Local Pubs – food, and drink, for thought

We have highlighted the ongoing loss of pubs, and the decision to close The Camp in February has not gone down well locally with the Planning Committee seemingly ignoring its own guidelines in the Local Plan. Demolition was approved by 6 votes to 3. Interestingly, the magazine ‘Pubs of View’ reports the observations of Professor Robin Dunbar of Oxford University, one of the country’s leading evolutionary biologists. He says “face-to-face meetings are vital to forming friendships and pubs form an integral role as a place for people to socialise. Given the increasing tendency for our social life to be on line rather than face-to-face, having relaxed accessible venues where people can meet old friends and make new ones becomes ever more necessary. There is a growing recognition to protect pubs as valuable social assets.”

Clearly the Council has conflicting views on this. It has a policy, but Councillors seem unwilling to follow it. St Albans’ pub heritage is one of its assets and attractions. It is a sobering thought that Fishpool Street once had 34 pubs, in latter years just three. Now the Black Lion and the personal shop have gone too, and only ‘Lower Red Lion’ remains. And well worth a visit it is! Not only for its fare but also the pictures of bygone St Albans that are now on display.

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It is with sadness that we report the recent death of Robin Booth. He was a former planning officer with the Council, and latterly a Committee member. The Society was well represented at the funeral held in the Cathedral’s Lady Chapel. We offer condolences to his wife and family.

News from the Clock Tower

The Clock Tower has opened for the new season and there is an exhibition on the first floor recalling its restoration by Gilbert Scott 150 years ago. It recently featured in a ‘Hairy Bikers’ TV programme and, interestingly, visitor numbers were up the following weekend.

We do need more ‘Clockt eers’ to help us in the opening of this important heritage attraction. Perhaps students might consider volunteering as it would assist them in their social and communication skills as well as their appreciation and knowledge of local history. Please contact Jill Singer (oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk or 01727 890965) if you can spare 1/2 hours on one or two weekends between Easter and the end of September. It is proposed to open the Tower during the Heritage Open Days event (8-11 September) which the Society will be coordinating again along with the Herts Advertiser.

This year we are asking St Albans Council to also join in it does not have to do any of the clerical works as it is felt there should be a full partnership involvement with this important European and National celebration. It is a great opportunity to promote our city’s heritage and attract visitors.

Forthcoming events 2016

Sunday 26 June (afternoon) Larks in the Park
The Society will have its gazebo and stall, with quiz. Victoria Playing Field
Thursday 30 June Annual General Meeting
Oxton Centre, St Peter’s Church, 8.00pm

Sunday 17 July (afternoon) Annual Cricket match
The Society & PVPF v the Council. Victoria Playing Field
Thursday - 8-11 September Heritage Open Days
Programme from Tourist Information Centre in early September.

Saturday 8 October Autumn coach visit to Cheltenham Spa
Price £30. Aoptional tour by Cheltenham Civic Society and lunch. Booking form in 2 September newsletter. For advanced tickets/payments/reservation contact Brian Holmes, 16 Trevelay Place, St Stephen’s Hill AL1 2D; tel. 045859 e.holmes@liv.co.uk

Membership Matters
To join or renew membership
Subscriptions remain unchanged and are renewable on 1 April each year.

- Individual £10
- Family (2 or more) £15
- Pensioner/Student/Unwaged £7
- Residents’ Association Free
- Corporate £50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Hanrod, tel: 01727 857574 hanrodyb@gmail.com or post to: 24 Monkis Horton Way, St Albans AL3 4HA

The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support from the following Corporate Members:
- T&B (St Albans) Ltd
- Debenhams Ottaway
- Runbull Sedgwick
- National Pharmacy Association
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- St Columba’s College

Notice of Annual General Meeting
8pm Thursday 30 June 2016
The Ocotgen Centre
St Peter’s Church, St Peter’s Street
Followed by refreshments Paidup members only

...have YOU renewed your subscription?
Renewals were due on 1 April 2016
If you wish to attend the AGM, receive future newsletters and details of events, visits etc. please renew NOW.
We value your membership and support.
Rates remain unchanged – see back page for full details.

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Do you have a local that you particularly value? Tell us why.

ST CIVIC SOCIETY
Looking to the future - with an eye to the past

President: Geraint John
Chairman: Tim Boulder

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

This issue marks the 25th AGM of STC. With thanks to all who have contributed.

The Society’s Autumn coach visit to Cheltenham Spa is on Saturday 8 October 2016. See panel on back page. The Spring visit to ‘On 7 May was very successful. 29 members enjoyed a good day out on a really warm sunny day. Rugby Heritage Centre, with knowledgeable staff, has a Town Model Sound and Light Show. Helmsley (a market centre) and something similar would be a terrific asset in the new Town Hall Museum and Gallery. Curators and officials might like to pay a visit. Something a little disturbing in the heart of the ‘Mapp and Lucia’ area around Church Square was the almost total absence of any sign of residents. It had the atmosphere of a Mary Celeste. Quote of the day, however, was from former Councilor, now a member, Rod Perkins: ‘All planning councillors and officers should be made to visit Rugby to see what can be achieved...’ Well said!

STOP PRESS! Great talk to a capacity audience by Tracy Harvey (Head of Planning). Also, coming to your street the LED lights that could keep you awake and make you ill. More next time.

National Planning: The 25 April editions of the three national standards – The Guardian, the Daily Telegraph and The Times – all covered stories of plans to build 275000 homes in England’s fourteen Green Belts. This, despite David Cameron’s assurance

Green Belt was ‘precious’ and its protection “paramount”. Last year’s election manifesto promised four times to protect the Green Belt. Some of the houses are to be in Hertfordshire, including St Albans. This threat was well and truly highlighted in May by Dame Fiona Reynolds, the former Director of the National Trust. She said ‘The Government was clearly not keeping its pre-election promise’. No wonder our local Councillors are alarmed and fearful that the Government will allow developers to carry out major building in the limited areas left of our local Green Belt (see also SLP update).

We really do feel our national body, Civic Voice, should be taking a stronger stand on this subject and advocating Government incentives to direct developers to build on brownfield first, thus making the Prime Minister honour his pledges.

In this edition, we comment on the ongoing loss of Britain’s pubs with some interesting quotes from the April/May ‘Pubs of View’. Pub numbers are down from 96000 in 1980 to 51000 now, with around 27 a week closing in 2015. Perhaps it is time the Society became more involved in not only how pubs operate but also in where their loss affects the local community. Pubs can be a local amenity for residents. Remember, as a Civic Society we are a conservation and amenity organisation.

St Albans Civic Society Newsletter
Summer 2016

www.stalbanscivicsociety.net

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Strategic Local Plan update

The Council is now evaluating replies to the consultation held in Jan/Febr. The Society’s representations were highlighted on page 1 in the Spring Newsletter. Disappointingly, overall responses on the housing issue were less than 0.14% of the City and District population of 140,600.

There was a definite lack of response on the need for housing expansion involving encroachment onto Green Belt land. Most residents and local conservation groups expressed concern. Landowners and developers felt more building was necessary. Neither of these positions is surprising. Watch out for a possible option on this and let us know if you have any comments to make on a draft SLP this November.

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Fishpool Street - only one pub left!
Local Planning:
In the last newsletter, we commented that the ongoing planning issue facing the town and the danger of being determined along the lines of a popular song contest – the Pemberton building was an example. Now, it seems, planning decisions have been made, and that means just one, just one, monetary value. Forget any architectural merits and the advice of planners, and call for financial advice.

This has been high-lighted by the recent decision concerning the former St Albans Museum in Hatfield Road. An important site, with a preferred scheme for its development involving an additional community engagement process in conjunction with the Council and duly submitted as an application. At its first hearing, in March, the plan was referred back by Plans Central Committee for further refinements. When it returned to Committee on 11 April, it appears to have been approved solely on the amount of money it would bring to the Council’s Town Hall and Gallery project. Planning Committee member Counsellor Chaddock was reported saying: “Although I feel it is a little bit over-developed, I can live with it, because it is a city centre development and will lead to new museum being really good.” Counsellor Rob Prowse was quoted that “he was still concerned about the development being cramped, but was aware that it meant capital for the new museum.”

The Herts Advertiser’s 14 April editorial summed things up succinctly: “However it is developed, and at this stage, there is the chance for a two-lined paradise; of course – this is a cramped development which clearly has aimed to get as much as possible onto the site as possible because that will go towards the new museum project... But should the Council really be aligning itself with a congested area? The concern behind the proposal is that there will be no ‘green’ in the city centre and the development will effectively only allow one parking space per property with new residents ineligible for parking permits. The answer has to be NO. Planning councillors are often very critical of similar hoarding schemes, particularly where parking is limited and rooms are small, but sometimes is not enough to prevent the town from making a great mistake. The purpose has been to try and work out a way through the system.”

It is disappointing that this planning ‘system’ allows the Council(s) to place monetary gain over any other purposes above planning and design, and has thus made a charade of the charrette process. Much as the Society supports the Town Hall and Gallery project, maintaining an independent quest for good design and town planning should be paramount.

W

We print the letter from our Chairman that has been sent to Anne Main MP, CEO James Ritchie and Head of Planning Trace Harvey at SADC, all City and District, and County Councillors.

—You may have seen the recent articles in the Herts Advertiser (24 and 31 March 2016) and Editorial (31 March 2016) in respect of Network Rail’s proposal to erect three staircases “An idea behind the Society adopting the tree was to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Verdun in World War I that took place from February 1916 for ten months.” Tim Boatswain, Chairman

It is appreciated that the topic may be becoming a little repetitive but it is very important. We are all potential rail users both economic and social welfare reasons. W e are all potential rail users; let alone the disabled. Tim Boatswain, Chairman

Railfreight battle continues

W

Railfreight continues to be a bit of a mess. It’s becoming a worst example that has emerged. This claim was made after Anne Main contacted the council on my behalf. I’m in a wheelchair and find St Albans utterly impractical and dangerous for disabled people.

There are numerous gaps with unstable sleepers, sudden dips and slopes, puddles of water, and paving stones sitting up – major trip hazards for the able-bodied, let alone the disabled.

The paving on the corner of St Peters Street which leads down to Jorgas is particularly appalling. The camber on the pedestrianised areas of St Peters Street, with steep drops down to the draughty right along each kerb, make crossing the road in a wheelchair impossible.

All of this, along with limited disabled parking, makes St Albans the last choice for disabled shoppers.

Editor’s comment – we too were surprised at the Council’s claim of no complaints. As members will recall, we have regularly featured articles concerning the state of the public realm and our periodic meetings with both local and County representatives. Ms Adams’ comments have brought home to us the importance of not only having a presentable city centre, but also one that is safe and has ease of access for everyone. We will continue to bear this in mind. Tell us you think.

Response from Ms Grifin Adams:
“I saw the Society’s article in the Review regarding some wheelchair obstacles and pavements. I’m interested to see the comment that you’ve been pointing out these failures for three years as my recent complaint about this was met with shock and surprise by the council, who seemed to imply that they’d had no other complaints. Indeed, they claimed they interviewed customers in the town centre every month...”

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Vision being restored?

Counselling on Civic Centre South

For some time the Society has been lamenting the apparent filing of the City Vision exercise of 2010 that produced, after considerable public input, a document and two possible developments for the City Centre. A key part of this was the Civic Centre South. Things have at last started to move again. Angle Property has come forward with a scheme for the site that includes 114 residential units, ranging from studio flats to 3-bedroom apartments, above restaurants/retail premises in 4-6 storey high buildings around a new public square. A larger community health centre would be incorporated.

An initial public consultation in Marlborough Road Methodist Church Hall was held on Friday and Saturday 15-16 April.

The feedback will be analysed during June and July and stakeholders and residents will be updated in August prior to a planning application being lodged in the autumn.

We urge all members to be involved and make their views known. Copy us in with your comments as this would help in our own decision-making process.

Verulamium Lakes

The Society has had a reply to its complaint – see last newsletter. In it, the Council states: “We now consider that the way to tackle both the accumulation of silt and the pollutants in the lake is to create a natural biological ecosystem through planting.” The letter, of 7 March, goes on to give various options which are being evaluated. Will there be any action as summer approaches? There are already complaints of terrible smelly lakes, do some action now. The feedback from the public should be seen on the Society’s website. Please Council – spend some money on the Lake, do something NOW.