

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future -
with an eye on the past

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

Newsletter | Spring 2018

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

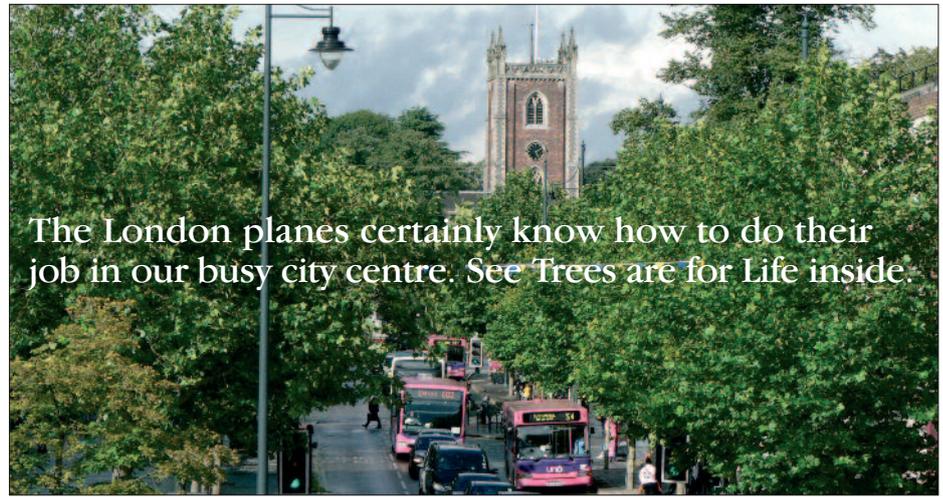
NEWS & COMMENTS

Your membership renewal is due on 1 April (unless you joined after 30 September 2017, then it's 1 April 2019). Please pay promptly. It is immensely helpful if you do. The Society appreciates your support. Rates remain unchanged – that's around 2p a day!

In this edition, there is a **Membership Renewal tear-off slip** at the bottom of the flyer with details of the **Spring Visit to Sandwich and Deal** on Saturday 12 May. There is also advance notice of the Society's review that the Committee is embarking on, with a message from our Chairman.

NATIONAL PLANNING – There seems to be an impasse. Despite the PM stating she was taking personal control of the housing situation, and announcing at PMQ's on 20 December 2017 that action was being taken to release land quicker and building on existing permissions, nothing much has happened. Indeed, Oliver Letwin has been asked to conduct a 'year-long review' into this subject. Yet the issues of landbanks and unbuilt sites with planning consent, a million homes at the last count, are well known. There may be other pressing matters that are occupying the Government, but this should not mean this important domestic subject fails to get the urgent attention it requires.

LOCAL PLANNING – The Society has responded to the recent Local Plan consultation – we hope you did too, as your views are important in the process.



The London planes certainly know how to do their job in our busy city centre. See **Trees are for Life** inside.

We found it a somewhat demeaning and trivial exercise. From the reports to the Council's Policy Committee, it appears that the local planning team are relying on the work done for the earlier draft, dismissed by the Inspector last summer, and there is little new substantive material.

The consultation has one plan that shows eight housing sites in the Green Belt. Nonetheless, this is short of the target by between 3,000 and 4,500 housing units. Worse, it completely ignores any of the infrastructure requirements such as schools, medical facilities and other services, and even employment, much of which will also have to be provided in the Green Belt. Overall, we fear there is a complete absence of serious purpose or intent in this consultation exercise. Is the Council simply going through the motions in the expectation that the work will shortly be taken out of its hands by consultants appointed by the Government?

The Society's response is on the website.

FORMER BHS SITE – The developers, Reef Estates, are proposing a 131-bed hotel and two restaurants, and carried out a public consultation exercise in January. The Society has known about this plan since last summer when it was approached by the Council for confidential pre-consultation comments. We were more than happy to participate, concluding that in principle the hotel proposal was acceptable but requested that the ground floor use kept the option of being used for either retail or catering (A1 / A3 mixed use) and not solely for restaurants.

It is over two years since BHS collapsed and no other retailer has come forward. The notion that there can be a return to an old-style department store concept is well and truly dead. Retail in St Albans has moved on apace, especially since it is claimed residents here are among the highest on-line shoppers in the UK!

The proposed plan is for a complete

demolition followed by a rebuild project. The Society's Design Advisory Group continues to liaise with the developer and the Council prior to submission of a planning application for any further comments.

This is a key building space in the centre of St Peter's Street.

AWARDS FOR 2017 – your nominations for projects completed in 2017 that have caught your eye are invited. Please send to Peter Trevelyan – see *newsletter introduction*.

CHEERS TO OUR PUBS – Following on from our last newsletter about the importance of keeping St Albans pubs' heritage, members may have noticed a second front-page article in the Herts Advertiser on 8 February (the first on 17 August 2017 was almost identical) about Ye Olde Fighting Cocks.

The article again reported that the landlord has ambitious plans for a £1m building project. This will include a new rear seating area catering for 200 people (more than doubling the existing seating in the pub) as well as a micro-brewery. In principle, it must be good that there are long term plans for this famous pub which is so much part of the St Albans story and attraction.

It will be necessary to ensure the development can be realised without harm to the setting of the late-Victorian listed building, or if it might cause major traffic and parking issues in Abbey Mill Lane, around Romeland and through nearby streets. We certainly do not want to see a repeat of what happened to the ill-fated Spotted Bull project.

Hopefully, there will be a restoration of the two iconic pub signs, sadly missed.

SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER

**Subscriptions are due
on 1 April 2018.
Your membership is valued.
Please renew promptly.**

What's It All About – St Albans?

Another New Year. What will 2018 bring? It's a time to take stock. Maybe make some resolutions and then get on with things as the weeks go by. Just like last year then!

It's not quite like that at the Civic Society. The committee has decided to conduct a review and ask some serious questions about its activities and how it involves members. In the coming months it will be consulting not only its membership but also the wider public. This, dear reader, includes YOU.

It involves pertinent questions like: as a civic society are we meeting our remit; keeping up with the city's development challenges; protecting and promoting St Albans' conservation area (soon to celebrate a 50th anniversary), heritage and amenities; communicating effectively with members, the public and Councils. Are we offering what people want with our various talks, visits and other events?

Of particular importance is the need to engage with younger people who are the city's future. They are key to things but, inevitably, lead busy lives and perhaps have little time to dwell on what's happening in the place where they live. Many of us know this because we have been through that stage of life already. Therein lies a clue to our deliberations. None of us are getting any younger!

Take any civic society and you invariably find that it has a mostly grey-haired

membership – shades of our committee! How to attract new members is an ongoing enigma and raises the question – what do people want from their civic society?

Fortunately for us it is not about money, as the Society's finances are healthy and we can sometimes offer funds to local community projects.

The key to the future is remaining relevant, keeping and attracting members who support our aims and who can help influence the Society and the city's future.

It's quite a challenge. The Society believes it has had some positive contributions and campaigns: saving the cinema building; opposing the railfreight depot; the tree sponsorship scheme; supporting projects such as the new Museum and Gallery; promoting Heritage Open Days; scrutinizing planning and licensing applications.

Inevitably we have ruffled some feathers. And why not? Sometimes somebody just has to say something and be there to take up an issue or offer advice and support.

As Cilla once sang 'What's It All About?' We really do want to hear your views. Email stalbanscivicsociety@gmail.com or phone Tim Boatswain on 07873586074.

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



The Chairman writes:

As part of the Society's review a questionnaire is to be produced for members.

For some time now charities have had much attention in the media, especially because of concerns over some fund-raising methods, and in the summer last year the Charities Commission issued a revised edition of the Charity Governance Code. While this has not had any major implications for St Albans Civic Society, the trustees have thought it timely to undertake a review of the Society's governance and practice.

A Review Advisory Group has been established, which has been looking into the structure and operation of the Society, to see how it can be improved and whether its organisation is, in the modern jargon, "fit-for-purpose".

The trustees have recognised the importance of consulting the Society's

membership and with this in mind the Review Advisory Group is preparing a questionnaire for all members. Of course, we know that some questionnaires can be off-putting and miss the point, so it is important that the Society gets it right. For the questionnaire to be relevant and meaningful it should engage members in a positive manner. To ensure an inclusive role of the membership, the Review Advisory Group are looking for a few members who would be willing to help by commenting on the draft of the questionnaire.

If you feel you have a view on how the questionnaire should be worded and would like to help, please contact the Society either by emailing stalbanscivicsociety@gmail.com or phone me on 07873586074. Thank you.

Tim Boatswain
Chairman

Sustainability

Sustainability is not a fad. It is vital in this age of global warming.

Mrs Bruntland, Norwegian Prime Minister, chaired the 1987 International Commission which created this definition:

"Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

These profound words remain the key definition, influencing sustainability policies in many countries. We cannot continue using up the planet's resources, and causing pollution (as we are with plastics).

A good quality holistic and inter-disciplinary design approach is needed, for both new and refurbishment projects, covering design, construction and building materials.

Creating a sustainable building, new or existing, involves many factors, including:

- renewable materials
- sustainably sourced materials, particularly timber
- avoiding toxic materials
- reducing energy costs
- water efficiency and recycling
- natural ventilation – avoiding expensive, polluting air conditioning.

In St Albans we must apply these measures to our stock of historic buildings.

The Government intends to reduce global warming, and make new buildings use carbon-zero solutions from this year. Sustainability is a key issue impacting on the full life cycle of a development. Many occupiers require buildings that perform well, promoting well-being. Sustainability brings added value.

BREEAM (the UK Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) was developed by the BRE in Garston. It enables sustainability performance to be measured, and is increasingly being used by Local Authorities.

Newer terms, such as social sustainability, bring in new factors; not just in construction, but in transport, energy and exhaust pollution - a real problem facing St Albans. Environmental friendliness using greenery and landscaping enhances well-being.

The term Financial Sustainability is now being used in the context of financial viability, and perhaps mis-used, as 'Can we afford not to do it? What are the costs to society of different options?' These terms do not apply to the sustainability being considered here. This is simply to ask if a project is financially viable.

Continued on next page

So what relevance has all this to St Albans? Referring back to Mrs Bruntland, the answer is that what we do now must not compromise the ability of our future generations to meet their own needs. We must care for our wonderful city and its future. The government is asking us to build many more homes, and this must be done in a sustainable way.

We must produce an environment using less energy, cut pollution and promote health and wellbeing and care for our planet.

Sustainable St Albans is a charity whose Sustainability Week will take place between 21 and 28 April 2018, supported by the Civic Society.

Geraint John

Note: Thursday 26 April, 6-8pm at AECOM offices in Victoria Street there will be a talk **'Architecture, building engineering and interior design, for health, sustainability and wellbeing'**. Speakers: Ant Wilson MBE Director of AECOM and Geraint John the Society's President. FREE – do come along!

Retailer of the Year 2017

The Society took part in the Gala Evening held in the Arena on 29 January last. It championed the Market Traders' category, as well as giving £250 sponsorship to help support the event. 'Tyler's Fruit and Veg' won this accolade. Top honours went to the 'Flower Box' in the Village Arcade. 'Jane and Dada' won the special Star Award. Jane, a member, sadly died last September.

Both the Review and Radio Verulam covered the event – so some good publicity.

Note: Can't get a Review? Look in Tesco's entrance on Wednesdays and the rear entrance of Boots – copies can be found there for several days each week.

The Herts Advertiser? Copies can be picked up late Thursday mornings from the Council offices, Arena, and the paper's office entrance in French Row. Failing that try Bradford & Howley or Frost's, estate agents in Chequer Street. Or just buy it!

News from the Clock Tower

The annual 'thank you' party for the 'Clockateers' takes place on Friday 16 March, from 7.30pm at the Verulamium Museum.

More volunteers are always needed, so if you are interested and would like to know more, please come along and maybe sign up, or contact Jill Singer on 01727-838965 or joxhey@gmail.com

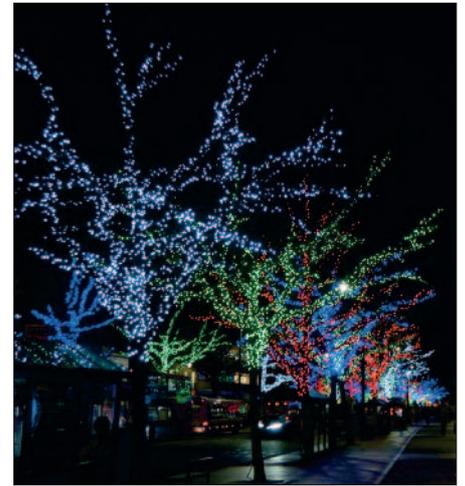
Trees are for Life

A recent Royal Society of Biology (RSB) poll for the UK's favourite tree saw the horse chestnut coming out top. It beat 14 other trees. It's thought that affection for conkers may have swayed the vote.

The result was particularly pleasing for the Civic Society. It was only in November 2016 it funded a special interpretation panel for the Verdun tree, itself a horse chestnut, grown from a conker taken from the last tree left standing on the Verdun battlefield of 1916. You can see both tree and panel near the entrance to the Vintry Garden in Waxhouse Gate Passage.

This poll reminds us, in a St Albans with growing air pollution problems, of the importance of trees, both in private gardens and along our streets. Dr. Laura Bellingan of the RSB explained: 'Trees are a valuable part of our culture and economy as well as the environment. They provide us with clean air, building materials, food and fuel, flood management; they are home to a wide range of wildlife and they are beautiful.' We would also add that they enhance our sense of wellbeing and improve mental health as well as providing cooling shade and adding to the look and value of our streetscapes.

Take St Peter's Street. Imagine it without those 36 London Plane Trees. Thirty three were planted back in 1999 – 2003 through the efforts of the Civic Society as part of its Tree Sponsorship Campaign in partnership with the local Council. This raised nearly £10,000. Today it would be called crowdfunding to create the scene you see today. We can be proud of this.



The London planes certainly know how to do their job in our busy city centre. They not only work away removing bad air through their leaves but also through their bark. This they shed, enabling them to breathe more easily – and us! They are also the framework for the city's much improved Christmas lights thanks to BID.

The County Council is now the custodian of street trees. Does it appreciate what has been created and the imminent need for some pruning and a replacement strategy?

The Society's Tree Sponsorship scheme has raised around £25,000 over the years. It is still alive. This year £2,136 has been raised for 10 trees, 3 more than last year. For details visit www.stalbans.gov.uk/sponsor-a-tree or telephone 01727 819363 and ask for the Tree Officer.

There is a Tree Book for Remembrance organized by the Society with an optional free entry for each tree. An excellent way to remember a loved one, celebrate an anniversary or birthday. It is on display outside the Council Chamber.

St Albans needs its trees and the trees need you.

Vintry Garden – is this worth it?

Another Christmas Market has taken place in the Vintry Garden. The result is all too plain to see. It raises the question as to whether the damage to this special peaceful haven is acceptable, along with the disintegration of the York stone paving in Waxhouse Gate Passage caused by heavy vehicles lifting the chalets in and out.

The Christmas Market's accumulated loss is now around £250,000 at a time when our Council is strapped for cash. Should this go on? Is the market in the right place? Does it meet visitors' and residents' expectations? Is it enhancing St Albans' reputation as a visitor destination, particularly on non-Charter Market days? WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW YOUR VIEWS. stalbanscivicsociety@gmail.com





Southwell Visit

Southwell Minster is a magnificent Norman building with an Early English quire and a renowned 13th century Chapter House. It is in the centre of the smallest English cathedral town (population 8,000) and surrounded by a largely Georgian town centre with over 240 listed buildings. On the day of the visit (7.10.17), the delightful Saturday market was, to our surprise, further enlivened by a colourful charity event involving the whole community in knitting and crocheting covers to bollards, seats, trees, a cycle, and even over a Mini!



Having toured the town, many of us took the coach to the outskirts of Southwell to visit the Victorian Workhouse, built in 1824, and now owned by the National Trust. It is the most complete surviving example of its type and served as a model for many later buildings constructed under the New Poor Law of 1834.

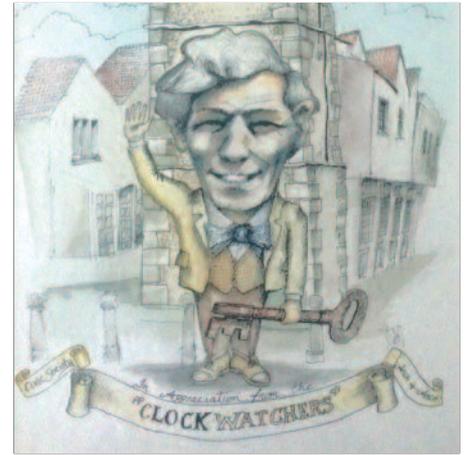
The visit concluded with a stop in the village of Bottesford for dinner at the Thatch Restaurant. All-in-all a successful day out.

Peter Denney

Editors' note: Thank you Brian Holmes for organising things. He is now arranging a coach visit to Norwich for the Autumn on Saturday 29 September. More next time.

OBITUARIES

Members were saddened to learn of the death of **Dennis Owen** late last summer at the age of 94. A member of the Civic Society since its formation in 1961, Dennis served as chairman from 1981 to 1984 and again from 1989 to 1990. As an architect, artist and one-time St Albans councillor, his skills, knowledge and enthusiasm were of huge benefit to the Society, whether in engaging with planners and developers, or in overseeing the Clock Tower. Many will recall his delightful invitations to the



annual 'Clockateers' Party. With the wraps coming off the Town Hall and as we anticipate its renaissance, it should be remembered that ten years ago, as one of his many projects, Dennis was instrumental in campaigning for a new museum for St Albans. Sadly we will be celebrating its opening in his absence.

We also report the death of **Wendy Watson-Simpson**, the wife of a former Chairman. She was a long time member, related to the Glossop family, a name linked to the World War I Street Memorials and the Memorial Garden by the Abbey Gateway.

The Society extends condolences to both families.

Forthcoming events 2018

Thursday 15 March

Reflections on Architectural Quality

A talk by Bob Thompson. A joint Civic Society/Herts Association of Architects meeting. The Cross Street Centre* Dagnall Street at 8pm – FREE

Thursday 19 April

Civic Voice Awards

A talk by Max Farrell, Chair of Civic Voice Design Awards. The Cross Street Centre* Dagnall Street at 8pm – FREE

Saturday 12 May

Spring Visit by High Speed Train to Sandwich and Deal

Two very different towns on the Kent coast. One full of timber-framed buildings, the other quaint Georgian/Victorian domestic architecture, with a modern pier.

Thursday 24 May

Smallford Station: starting point for a Local Community Heritage Project.

A talk by Jeff Lewis. The Cross Street Centre*Dagnall Street at 8pm – FREE

Thursday 28 June

Annual General Meeting

The Octagon Centre, St Peter's Church at 8pm, followed by refreshments and an opportunity to meet fellow members. Paid up members only.

*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
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- National Pharmacy Association
- St Columba's College
- T&B (St Albans) Ltd