

Local Pubs – food, and drink, for thought

We have highlighted the ongoing loss of pubs, and the decision over 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 'Pints 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 14 pubs, in latter years just three. Now the Black Lion and the Blue Anchor have gone too, and only the 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. Do you have a local that you particularly value? Tell us why.

Strategic Local Plan update

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

There was a divide in opinions 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 further opportunity to comment on a draft SLP this November.

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 'Clockateers' 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 838965) if you can spare 1½/2 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 work) 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

Octagon Centre, St Peter's Church, 8.00pm.

Sunday 17 July (afternoon)

Annual Cricket match

The Society & FVPF v the Council.

Victoria Playing Field.

Thursday - Sunday 8-11 September

Heritage Open Days

Programme from Tourist Information Centre in Arena, early September.

Saturday 8 October

Autumn coach visit to Cheltenham Spa

Price t.b.a. Optional tour by Cheltenham Civic Society and lunch. Booking form in 2 September newsletter. For advanced details/provisional reservation contact Brian Holmes, 16 Trevelyan Place, St Stephen's Hill AL1 2DT; tel. 843389. eilyholmes@live.co.uk

So as to avoid any possible confusion or misunderstanding, members are respectfully asked that if they attend 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 by any member. Also, the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is consulted about any plan or proposal this should not automatically be deemed as leading to consent.

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.

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 Hanlon, tel: 01727 851734 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
- Debenhams Ottaway
- Rumball Sedgwick
- National Pharmacy Association
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- St Columba's College

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future -
with an eye to the past

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

Newsletter | Summer 2016

This edition has been prepared by Eric Roberts (Committee member) and Peter Trevelyan (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

NEWS & COMMENTS

The 55th AGM is on 30 June 2016 and we look forward to seeing you there. Don't forget to bring your copy of the Annual Report and Accounts with you. Any Agenda item(s) to the Secretary by 24 June.

Nominations for the committee are invited. Send the nominee's name with their signature of acceptance plus the signatures of proposer and seconder to Jill Singer, Secretary at oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk or to Kingsbury Manor, St Albans, AL3 4SE by Friday 24 June 2016. **All must be paid-up members.** Still on membership, new ones continue to come in but renewals by current supporters are always needed and appreciated. That target of 1,000 members remains.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

8pm Thursday 30 June 2016

The Octagon Centre
St Peter's Church, St Peter's Street

Followed by refreshments
Paid-up members only...

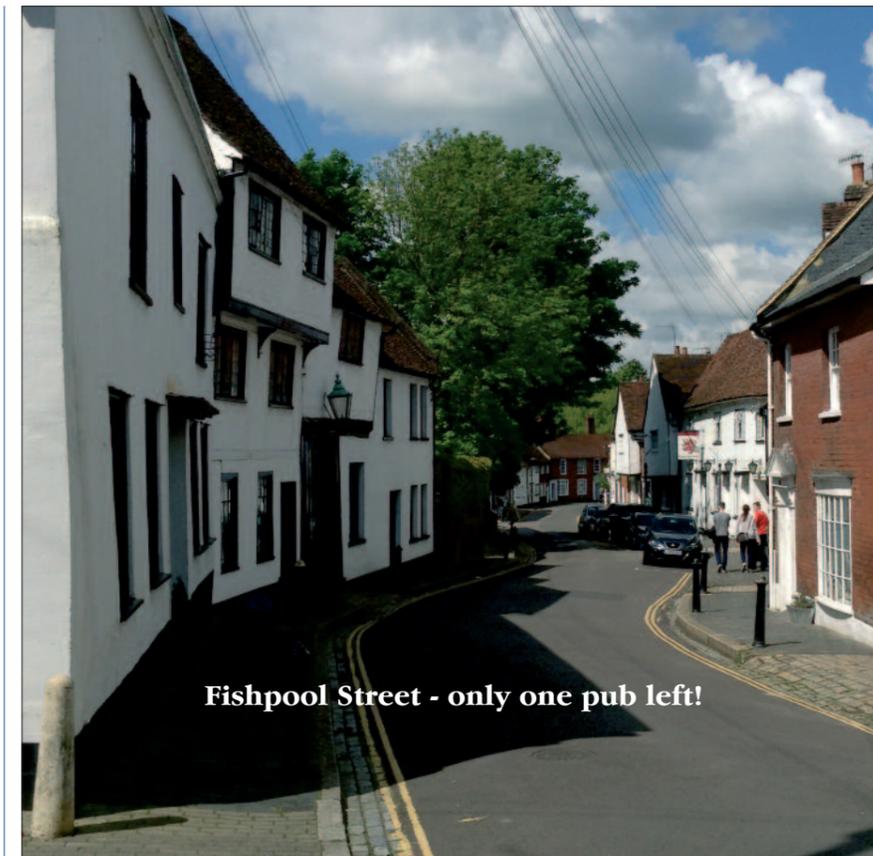
...have YOU renewed your subscription?

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.



Fishpool Street - only one pub left!

The Society's **Autumn coach visit to Cheltenham Spa** is on Saturday 8 October 2016. See panel on back page. **The Spring visit to Rye** on 7 May was very successful. 29 members enjoyed a good day out on a really warm sunny day. Rye's Heritage Centre, with knowledgeable staff, has a Town Model Sound and Light Show (*Son et Lumière*) and something similar would be a terrific asset in the new Town Hall Museum and Gallery. Councillors 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 Councillor, now a member, Rod Perks: "All planning councillors and officers should be made to visit Rye 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 275,000 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 'Pints of View'. Pub numbers are down from 69,000 in 1980 to 51,900 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.

Continued over page

NEWS & COMMENTS *continued*

Local Planning: In the last newsletter, we commented how planning was in danger of being determined along the lines of a popular song contest – the Pemberton building was an example. Now, it seems, planning decisions are also to be made just on monetary value. Forget any architectural merits and the advice of planners, and call for financial advisers!

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 worked up through a 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 Councillor Janet Churchard 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 our museum being really good."* Councillor 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 dressed up – and the drawings show a tree-lined paradise, of course – this is a cramped development which clearly has aimed to get as much money-spinning housing on the site as possible because that will go towards the new museum project... But should the Council really be aligning itself with a congested development which effectively allows only 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 housing schemes, particularly where parking is limited and rooms are small, but somehow or another this one has found its way through the system."*

It is disappointing that this planning 'system' allows the Council(lors) to place monetary gain for its own 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.

ST ALBANS BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

WHAT IS IT?

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a geographical area in which the local businesses have voted to invest collectively to improve their environment. BIDs provide additional and improved services as identified and requested by those businesses.

WHY DO WE NEED IT?

St Albans is already a fantastic city of which we are all rightly proud. A BID will enable businesses to create additional investment to further improve our city centre. Current Local Authority services provide an adequate but improvable baseline from which a BID will be able to show a measurable improvement.

WHO MANAGES IT?

St Albans BID will be a private sector-led, not for profit, limited company. The BID is built by local businesses, for local businesses and managed by local businesses. A BID is not managed by the Local Authority. It will enhance existing services provided by the Council, rather than replace them.

IS IT SUCCESSFUL?

Yes. The first BID in the UK was created in 2004: there are now over 200 BIDs. A BID runs for a maximum of 5 years at which point it must be renewed. BID renewal success is currently 90%. Over £65m is raised through BIDs across the UK annually.

Business Improvement District process

The Society is supporting the BID in principle. Businesses in the city centre will be eligible to vote in November 2016. The five focus areas will be ALBAN: viz Appearance, Leisure, Business, Awareness, Network.

Railfreight battle continues

We print the letter from our Chairman that has been sent to Anne Main MP, CEO James Blake and Head of Planning Tracy 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 response to enquiries from Anne Main MP and Oliver Dowden MP concerning the impact on Thameslink services caused by the proposed SRFI at Park Street."

It is apparent that no real assessment has taken place on how the infrastructure works would be programmed and the eventual impact on the enhanced Thameslink services from 2018. The routes affected will not only be via St Albans but also on the parallel line through Stevenage and Hatfield where services will eventually share the single track tunnel between St Pancras and Blackfriars."

In view of this unsatisfactory response, is there any way the planning decision to approve the SRFI based on previous assurances from Network Rail can be revisited and possibly reversed?

Secondly, because of the likely impact on rail services, creating a domino effect when things go wrong, which they will, can the interests of commuters and leisure/off peak travellers, ie. Hertfordshire residents, be protected by County Councillors, who

represent them? Namely, not to sell the land for an SRFI development. If such Green Belt land has to be lost, surely the overriding special circumstances are for housing and not for a project that will potentially inflict ongoing delays and cancellations of future rail services in the county."

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 and a reliable train service is essential for both economic and social welfare reasons as well as the image of the city. The revelation that Network Rail has really no idea how the necessary infrastructure work can be programmed and how the freight trains will affect passenger services is extremely serious. It does bring the whole concept into question.

Luton Airport has announced that it wants to expand (another looming problem for us as aircraft noise pollution increases) and build a dedicated tram-line between Parkway Station and the airport. Its management is now pressing for an Express link, like Gatwick Express, with four trains an hour serving the airport. Result, even more pressure on the line. Something has to give, and Network Rail struggles to deliver reliably now. County - Do Not sell the (our) land to Helioslough. Do make your views known to County officials and councillors.



Watch out!

Take care the next time you are crossing St Peter's Street. There could be some dreadful potholes just waiting to trip you up.

Why does County Hall neglect its cathedral city's main street so badly? And, of course, many of our other roads are equally pitted with some pretty awful potholes too.

The city centre's pavements don't fare any better. The notorious Chinese granite surface now finds itself being replaced sometimes with tarmac, as in front of Carphone Warehouse, put down some 18 months ago after Water Utility works. The rules state that proper repairs should have taken place within six months. They obviously haven't. Other slabs have been replaced by some of a different colour, and even of different materials. It's becoming a bit of a mess.

Smartly surfaced George Street with its upmarket shops has been given the same poor treatment. Some of the blue and buff pavement bricks have been again replaced by those of a different shade and not always in the right order! Several of the cross-pavement drainage channels have simply been filled in with tarmac as a solution to their repair. It not only looks tatty but prevents water draining away, and it is thus backing up ominously into the frontages. Why should this be considered acceptable? And who will pay for any structural damage being caused to these listed buildings?

The Society is somewhat fed up with pointing out these failures over the last three years. It intends to conduct a picture audit of the city centre and highlight the 10 worst examples that have emerged. This will then be sent to those responsible over in County Hall in the hope they will finally act and see that the contractors who do these works on behalf of the County Council do them sympathetically.

Respect our city centre is the name of the game. Watch out!

St Albans Review article 6 April 2016

Editors' note: coincidentally, the restoration outside Carphone Warehouse was carried out five days after this article was published!

Response from Ms Goffin Adams:

"I saw the Society's article in the Review regarding St Peters Street's potholes 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 investigate the pavements in the town centre every month!"

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 sloping pavements, sudden dips and slopes, puddles of water, and paving stones jutting 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 Argos is particularly appalling. The camber on the pedestrianised area of St Peters Street, with steep drops down to the drains right along each kerb, make crossing the road in a wheelchair impossible.

All of this, along with limited disabled parking, and so many shops with no access, 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 Adam's 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 what you think.**

Vision being restored?

Consultation on Civic Centre South

For some time the Society has been lamenting the apparent filing of the City Vision exercise of 2009 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 Opportunity Site 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-bed apartments, above restaurants/retail premises in 4-6 storey high buildings around a new public square. A larger NHS community health centre would be incorporated.

An initial public consultation in Marlborough Road Methodist Church Hall was held on Friday and Saturday 13/14 May.

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 smells. The full response can be seen on the Society's website. Please Council - spend some money on the Lakes; do something NOW.

VERDUN TREE: *Nice planting by the Council, shame about the rubbish bins! The 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. The aims were to conceal the bins, and to erect a bigger and better interpretation board. Sadly, despite considerable negotiation and liaison, neither of these look as if they will be achieved this year. The shrubs will need to grow quickly!*



Waxhouse Passage Garden