green Belt is safe in our hands’. This did not stop him later making the decision to approve the Railfreight terminal on Green Belt land next to Park Street!

On the subject of the Railfreight terminal, we applaud the Council’s decision to seek to appeal the latest Judicial Review of the decision. The Society will be writing to our MP to ask if she will extract from Network Rail a schedule of when all the necessary infrastructure works to the line (track, tunnels, signals and overhead wires) will take place, and how it will impact on our daily service. If you think the current problems being experienced by all travellers into London Bridge are alarming – just you wait! Until a schedule is provided and the works start, absolutely no progress should be made on building the terminal.

From assurances are needed otherwise we land up with a road-based freight depot, like the others appearing alongside the motorway network.

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 and update on any matter by any member. Equally the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is considered about any item this should not be automatically deemed as leading to consent.

Editors’ note:

Would it not be a good idea if the TIC was open on Sundays during the summer, say between 11 and 3 pm? It is one thing to be saying the city is promoting tourism, e.g. at the Visitors Partnership, inventing new initiatives. Perhaps weekday opening hours should be amended like we have seen elsewhere.

The remarks in the visitors’ book show people from all over the world and their appreciation of this ancient monument. There is also some tourist information on hand. This is particularly useful on Sundays when the Tourist Information Centre is closed.

We welcome some new Clockkeepers, but more are always needed.

Forthcoming events

- Monday 22 June:
  Retailer of the Year Gala Evening
  9pm Club Batchwood. Tickets £6 (includes refreshments) from the Tourist Information Centre early June.

- Sunday 28 June:
  Larks in Victoria Playing Field
  It is Larks in the Park time again. The Society will have its gazebo stall. Call by and enter our picture competition. Have a fun afternoon and enjoy a wide range of sports, entertainments, attractions, music, food and drink – 12–5 pm.

- Saturday 26 September:
  Autumn coach visit to Salisbury
  Chance to visit the cathedral, the Close (with Arundells and Mompesson), an original 1215 Magna Carta with the new exhibition.

- Tuesday 13 October:
  Annual Awards Evening
  The Maltings Arts Theatre, 7.30 for 8pm.

- Tuesday 22 June:
  Retailer of the Year Gala Evening
  9pm Club Batchwood. Tickets £6 (includes refreshments) from the Tourist Information Centre early June.

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Congratulations to the Council but.

The Society congratulates the Council on its brave decision to continue its opposition to the Raftright plan. It is also an expensive process and, in view of the other initiatives the Council is proposing, we wonder where all the money is coming from. Remember, it is also proposing to fund the new Museum of St Albans partly through commercial development on the Hatfield Road site. There have been reports that it is seeking to buy Hertfordshire House from publicly-owned BHS. This with a view to developing the south side of the Civic Centre in partnership with a developer. Presumably this will ensure that the poor approval to convert Hertfordshire House into flats does not go ahead, which could withdraw, follow ed by the infamous nine and 12 storey tower blocks of flats. So the warning bells are sounding.

We know that the brief for the Civic Centre Opportunity Site calls for a “comprehensive design itself including high quality civic realm, new retail and office space, and attractive affordable housing.” A lot of useful work has already been done in the City Vision exercise, so further workshops are not required. The Society suggests the Council launches an architectural competition, and then involves the public in the decision-making process to help select the winning design.

Annual Awards - still time for you to nominate

The Society’s Annual Awards Team is looking for any projects considered extra special and completed between 1 January and 31 December 2014. They could include things big or small that have contributed towards enhancing the Maltings shopping centre development which led to the Chester Street Action Group being formed and its ultimate success. The Society would also quote a more recent example of the 2004 multiple cinema proposals where the Council aligned itself with a developer in order to fund the project. The results were first a scheme for a monolithic block, subsequently withdrawn, followed by the infamous nine and 12 storey tower blocks of flats. So the warning bells are sounding.

The Roman Wall

There was a meeting on 26 April initiated by the Civic Society and Arc and Arc (SARAH) to discuss concerns about the deterioration of the large section of Roman wall following the removal of the railings. This was attended by representatives of the two societies, St Albans Council officers, Simon West (District Archaeologist) and local Cllr. Edgar Hill. It was agreed that there is a need to better conserve the wall for the future. The Council has permission from English Heritage to install interpretation boards and will also ask if it can overhaul signs warning that it is a criminal offence to damage or remove any part of the wall - to do so is now a ‘Heritage Crime’.

The Council will set up a further meeting with English Heritage to include the Arc and Arc, the Civic Society, plus any others concerned, to take this forward. This takes place on 6 June. It was also agreed we should also publicise the importance of protecting and conserving this monument through our societies and members.

Editors’ note:

The fact that the Roman Wall became political in the recent local elections was not edifying. Apparently it had once been dismissed as “a dilapidated scrap of history” and this was unearished as some political knockout in election leaflets and correspondence to the local press. We think this was unhelpful and unnecessary. If we are really serious about being a tourist destination, we need to conserve what we have to offer as well as pass on such artefacts to future generations. Some may make mundane comparisons with bigger and more complete examples elsewhere, but IT IS WHAT WE HAVE GOT. A similar argument was used about the former Odeon at a planning appeal into its demolition - that it wasn’t highly rated in the Art Deco world. We pointed out that it was what we have got – and wanted to keep!

W henever I travel by train from Victoria into Sussex I always smile as we speed through Balham, as do others in my carriage. I guess it’s because of that Peter Sellers record (EMI 1958) “Balham - Gateway to The South.” What a hoot! If you haven’t heard it you are missing a comedy classic.

I wasn’t so amused last autumn when reading that certain planning consultants were suggesting St Albans should become part of London. An idea also being promoted by Mayor Boris Johnson. So when I saw him outside the ‘Town Hall back in October I implored him to go away. Just because 60% of St Albans commuters to London means we shouldn’t happen.

St Albans: Gateway to The North?

W hen we heard that 60% of St Albans commuters to London means we shouldn’t happen,

St Albans Civic Society Newsletter | Summer 2015

Eric Roberts

All those homes! Questions that need answers

W e regularly read that, in the period 2011 to 2015, the District needs to build thousands more new homes. The annual figures of 436, then revised up to 475 are often quoted.

Where will all the people work? Hundreds of office jobs have been lost since the policy of converting offices into flats was introduced. The process is still going on. This is bad for the local economy and encourages out-commuting.

Where will the children go to school? There are already difficulties placing children in local schools. Some, from as young as five, now have to travel considerable distances. This has a tremendous impact on family life and transport.

Will the local health facilities cope? Will there be enough doctors, nurses and other staff (how can they afford to live in St Albans?) and sufficient hospital facilities?

Will the utilities cope? Water is taken for granted, but can this be guaranteed? The sewerage system is under pressure.

What about transport and congestion? Both the roads and the rail service are, for much of the time, at capacity. Congestion creates stress as people become exasperated with delays. St Albans as a retail and tourist destination will strangle itself and visitors will simply turn away to avoid hold-ups.

What type of homes should be built? This needs to be determined and controlled. Who are the building houses for and how will this affect the demographics of the district?

The Strategic Local Plan cannot come too soon. Answers to questions such as these need to be given from all political parties, locally and nationally. The Society suspects that many of the answers will lead to the conclusion that the numbers envisaged are simply unattainable. Building on such a scale, and on the Green Belt, really should not happen.

I wondered, and went and got some honey for tea. I am sure the Society certainly won’t surrender to London without a fight. Of course, there are going to be changes if our city is to evolve. There’s room for improve- ments and new developments that blend in with their surroundings. The key is keeping a place still distinctive in character - surely one of the incentives for all those commuters to live here?

Who knows for what developers and planners in London might be eying us up? Vigilance is the key word. Join us in keeping St Albans like – St Albans, of course!