

# St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future -  
*with an eye on the past*

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

## Newsletter | Summer 2019

*This edition has been prepared by Eric Roberts (Committee) and Peter Trevelyan (Awards). If you have any comments, please write to the Editors at 3 Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN or email [ptrevelyan@aol.com](mailto:ptrevelyan@aol.com)*  
**We very much appreciate your views and information on topics.**

### NEWS & COMMENTS



we draw members' attention to the forthcoming **Annual General Meeting** on

Thursday 27 June at 8pm. We look forward to seeing you there to participate in proceedings and enjoy the refreshments and socialising afterwards. **Please remember to bring your copy of the Annual Report and Accounts**, included for members in this newsletter. To be able to attend the AGM you have to be a paid-up member – subscriptions were due on 1 April. Please renew if you have not yet done so **otherwise your membership will lapse**. Why not set up a standing order? Contact John Thomson (Treasurer) on 07711 696417.

**Nominations for the Committee are invited.** Anyone interested, please contact Tim Boatswain (see above). Then, to proceed, you will need to send in your name and signature, together with signatures of a proposer and seconder. All three people must be paid-up members of the Society. Send to Jill Singer (Secretary), 2 St Michael's Street AL3 4SE or [joxhey@gmail.com](mailto:joxhey@gmail.com) by 21 June 2019.

### NATIONAL PLANNING

It appears that some politicians are casting a covetous eye on the Green Belt once again. Kit Malthouse MP is advocating building on the GB by relocating boundaries and also arguing that Councils should "aspire to build the conservation areas of the future". This has been done, but needs really good planning and design, commitment and time! Meanwhile, the Campaign to Protect

### Hertfordshire House - wraps come off! Will there be more of the same?

See article inside.



Rural England (CPRE) has identified enough derelict brownfield land to build one million new homes, particularly in places that already have considerable supporting infrastructure. The CPRE is pushing ministers to introduce a 'brownfield-first' policy that ensures previously developed or underused land is prioritised for building. Surely this ought already to be happening.

### LOCAL PLANNING

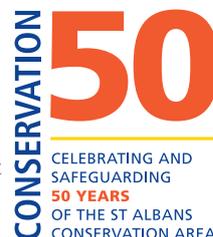
On 29 March 2019, the District Council submitted the local plan to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for public examination. It provides policies and proposals for the future development of the District up to 2036. The Society participated in the consultation process as reported earlier this year.

The plan will now be subjected to an independent public examination by the planning inspectorate. Dates are yet to be announced. The current documents can be viewed on the Council's website (and see planning policy section).

Related to this is a Government grant of £750,000 to study the potential for 11,000 homes built on the Green Belt between St Albans and Dacorum (see Herts Advertiser reports 28 March and 2 May 2019). Member Brian Hanks has written a letter about this, originally intended for the press, and we have put it on our website as it offers a contribution to the debate.

### CONSERVATION 50

Full details are now on the website and have recently been sent to members signed up to receive email news from the Society. To summarise: there is an exhibition at St Albans Museum + Gallery now to 21 July;



a conference (free and open to all) at Dagnall Street Baptist Church Saturday 6 July 2-5pm, guest speakers and 'Question Time' panel. Please come along and also tell your friends and neighbours. There is also a reception (free, but by invitation) at St Albans Museum + Gallery on 6 July 6-7.30 pm. See <http://conservation50.org/>

The Society hosted Civic Voices' **Larger Societies Forum** on 16 March at the Clarion Comfort Hotel. It was a great success

## AGM Notice of Annual General Meeting

**8pm Thursday 27 June 2019**

The Octagon Centre  
St Peter's Church, St Peter's Street  
Followed by refreshments  
*Paid-up members only.*

*Have you renewed your subscription?*  
**FINAL REMINDER!**

If you have not yet paid, please do so **NOW**. If payment is not made by 1 July 2019 then, regrettably, **membership will lapse**. The Society values your support  
*Rates are unchanged - see back page.*

## ANNUAL AWARDS EVENING



Please note that this has been brought forward three months to **24 July at Kingsbury Barn** 7.30 for 8.00pm. Parking for the disabled only by prior arrangement. See back page.

The atmosphere will be informal, with table seating, drinks and canapés. **FREE**. We hope it will appeal to even more members. Come along and celebrate!

# Taking our trees for granted

The Society tries to keep its ear to the ground thus picking up on matters of concern being expressed from people across the city. And this is not just from its members. A recent topic was the plight of the city's trees.

Actually we've been here before. In 1999 there was a right royal battle to save the Gombards Yews in Verulam Road, threatened with felling by a seemingly then uncaring Council. The campaigners won and these trees, and wall, remain today. Within a year there was, what we would call today, a crowdfunding campaign to find sponsorship to replace the ailing limes along St Peter's Street. There was a great response, co-ordinated by the Society, and today we have a scene that has re-established the beauty of a street that was once called 'one of the finest in Europe'. More about our city's trees can be seen and read in the reprinted and updated book 'The Remarkable Trees of St Albans, Revisited' by Kate Bretherton. At £14.95 it is a great read. As the book says, the Tree Sponsorship partnership between the Council and the Civic Society is still going. Visit the former's website for information or telephone 01727 819363 and ask to speak with the Tree Officer.

Yet people continue to take trees for granted. They do so at their peril. Not only because of their beauty and greening effect, but for the environmental help they give in easing pollution and flash flooding. They provide shade and enhance a sense of wellbeing. They have even been said to influence property prices – usually upwards!



*The new Robinia tree planted on 13 May – three months late. We hope it will survive. Alas it is now being cluttered by 'A' boards!*

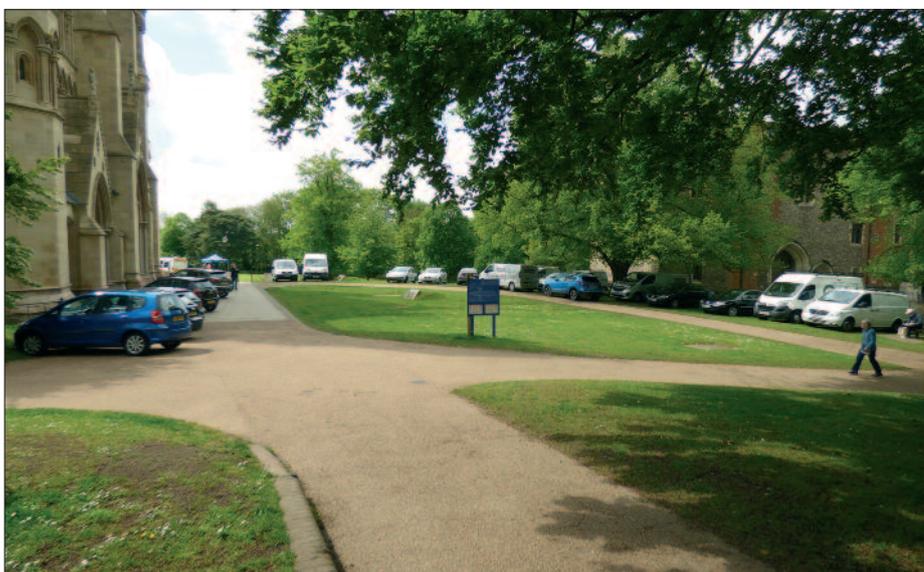
Nevertheless, there have been applications to fell trees being granted by our Council. Some have been in very sensitive city centre sites – one not that far from those notorious Gombards Yews. Recent Government legislation seeks to give residents more say in how their local trees should be protected. Not before time – but alas too late for many of our trees. The recent questionable mass felling of urban trees in Sheffield has resulted in some very red faces at their Council for misleading residents. Here in St Albans there is the

issue with Network Rail still to be resolved and its intention to cut down trees in the Lancaster Road area. The Society has been much involved with people in the neighbourhood challenging the need for such drastic action.

We need to think much more carefully about our trees and stop losing them so easily. In fact, more should be planted and so it is encouraging to hear the announcement by Sir William Worsley, the Government's tree champion, that one million 'pavement trees' are to be planted in England's towns and cities. Ten million pounds has been allocated towards this and Local Authorities and third parties can compete for these funds. We are investigating how to get a slice of this cake for St Albans.

Meanwhile the Society is drawing up a Tree Charter for the city. In the words of that song 'Woodman, Spare that tree... Chop not a single chop'. Think!

**Editors note:** The recent treatment of pouring some waste liquid around the base of the tree in front of the Town Hall + Gallery illustrates an appalling attitude. Who did it, and why? (picture by member Mollie Kennedy)



*Top: this is a regular sight that greets visitors by the Clock Tower. They belong to The Snug public house opposite. Why do they not use their own curtilage and thus affront their own building?*

*Left: we trust this parking at the West Front is only temporary whilst works on the new Welcome Centre are completed. It should not be allowed to become a regular practice.*

## Many a true word is spoken in jest?

The Clock Tower is open again at weekends until late September. Volunteers who do this (Clockateers) will tell you residents and visitors love it. As the only medieval (1405) town belfry in the country it is unique. St Albans should be proud of it. Yet sometimes we wonder. Recently some fast food kiosks opened up right in front. This blocked the view of the tower and its two information plaques. One recalls the Eleanor Cross that once stood there but was demolished because it got in the way of things. Will history repeat itself?

This trashing of an important aspect of our city's public realm prompted a draft article intended for 1 April. Correspondent Flora Poil reported how the Clock Tower was to be demolished to make way for more of these fast food stalls. The usual anonymous Council spokesperson explained "it would enable many people to enjoy their takeaways sat on the seats watching the traffic go by and see the lights changing from red, yellow and green and back again." The spokesperson went on to assure that the old rubble would be put to good use and help infill Verulamium lake. Society Chairman's (printable) response expressed dismay at such civic vandalism. All this was in jest of course but if Stamford



*The Clock Tower was opened on a sunny Good Friday morning by our Mayor.*

can have its historic and TV famous cobbles threatened by tarmac, watch out! Such humour, however, can make an impact. Like the recent 1 April 'closing' of the Boot and Fighting Cocks (Herts Ad 4 April) emphasising their huge hike in business rates that threatens their future.

Remember it was only last autumn when the Society sent a questionnaire to all its

500 members asking for their views, comments and priorities. The overall response was very good. Whilst you expected it to be involved in major new projects and make the case for good practical conservation and quality design, you wanted it to continue to stand up for the image of St Albans. **Please continue to tell us your views via email, at meetings and in response to the quarterly newsletter as it helps decide our policies.**

Too often the predictable voices of commerce and commercial interest predominate and start reducing things down to almost the lowest common denominator to gain consensus. Finance is important but the conservation case for keeping up appearances and for top quality new developments has proven to reap great dividends too. Think York, Chester, Norwich or Winchester.

Visitors who don't like what they see don't come back. They tell others too. Now that's something not to laugh about.

**Editors' notes:** Try and go on the Stamford visit (back page) to see if those cobbles still survive. It is a delightful town. We are thinking of asking Flora Poil to give a Talk next year on 1 April!

As always, new Clock Tower volunteers are welcome. Contact Jill Singer (Secretary) on 01727 838965 or joxhey@gmail.com.

## City Centre Opportunity Site South – update and comment

The Spring Newsletter featured an article on this proposed development. It also expressed concern that an opportunity for a really quality design *might* still be lost. Although the fact that the Council and its developer were still specifically engaging with the Society, through its Design Advisory Group, was encouraging. Especially so, as we reported, after an independent Design Review Panel set up by the Council, which had met on the 7 March, expressed some of the same criticisms as the Society.

Since then, we are pleased to say that the Society has been invited to comment further over the potential design and a comprehensive report from the Design Advisory Group was sent to the Council's planners on 17 April. It is available to read on the website and, as always, we welcome your comments. A planning application is now awaited. As soon as it is lodged, members will be advised by email. Do then inspect the plans and make your views

known to the Council. **It would be helpful to copy in the Society so that we can take note of what members think. We are also proposing to hold a special meeting on the plans once again to seek your views.**

The Spring Newsletter's article also appeared in the 28 March edition of the Herts Advertiser as the Society's regular monthly column. The next week, there was a critical letter from Mel Hilbrow, Vice-Chair of Look!StAlbans making certain allegations to which our Chairman, Tim Boatman, replied the following week.

As Tim pointed out, whilst it was totally legitimate to disagree with our article, the accusations that the Society was undemocratic and lacking transparency needed to be challenged.

For the record, throughout this development process, we have not only pressed for an architectural competition but as wide a debate as possible, even to have a stall in the market. We have sought your views and, indeed, continue to do so. Contrary to



a further erroneous allegation made by Mr Hilbrow in another letter in the 8 April edition, we did indeed advise members of the 10 January 2019 Community Design Review (CDR) in our December email news.

The Society's meetings with the Council and developers have always been reported and transparent. It has never claimed to be the (only) community voice but *another* voice, as a conservation and amenity society – the local Civic Society since 1961. That is what we are; it says so 'on the tin' when anyone joins us. It is this members can expect from us and to stand up for.

We will continue to keep you advised and to seek your views. Once again we remind you of the AGM on 27 June where you can

*Continued on back page*

*City Centre Opportunity Site South. Cont.*

ask questions and give your views to the Committee and fellow members.

Mr Hilbrow did make a very good point though about a body polling its members. We agree. But wonder if it is always practised.

It is good, indeed somewhat flattering, to know that other people are getting to read our news and articles. After all, do we not share a common goal in wanting the very best in design for St Albans? The word 'synergy' comes to mind.

### AUTUMN COACH VISIT to Stamford and Burghley House

*Saturday 28 September* £35pp inclusive.

Book now/reserve a place by email to [eilyholmes@liv.co.uk](mailto:eilyholmes@liv.co.uk) tel: 01727 843389 or write to Brian Holmes, 16 Trevelyan Place, St Albans AL1 2DT.

Cheques to 'St Albans Civic Society'. More details/booking form in Autumn Newsletter (out early September).

## Noise and Nuisance Licensed Premises: how to report a problem

Members asked us to repeat the advice on how to report problems arising from licensed premises and events in public places like the city centre and Verulamium Park.

**A** problem must be recorded with St Albans District Council Licensing and/or Environmental Health Departments for it to be taken into account in future decisions.

If you register a complaint, you should keep a record of the complaint and the reference number which should be given to you by the Council. If not, ensure you ask for one. The reference number ensures that the complaint has been logged and that you can reference the complaint in any future hearings, consultations or correspondence.

### For Licensed premises and events:

Out of Hours Compliance Officers work on Friday and Saturday nights between 18.00 - 03.00. These are specialist Licensing and Environmental Health Council Officers. They can be contacted on:

**Licensing Hotline: 0777 0701 720**

If you cannot talk to an officer immediately you can leave a message on the voicemail as this probably means they are busy dealing with another premises. Our experience is that they call back within the half hour. They attend as soon as possible and the ideal is if they can witness the problem themselves.

If you do call the Out of Hours Hotline, contact the Licensing dept the next working day to obtain a reference number

for your records. (Tel: 01727 819406)

At other times complaints about licensed premises can also be logged with the 24 hour call centre on 01727 811155. Or during office hours on 01727 819406.

Complaints can also be sent via email to [licensing@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@stalbans.gov.uk)

Post to: Licensing Authority, St Albans City and District Council, Civic Centre, St Peters Street, St Albans, Herts AL1 3JE tel: 01727 819406.

**If you make a complaint, in all instances, get a reference number. All this may seem tedious but it is essential as evidence if problems arise.**

### Disturbances in the street:

For cases of disturbance contact the Police on the non emergency number 101.

If it looks like an emergency 999 should be dialled.

There are specific public order police patrols during weekend nights around the city centre in addition to the usual police response.

This information is available on the council's website:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/business/Business-in-St-Albans/StAlbans-Council-Services-for-Businesses/BusinessLicences/alcohol-and-entertainment-licences/haveyoursay/default.aspx> **Please keep for reference.**

## Forthcoming events

*Saturday 15 June*

### Visit to Bishop's Garden

5.00 – 6.30pm

Abbey Gate House, Abbey Mill Lane.

To book, contact Katherine Booth [kemb1@hotmail.com](mailto:kemb1@hotmail.com)

*Thursday 27 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.

*Sunday 30 June*

### Larkus in the Parkus

12 – 4pm in Victoria Playing Field.

The Society will have a stall.

*Saturday 6 July*

### Conservation 50 Conference, Reception and Exhibition

See reference in this Newsletter.

*Wednesday 24 July*

### Annual Awards Evening

Kingsbury Barn 7.30 for 8.00pm.

A celebration for members and invited guests. Drinks and canapés. FREE.

Nearest parking in St Michaels's car park. For disabled parking tel 01727 838965

*13 – 22 September*

### Heritage Open Days

See national website and email news.

## 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	<b>Free</b>
Corporate	£50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Moragh Ormiston, tel: 01727 865421 or [moraghormiston@waitrose.com](mailto:moraghormiston@waitrose.com) or post to Thatched House, Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN

### The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support from the following Corporate Members:

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

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 automatically 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.