

Night Time Economy survey: continued

2. Entertainment/Community Space

An outdoor community square to allow for "hanging out" and community events, concerts, large screens for sporting events (as Canary Wharf has), open air theatre, opera, a skating rink in winter - again open until the middle of the evening with nearby cafes open to provide hot chocolate and snacks.

If the Police station area is being re-developed, is there an opportunity to include such a space in that development? The Food and Drink Festival generated a lot of good feedback amongst the community according to one respondent so more food based street events like this would be welcomed.

3. Parking - availability and cost

People who come in from outside St Albans find it expensive to park.

Car parks close fairly early so if one is going out later then this is not an option. Hence the search for on street parking.

4. Cost

St Albans is considered to be expensive - drinks, entrance fees, parking/taxis. One comment was - "it is cheaper to buy a bottle of wine and all go back to my place".

Someone else goes to Berkhamstead

instead of St Albans as the offering in terms of evening entertainment is similar and it is cheaper to get a taxi to/from Berkhamstead than St Albans.

5. Safety/Harassment

A few people related incidents which had happened to them on an evening out and which made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable in the town centre. (Being groped in a nightclub is now known as "being Trumped".) Women said this did put them off going to nightclubs. One suggestion was better bouncers who "did their jobs" and kept a watchful eye out for women and vulnerable groups.

Safety needed to be considered particularly if different groups are present in the town centre, i.e. those who want to drink who can get rowdy (normally twenties and early thirties) and more sedate civilised groups (both older and teenagers).

More police presence in the streets. Better street lighting

6. Shopping

The selling point of St Albans in the past was its independent shops. One could find things here which other towns such as Watford and Hemel did not have. Some chains have moved into St Albans but lack of floor space means they cannot carry a

full range of stock. And not all chains are represented, eg Next, Monsoon. People now go to Watford and Hatfield because the choice is greater. Even Hemel is considered better for shopping. It was pointed out that St Albans no longer has specialist shops, eg a proper sports shop such as J D Sports. Excellent toy shops such as Ryders and the one which used to be in the Maltings are missed.

A few people commented that rents and rates are too high, pushing out the independents.

It was suggested that if St Albans had a different shopping environment attracting people in during the day, then this may help publicise what St Albans could offer in the evening. Sometimes people notice restaurants as they walk past. Posters and publicity for events may increase attendance.

7. Publicity

If there are events, often people are not aware of them. It was felt that wider publicity of what St Albans offers now, or in the future, is required. The arrangements for parking and opening hours for out of town visitors would also be useful.

We would like to hear more views from members on this subject. It's your city centre!

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future - with an eye on the past

President: Geraint John
Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

Newsletter | Winter 2016

This edition has been prepared by Eric Roberts (Committee member) and Peter Trevelyan (Awards Panel). If you have any comments, please write to the Editors at 3 Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN or email ptrevelyan@aol.com We very much appreciate your views, also nominations for 2016 Awards.

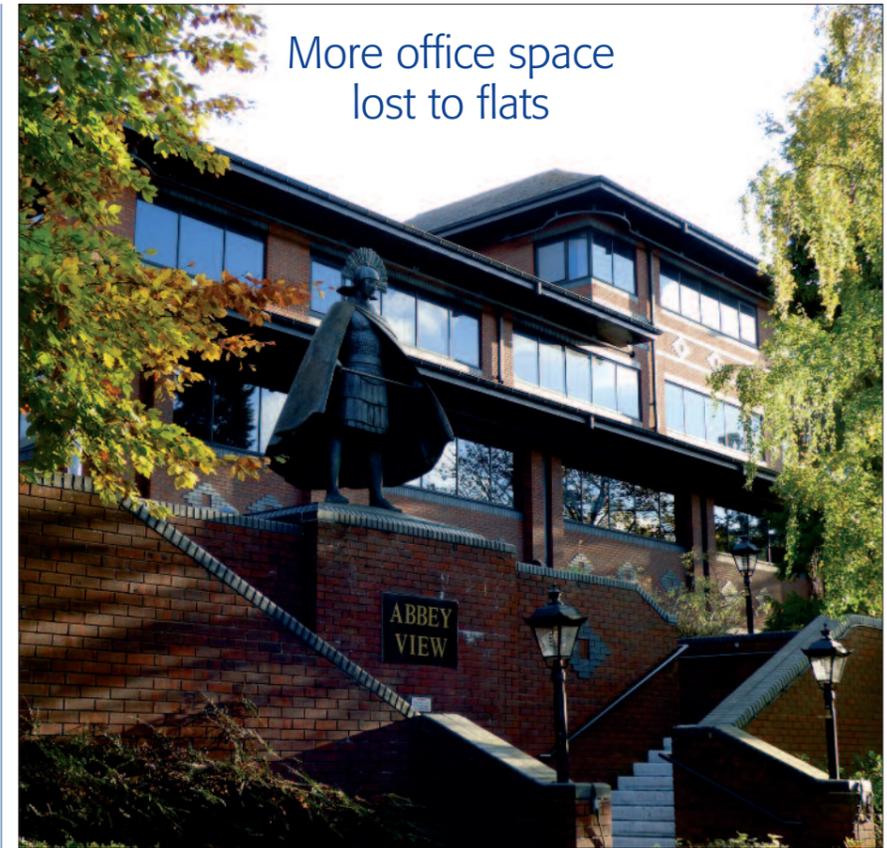
NEWS & COMMENTS

The Members' 2017 programme card is included with this edition. We hope to see you at these events, and to be able to extend a special welcome to our many new members.

Another successful Awards evening was held on 11 October in the Maltings Arts Theatre. As there were some seats available, it would have been good to have seen even more of you enjoying the convivial atmosphere and chatting to the awards team, winners, and fellow members. A special Awards 2015 supplement comes with this newsletter.

The visit to Cheltenham on 8 October was much appreciated. Some 43 members met up with the Cheltenham Civic Society. Thank you Brian Holmes for all the excellent arrangements. *Where to go next autumn? Please tell us.*

National planning - we remain concerned about the reported threat of some 123,000 homes in the Green Belt, and the ongoing claim, supported by a report from Civitas, that developers are 'land-banking' with planning permission granted for 750,000 homes which have not yet been built. The building industry, and previous Ministers, deny this but, for us, the jury is still out. The new Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, certainly believes that big developers should be building faster using their already obtained planning permissions for homes and not on more Green Belt land.



More office space lost to flats

On a happier note, in October the Chancellor announced a £5billion new fund to help tackle the housing crisis with £2billion going to a scheme which would make publicly-owned brownfield land available for development. The remaining £3billion is to go to a Home Builders Fund which will help the development of 25,500 homes by 2020. Supporting brownfield development must be good news.

It will be interesting to see the new 2016 design for 100,000 ready-made homes (i.e. prefabs) that are proposed to help with the housing shortage, and where and when they are going to be located.

Local planning - Our local Council has been severely criticised by neighbouring Councils for being 'uncooperative' in its preparation of the Strategic Local Plan. This could delay the plan further, which is extremely worrying.

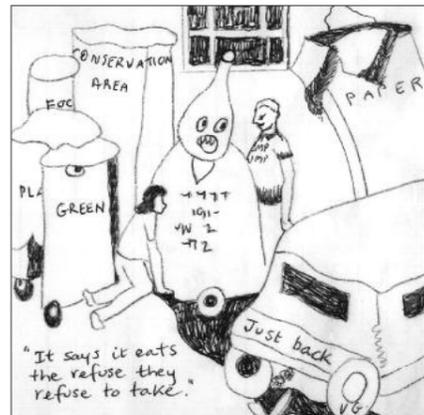
Other things are going to be held up, like the Council's belated consideration to using the SLP to control the loss of offices to flats. It has been estimated that nearly 1,000 local jobs have disappeared in the last three years because of the relaxation of planning controls to facilitate the change of use. The latest application for prior approval is for Abbot House (by the roundabout at the Holywell Hill / Griffiths Way junction) for 77 flats. Nearby Watford acted positively two years ago, issuing a Direction to help protect their office/employment stock.

Finally, we should **spare a thought for the people of Exeter** who have lost their wonderful Royal Clarence Hotel in the Cathedral Close to a ferocious fire. It was a building of distinction, indeed one of national importance with a rich heritage. To enter it was like going into a land-locked galleon. How ironic that it survived the Baedeker raids of 1942 that destroyed so much of old Exeter and the later assault by town planners and developers in the 1960s only to be taken like this.

Imagine if a similar fate befell one of our fine old buildings. It makes one realise how important it is to keep an eye on our heritage assets, and to celebrate them with events like Heritage Open Days. St Albans Council please note!



On a positive note, it is encouraging to see that work has started on the Town Hall.



Rubbishing our streets

Yet another (brown) wheeled bin per household has been added to the number that already clutter many of our street frontages. Recycling is important, but is coming at the expense of our streetscape and any conservation area status. Enough is enough! There surely needs to be a re-think about the impact on appearances. Cartoon by member Vera Graubart.

Forthcoming events 2017

Thursday 16 February
Current Issues of National Concern
A talk by Phil Duce, Civic Voice Trustee, from HQ of the Civic Society Movement. The Cross Street Centre* Dagnall Street at 8 pm - FREE.

Thursday 16 March
Famous Faces of Fleetville
A talk by Liz Bloom of Fleetville Diaries. The Cross Street Centre* Dagnall Street at 8 pm - FREE.

*Disabled parking only at The Cross Street Centre. There are public car parks nearby.

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.

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:

- Austin Trueman Associates
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- Debenhams Ottaway
- National Pharmacy Association
- St Columba's College
- T&B (St Albans) Ltd



Verdun tree

The Society has funded a new interpretation board to commemorate the centenary of the battle of Verdun during 1916. It was unveiled on 11 November by the Mayor with the Dean saying a Prayer of Remembrance. The tree, a horse chestnut, was grown from a conker off the last tree left standing on the battlefield. We thank Cllr Annie Brewster, the Council's Richard Shwe and colleagues, for their help. Well done Bryan Hanlon and David Lloyd for achieving this result for the centenary year – there were various obstacles to overcome. Roy Bellamy designed the multi-lingual layout.

News from the Clock Tower Best ever visitor numbers

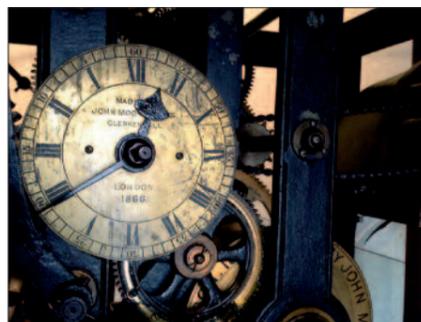
Nearly 1100 visitors were recorded during the very popular Heritage Open Days (8-11 September). On the Thursday evening the Mayor and Deputy Mayor came along and, as part of the national bell-ringing event, rang the bell. They did it well!

Overall, it has been another excellent season with the best ever visitor numbers.

On a historical note, the present clock is 150 years old this year (the Tower itself is 611 years old) and the clock mechanism can be seen on the second storey.

Look out for this year's Christmas lights.

As always, volunteers for next year's season, starting at Easter, are needed.



Verulamium Park lakes

On 19 October, the Council announced that it will be looking once again at options to improve the River Ver and Verulamium Park lakes. A major study is to take place in conjunction with the Environment Agency, Affinity Water and the Countryside Management Service. A consultant is to be appointed. The study should be published in Spring 2017, and will outline strategies along with costs. The public will then be invited to comment before any decisions are taken.

Presumably this means the Council hasn't determined what to do about the highly unpleasant and unacceptable situation with the lakes that has come to a head over the past two summers.

So, whilst the consultants do their stuff

and the comment process goes on, the prospect of another summer of offensive smells, dead and dying wildlife looks ever likely – a right turn-off for residents, visitors, and tainting the image of St Albans. This is totally unacceptable.

As the Council deliberates what to do, it must take some short-term preventative action and proactively manage the situation.

There cannot be yet another summer of shame before the offensive silt is cleared.

Many long-term residents recall that in times past the lake was thoroughly cleaned every two years. Therein lies the rub. One suspects that repeated cutbacks have contributed to the situation as it is today. Now comes the big bill.

Railfreight threatens

The Society's Planning group has made representations in connection with applications (Conditions/reserved matters) relating to the development.

It is thought appropriate to remind members of the appalling implications of this proposal despite the outline permission already granted in principle. **We are not giving up!**

“We object to this application for development which is a departure from the existing District Plan.

The proposal would be inappropriate development in the green belt and the application is premature pending adoption of a new local plan.

The proposal is environmentally unsustainable having substantially adverse impacts on:

- *the local road infrastructure through substantially extra distribution lorry traffic on main roads within the District, many junctions of which are already at full capacity (especially on the A14 between the M1 and the A1M), further exacerbated by the high number of employee car movements envisaged, many over long distances from cheaper pools of available labour.* (Editors' note: parking is for 1,602 cars and 617 lorries, no less).
- *the rail network and in particular commuter services which are increasingly the employment lifeblood of St Albans and scheduled to see*

continued growth in passenger numbers in the wake of the Thameslink, Crossrail and Luton airport expansion projects.

- *biodiversity with the loss of vegetation and wildlife.*
- *productive farmland with the loss of Hedges Farm.*
- *air quality through an unacceptable level of additional carbon emissions primarily from the additional lorry and car traffic generated in an area where air quality levels are already recorded as critical.*
- *residential amenity through increased noise pollution with nearby residential properties affected to an unreasonable degree by noise intrusion from excessive lorry traffic, freight handling operations and slow, heavy freight trains from round-the-clock operation.*
- *light pollution with the level of external lighting to include lighting gantries required throughout the night for the security and safe operation of the development resulting in an unacceptable expansion of urbanisation and loss of dark skies.”*

Ever since the Appeals of 2007 and 09 we have repeatedly questioned Network Rail's ability to incorporate the freight trains without disrupting passenger services. Fortunately our MP Anne Main continues to pursue this fact. The outlook is grim if the County Council caves in and sells the land. A giant lorry park looms.



Night Time Economy survey

The Society is grateful to Rita Waldron (member assisting with Licensing) for carrying out a survey and report to supplement our previous response printed in the Autumn Newsletter. The findings are most interesting and should help the Council determine future action and policy.

Two questions were asked:

1. What discourages you from coming into St Albans to go out or persuades you to go elsewhere rather than come here?
2. What would encourage you more to come into St Albans for entertainment?

Number of participants questioned: 22

Age range from early teens to approaching 90 years old. Outside the 22 respondents, one child also added comments as did one adult on behalf of children.

Participants were split into those who lived in St Albans (for whom parking would not be so much of a concern) and those who travelled in from elsewhere.

No-one had heard of the Council's survey. Their comments and suggestions are documented below.

The twenties age group appeared to be well served in terms of activities (ie pubs and bars), the only comments they made were that costs were high and they would like venues to stay open later as they go out later after work.

All the other age groups did not go out as much as they might have done for various reasons. Some went into London without even considering St Albans as a venue. Others had friends round at home, mainly because of the cost of going out. Others limited their evenings out, again because of cost and the limited variety of entertainment on offer.

Findings/Comments

1. Lack of variety

“Nothing to do for our age group. It is all geared for the young twenty somethings”. “Everything shuts at 6pm” (ie shops, cafes and coffee shops)

A common view from the other age groups is that the nightlife is all centered round pubs, bars and restaurants for the twenty somethings. It was mentioned that outsiders are attracted into St Albans to the bars from places such as Luton and Reading while a lot of the residents' needs are not addressed.

For the non twenty somethings, St Albans was often only considered as a venue for an evening out if one wanted to go out for a meal. They may then go for a couple of drinks afterwards.

There does seem to be pent up demand for nice places to go where one does not have to drink a lot, and can buy soft drinks or coffee (good quality - opinion of coffee served in bars and pubs was low) and nibbles - something like tapas - without having to opt for a full restaurant meal; with the ability to be able to chat and perhaps listen to (low level) music - a bit like piano bars in the US or a proper grown-up club, not the type of nightclubs which St Albans already has. Women in their thirties, forties and fifties in particular would like somewhere civilised and safe to go for an evening out.

The point was made that some cultures do not drink alcohol at all so they are not catered for in terms of a club type venue which is not centred on the drinking culture in the evenings.

Some existing clubs in St Albans were mentioned in disparaging terms. Anastasias and the Odyssey were the only two venues mentioned in a positive light by

the over 30s. Company of Ten was singled out as good but the Abbey Theatre was thought to be a bit out of the way. One person said he had been meaning to go but not got around to checking out parking etc. He can walk to the town centre so he is more likely to go there, although he added that the Maltings needed to up its game in terms of number and professionalism of the productions.

The town is dead once the shops shut. Cafes open in the early evening would be welcomed to give the opportunity to pop out for a drink and a snack with friends, or popping into a coffee bar on the way back from an early evening gym session for example.

Teenagers would like somewhere to “hang out” in the early evenings - up to 9 or 10 pm or so. They currently sit in the lobby outside the Library or the steps to the side of the Town Hall or the War Memorial. They get moved on. They do not have much disposable income and hence would like cafes/newsagents to be open in the early evenings to allow them to buy a cheaper drink and a snack.

One comment was that the café culture has to be encouraged with the appropriate support. Expecting it to surface of its own accord in a town full of pubs and bars was not going to work. It was suggested that a trial be undertaken with the new Town Hall exhibition space when it opens as a focal point. Hold evening exhibitions and events and subsidise one or two of the coffee bars nearby in St Peters Street to open up to 9 or 10 pm. (Subsidies would be required as cost versus lack of footfall was the reason one of the retailers said they did not find evening opening worked.) An outside seating area in front of the Town Hall could be provided as Merchant Tea and Coffee used to do. If this worked economically, then it was hoped that other coffee shops would follow suit. The provision of snacks and light meals (not a full blown restaurant) would also be welcomed.

Safety is a consideration if a café culture is to be promoted. Having a café culture in proximity to people drinking in pubs was not thought to work. Earlier closing times, say around 10pm, for the coffee bars would help in this respect as the café culture groups would disperse before the pubs and bars turned out. A police presence around the area would be useful to discourage harassment as pub goers often drink at home before they come out later on in the evening.

For young people, activities such as a bowling alley, skate boarding park, and water park were mentioned. Supervised for children and young teenagers.