

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future -
with an eye on the past

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

Newsletter | Autumn 2017

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 and information on topics.

NEWS & COMMENTS

A warm welcome to the many new members who have joined the Society during the summer months. At the last count this was just over fifty. We hope you will find membership both enjoyable and interesting, and that you will come and join in forthcoming events.

Coming up are **Heritage Open Days** and the Society's afternoon walk on Saturday 9 September; the members' **Annual Awards Celebration Evening** at the Maltings Arts Theatre on Thursday 5 October (8pm).

There are other events like the 7 October **visit to Southwell** and **Sir Terry Farrell's talk** on 21 November (see back page).

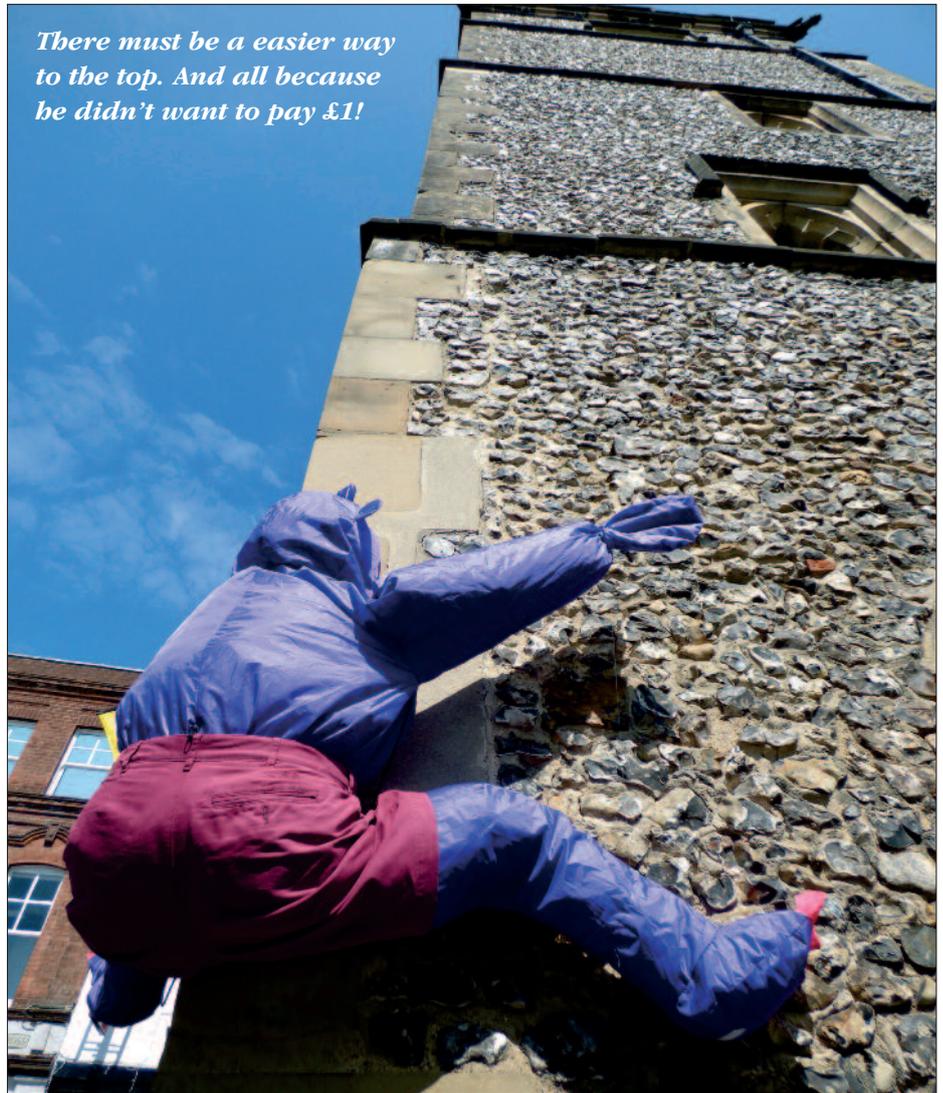
The AGM on 29 June saw St Peter's Octagon room almost full. With business and questions concluded in around 30 minutes, most members then stayed and enjoyed socialising, helped considerably by the tasting, quaffing even, of the six wines on offer. A great way to mark our 56th year.

On a more serious note, the Society does need to fill the Vice-Chairman vacancy as part of its succession plan. Otherwise the committee remains at full strength for another year, although there are opportunities to assist on a variety of activities and even be co-opted. If you would like to know more, please contact the Chairman.

National planning – concern over the future of the Green Belt remains and this is highlighted in the article 'Time for a new kind of NIMBY'.

In last winter's newsletter we expressed sympathy for the people of Exeter over the

There must be a easier way to the top. And all because be didn't want to pay £1!



loss, by fire, of their glorious Royal Clarence Hotel building. Now we offer **congratulations to the citizens of Halifax** with the opening, on 1 August, of the superbly restored Piece Hall, with its 315 identical trading rooms.

In the 1970s, it was saved from demolition for a car park by just one vote. The last three years has seen restoration by Calderdale Council. People flooded to its re-opening. "I think it is brilliant" and "A1 fantastic" were just two of the comments from persons featured that day on the BBC1 national lunchtime news. Hopefully the transformation of our Town Hall, opening in 2018, will receive similar plaudits and publicity.

Local planning – Aircraft noise over St Albans is getting worse and with proposals for further expansion at Luton Airport is a matter of concern. People are urged to voice their irritation by responding to the latest CAA consultation survey, available on its website (<https://consultations.caa.co.uk/policy-development/aviation-noise-impacts/>).

Things seem somewhat confused over the **Civic Centre South** site. In the last newsletter we reported some progress on Angle Property's planning application. Since then, the Council has announced that it has

alternative plans, in conjunction with BDP. If we are not careful, Hertfordshire House could end up simply being converted into flats (for which it has permitted development clearance) and standing apart from the rest of the site. There is a need for liaison and cooperation.

The Society has donated £1000 to **Save Symondshyde** campaign's legal fees.

St Albans School has obtained planning permission to build a three-storey maths block on the site of its current rifle range hut. The land is designated Green Belt. The School based its case on special circumstances to provide an extra ten classrooms to teach maths.

On 7 August, the Council's Plans Central Committee gave planning consent, by six votes to two, subject to no objection from the Secretary of State. Councillors expressed views such as the current hut was inadequate, apparently overlooking the fact that it is not used for teaching, but as a rifle range. Another argued that although it was in the Green Belt, it did not really look like Green Belt, particularly with the massive Sports Hall adjacent to the site. This too was approved as special circumstances in 2011.

Continued over page

NEWS & COMMENTS *continued*

Little regard was given for the environment and conservation area or impact on the local community. The implications of the development, resulting in many hundreds of lorry movements of materials through the city's narrow George Street, Romeland, Fishpool Street down to St Michaels, was not considered. Nor any additional traffic adding to the already considerable congestion and pollution caused by the School's coaches and parents' cars.

There is a need for the Council to monitor the accumulative effect of the School's various developments and what they are doing to the historic conservation area around the Abbey's Precincts. Councillors are letting residents down here and they are justifiably aggrieved. Enough is enough.

The Society has made representation to the Secretary of State but it is not optimistic.



Larks in Park – on Sunday 2 July. Airing of T-shirts! (A summary of the Society's 'Proud of and Not Proud of Post-it Poll' will be in the Winter newsletter.)



Cricket match – the Society and Friends of Victoria Playing Field -v- the Councillors, Sunday 23 July. The French came too!

Time for a new kind of NIMBY

There's a national housing shortage. Both main Parties are saying something has to be done. Things are serious.

It is estimated the Country should be building 250,000 new homes each year to meet demand. The actual number constructed is around 143,000.

Young struggle to buy their first home. Pensioners seeking to downsize cannot find suitable properties. Local infrastructure such as schools, health services, transport and utilities like water, cannot always cope. All this is happening to some degree here and we should be doing more about it.

The Civic Society is alert to all this. It currently opposes Green Belt applications made by developers seeking to pre-empt the long awaited Strategic Local Plan. (The one now sent back to the drawing board by the High Court).

There is enough brownfield nationwide for around 1 million new homes. Some 1.4 million existing properties stand empty. Developers are sitting on about 700,000 existing permissions yet to be started and another 500,000 plots in what's called 'strategic landbanks'.

The figures are mind boggling. Again some of this must apply around St Albans. Hence the Society's recent £1000 donation to Save Symondshyde.

Sajid Javid, the Communities Secretary, previously announced action to get developers building more and cut land-banking. Little appears to have happened. Post election, he is proposing more building on 'wealthy, rural areas'. That

translates as a renewed open season assault on the countryside by developers. The Government's 'safe in our hands' Green Belt promise once again looks suspect.

More homes are needed. Positive steps must be made to build on brownfield, to occupy those empty homes and utilise existing permissions and plots. Financial penalties and/or incentives, could be used.

Only then should some Green Belt land have to be lost. Provided there are strict planning consent conditions which Government must direct to the Planning Inspectorate and local councils in order to deter any speculative, grandiose applications from developers. NO to 4/5 bedroom/bathroom houses; YES for those 2/3 bedroom homes, the very ones suitable, even affordable, for first time buyers and downsizers. With such consents must come funding for new schools, health and social care and transport. It's called good Town Planning. Any new NIMBY's aim would be to insist on such stipulations.

With hindsight, might the former Eversheds site, off Alma/London Roads, been better used for more modest homes akin to those nearby in Inkerman, Alexandra and Bedford Roads. If Green Belt has to be lost, these kind of homes would be a more appropriate use. That land identified for the Railfreight site comes to mind.

Start the debate. Let's get positive action for this growing problem that affects us all.

Editors' note: just in case you had forgotten, NIMBY stands for Not In My Back Yard.

YOU ARE INVITED TO:

A double celebration

At the Civic Society we like to celebrate the best of St Albans. It's certainly not doom and gloom all the time as some would have you believe.

Coming up very soon, from Thursday 7 to Sunday 10 September, is the national, indeed European, Heritage Open Days event.

This is a celebration of our heritage,



an initiative started in 1994. It's something the Society believes St Albans must take part in and everybody in the visitor business should get behind. For the third year running the Civic Society is co-ordinating the two dozen or so attractions in and around the city and district and producing a special, colourful brochure (available at the Arena, Cathedral desk and Clock Tower). Once again, the Herts Advertiser is helping to promote the event, so look out for news in the paper. Details appear on the Council's tourism website www.enjoystalbans.com.

We know from previous years that HODs attracts visitors from all over the Country and across Europe. They come and stay and thus eat, drink, shop and spend here. That's all great for the city's economy. Local powers that be are quick to boast that we are a heritage city. Indeed we are. This is actually doing something positive about it by both promoting and celebrating St Albans to a potentially huge audience.

Then, on Thursday 5 October, for members and invited guests, is the Annual Awards Celebration Evening

at the Maltings Arts Theatre (doors open at 7.30 for 8pm start). This is always a splendid affair with (free)



drinks and canapés followed by a visual presentation in the theatre of various projects completed during the last year that have been nominated for recognition.

The Society's Awards Panel will have short-listed the finalists and visited each one over the past few months. Only they know who has won. It's a bit like the Oscars. Hopefully the names in the envelopes won't get mixed up!

Look forward with us to this double celebration in the coming weeks. You've joined up, so you're welcome to join in.

Some service please

It is good to see work progressing well at the Town Hall to transform it into St Albans Museum and Art Gallery due to open in 2018. The city really will then have something to shout about that has the potential to boost our visitor economy. It could become a centre of civic pride for us all.

The £7.75 million project is partly funded by a £2.8 million grant from the Heritage Lottery. The community is still trying to match-fund £1.4 million of the overall cost through initiatives and events by people and organisations like the Society. As such, there is an added vested interest for residents in the finished product and how it functions.

A sort of Visitor Information service, it is said, will return from its temporary, makeshift location just inside the Arena. While such a move was understandable, the dumping down of the service once offered was not so good.

Remember the friendly and efficient staff at the hitherto TIC? They offered you leaflets and brochures, bus, coach and railway timetables and ticketing, plus local hotel/B&B reservations and information. You could even book local concerts and gigs. A veritable civic culture hub for EVERYONE.

Rumour has it that this comprehensive

service will not return. If so, all that previous training and good efforts of the staff will be thrown away. A skeleton facility akin to the present set up at the Arena is envisaged. Ask Councillors and Officers associated with the Town Hall's exciting upgrade what actually will return and you detect a sense of reluctance to give details. We wonder why. A great opportunity could be lost.

Similar questions should be asked about future facilities at the city station. In the June 15 Herts Advertiser, a St Albans resident wrote about Thameslink bosses giving 'a thought to the long-suffering ticket counter staff' who have to explain and issue all those 'complex' fares. Well, apparently this has been thought about. The answer they have come up with is to CLOSE the ticket office! Customers (passengers) will then have to rely on machines, hoping they have been updated. Or they go and get the attention of staff at the barriers as they do their important job.

We can see some campaigning coming on if these suspicions are true. Memos to Council and Thameslink. Give us excellent customer service which means being able to talk to knowledgeable and helpful



Temporary TIC. Even this was closed mid-August for visitors. What a welcome!

human beings. We pay enough and have contributed enough to expect this.

Editors' note: what you can do. This article featured as our monthly column in 20 July Herts Advertiser. It is interesting that no one from the Council nor Thameslink responded to deny the rumours.

In the 3 August Herts Advertiser was a report of the work taking place at the Town Hall, with pictures and of Councillor Annie Brewster, portfolio holder for Sport, Leisure and Heritage, speaking about the exciting things that will be incorporated. No mention of any TIC and services.

Any reader who shares our concerns about future facilities here and at the station would do well to write to both organisations seeking clarification.

Folkestone visit

We reproduce a report from the New* Folkestone Society's summer newsletter. Enjoy the tour.

“Visit of St Albans Civic Society

On Saturday 6th May most of the Society's Committee were on hand to welcome 33 members of the St Albans Civic Society, led by NFS Vice-President and erstwhile Chairman Eric Roberts.

Our guests were met at the junction of Earls Avenue and The Leas, and, unsurprisingly, their collective jaws dropped at the sight of Madeira Court, Folkestone's (Kent's? England's?) most incongruous building, tacked on to the western end of (the listed) Clifton Crescent. Those needing to recover from the shock were duly whisked off for a restorative coffee at The Grand, whilst the bulk of the party were shown the

more treasured aspects of The Leas – Clifton Crescent itself, with its planned gap (which Eric was once instrumental in helping to preserve from development) to afford a view of Holy Trinity tower, currently, ironically, obscured by foliage; the Harvey statue sadly draped in guano, monument to one of our famous forefathers; the Leas Cliff Hall, a rather fine building celebrating its 90th birthday; the Leas Pavilion with its glorious past and uncertain future; the forlorn Leas Lift; the Memorial Arch; Albion Villas and the Road of Remembrance – at which point the party broke for lunch, dispersing to various corners of the town. Some of us repaired to the British Lion, where Eric and I were able to catch up on respective business.

Reconvening by the Memorial Arch after lunch, our guests were next shown the magnificent Bayle area, including the pond, and then into the garden of The Battery, courtesy of Paul and Judy Fox. Paul was on hand to answer questions about the history of the building and following grateful adieus, we made our way to the top of the Old High Street (noting the famous pigs' heads once belonging to Tommy Taylor the butcher

and down to the Fishmarket, as far as Cornelia Parker's Mermaid statue. Charming was the verdict, and long may it remain so. After a final cup of tea with Eric at the excellent Steep Street on the Old High Street, I bade him farewell, and the party was back in St Albans by 7.25pm. *(By 6pm High Speed Train from Folkestone to St Pancras and 7.04 from there. Both on the dot!)*

Many had, in Eric's words, found Folkestone delightful. Some picked up on the 70's vandalism and the need for some TLC, but all had enjoyed their time here greatly. Your committee, meanwhile, is planning a reciprocal visit to St Albans sometime in 2018.

Lindsey Page

* The New Folkestone Society is the town's civic society. The 'New' applies to 'Society' not 'Folkestone'. The original society became moribund. A new one was formed in 1974 at the British Lion. A plaque recalls this in its Dickens snug. Paul Fox was one of the four founders and Treasurer. Lindsey Page is a committee member, past chairman and long-time editor. Both are Vice-Presidents. The NFS and Civic Society movement owe them a lot.

News from the Clock Tower

The ground floor room has been decorated using special paint required for this listed building. It looks very smart – do come and see. Paint was donated by Brewers Ltd; work was carried out by Tobi Morrissey; co-ordinated by Anthony Oliver. Paid for by the Clock Tower Joint Committee of the Arc & Arc and the Society.

The season continues to see visitors climbing from all over the world. Recently there was a delightful family from Seattle, and many people from Spain, to name but a few. St Albans folk, young and old, climb up once again, or visit for a first time. They all love it!

Entrance is free over Heritage Open Days (see Double Celebration). Normally it is just £1 for adults, children under 14 are free, at weekends until end of September. On Saturday 9 September the Society's "Heritage and History Revisited" (free) one hour walk will start outside the entrance at 2.30pm.

As always, volunteers are needed to keep this amazing building open. Contact Jill Singer joxhey@gmail.com 01727 838965 or 07710 784 960.

Not so good is that the clock has been stopped for months awaiting attention from the clocksmith firm in Derby.

The St Albans Civic Society is now on Twitter. Follow us at [@stalbancivicsoc](https://twitter.com/stalbancivicsoc)



Email Alerts and e-Newsletters

From time to time the Society alerts members of forthcoming events and topics of interest by email. If you would like to be added to the current circulation list, please request by email to: stalbanscivicsociety@gmail.com

For those who wish to read their newsletter electronically this can be done by going to the Society's website (see top of page) in mid-March, June, September, December each year.

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 consulted about any item this should not be automatically deemed as leading to consent.



Tour de l'horloge – a French Clock Tower

Spotted on a visit to Barcelonnette in the Hautes Alpes. This tower dates from 1316, even older than ours! Damaged in religious wars in 1592, it was rebuilt in 1639. It then collapsed in 1793 the day after a dance held inside! Now it has pride of place in the main town square.

Forthcoming events

Thursday 7 to Sunday 10 September

Heritage Open Days

See special brochure.

Saturday 9 September

Heritage and History Revisited

FREE one hour guided walk.

Starts 2.30pm outside Clock Tower.

Thursday 5 October

Annual Awards Celebration Evening

For members and invited guests. Doors open 7.30 for 8.00pm start. Maltings Arts Theatre. Drinks and canapés. FREE.

Saturday 7 October

Autumn Coach Visit

To Southwell (Notts) and Minster.

See special leaflet.

Tuesday 21 November

Designing Modern Architecture in a Historic City

Talk by Sir Terry Farrell, Vice-Chairman of Civic Voice. In the Library of St Albans School. 7.30pm (doors open 7.00). FREE. 90 places. Collecting box for donations.

The 2018 Programme Card will be included in the Winter Newsletter

Calling all Residents' Associations

Do you know that you can be affiliated to the Society for FREE. There are no strings attached; no loss of independence. It enables us to exchange views, raise any issues, and maybe even tackle them together.

We send two free newsletters quarterly each Association. The Society is open to exchange articles/letters, maybe for publication. To sign up, contact Jill Singer (joxhey@gmail.com or 01727 838965).

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

It is with sadness we report the death of:

MICHAEL MORGAN, the Society's former Treasurer. With his late wife, Margaret, the Society had two loyal and staunch supporters. They helped deliver newsletters, came on visits and to talks, and volunteered for the Clock Tower.

DOROTHY WESTWOOD, who occasionally did a cartoon for the newsletter and, with husband Len, came on visits and was active on local issues.

The Society extends its condolences to Len and both families.