

## **St Albans Civic Society Awards Evening 24 July 2019 at Kingsbury Barn**

The Society pulled no punches in its recent Awards ceremony. Having reviewed more than 50 development projects completed in the calendar year 2018, and critically dismissed many of them along the way, it gave its highest Award to the renovated Town Hall, and the Trevelyan Prize for the most outstanding conservation project to a 1930's Art Deco house in Marshalswick. Seven other projects were commended, including a remarkable make-over of a terraced house in Bernard Street. Certificates and plaques were presented by Cllr Janet Smith, Mayor of the City and District of St Albans.

The Town Hall, dating from 1832, was originally the Court House and Council Assembly hall. In the last couple of decades it has suffered from lack of maintenance and uncertainty about its role in the City. It is now the city's Museum + Gallery. The redesign cleverly incorporated two significant additions. First, excavation below the entrance hall creating a fine exhibition gallery capable of taking the most sensitive works. Second, two glazed links were added on the first floor, on either side of the courtroom, linking back rooms of the building with major spaces to the front. These give views down into the courtroom, and out over the city. The Assembly Room was restored to its prime with three large chandeliers that underlined its splendour, and double glazing added for improved insulation. The Society considered this to be a clever and sensitive regeneration of a fine building and an achievement which has restored the building's architectural dignity and strengthened its significance in the life of the city. It was however noted that some of the external work on the Town Hall was of doubtful standard, and that defects were already appearing on the new external surfaces.



The conservation award went to an elegant 1930's Art Deco villa that has been extended and revitalised. For example, every one of the windows, including curved corners, and external doors have been double glazed. Side extensions have been added, with curved corner windows and matching tiled roofs, carefully respecting the external design of the main house. Similar care and attention to detail has been lavished on the interior. The Society congratulated all involved, not least the owners, on



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their commitment.

Commendations were also given to 77 Bernard Street for a makeover, St Michael's School for its extension, the new Visitor Centre in Highfield Park, the conversion back to housing 16-24 Spencer Street, and three commercial premises in the city centre - The Ivy Brasserie, Clarks, and Molton Brown.

However, the Society was also prepared to criticise, and handed out a special Wooden Spoon Award for the destruction of the Glass Ziggurat facade. This is vandalism of the highest order, made possible by the Government's carte blanche to convert offices to residential. But that is far from all, bland housing design, inappropriate housing location (at the far end of industrial dead ends), overblown and inappropriate bungalows in suburban arterial roads were all frowned on. Another serious casualty was Gabriel Square - a remarkable piece of architecture that has created a modern 'Georgian' square, but regrettably has now, following an omission by the local planners, been closed to the public. This leaves only the prominent facades on London and Alma Roads for the public to admire or dislike as they wish.



*The Society's Chairman (Prof. Tim Boatswain) with the Wooden Spoon for the Ziggurat*

### Notes for Editors:

*Every year, the St Albans Civic Society considers buildings and other projects completed in the previous calendar year for possible awards.*

*For its **Awards**, the Society looks for projects that contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the character of St Albans, and achieve the highest standards of architecture, planning, landscaping and civic design. This year, one project was given the Society's Annual Award and plaque, and seven projects were commended.*

*The **Trevelyan Prize** recognises projects that achieve the finest quality in terms of conservation / restoration. This year, one project was awarded the Trevelyan Prize; one project was commended.*

### **High resolution copies of the photographs can be provided on**

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