

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future -
with an eye on the past

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

Newsletter | Winter 2019

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

NATIONAL PLANNING

We are disturbed by the report from the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England that just one in ten homes built on Green Belt land is deemed affordable.

When we lose some of our Green Belt around St Albans there should be a requirement that the majority, that's over 50% of new builds, **must** be affordable and not the all-too-common 5 bed, 5 bathroom mansions. Otherwise there is no hope here for young people to be able to get onto the property ladder.

There are **proposals to increase the number of listed buildings** by greater liaison with the local community. The Society obviously welcomes such an initiative but listed buildings often require special works and attention.

We therefore repeat our previous request that repair and restoration carried out should be treated like a new build and not be subject to VAT. If the Government wants people to look after our shared heritage, they



Photo Reinhard Geister

We thank the Clockateers who opened on 17 November for the Xmas lights switch on.

should do something about this anomaly.

LOCAL PLANNING

This is predominantly taken up by the plan for the **Civic Centre Opportunity Site South** (CCOSS) and Tim Boatswain, Chairman, gives the background and latest position in an article in this edition.

The Society continues to monitor the weekly planning list and it is apparent that there are some other schemes in the pipeline for developments in the city

centre. It is piecemeal planning and there is an article concerning this and the erstwhile City Vision.

OTHER NEWS

The Society needs people to come forward to assist with its activities as highlighted in the recent 5-year Plan and feedback meeting, held on 24 October (see inside).

In the New Year, the Society is focussing on **Greening the City**. The dates and titles of this series of talks are given on the back page.

Awards Nominations Wanted

Have you noticed a new building, extension, shop refit or restoration project? Something that has enhanced St Albans during 2019, completed between 1 January and 31 December 2019? The dates are important.

The committee is proposing to revamp

the Society's Annual Awards Event. The aim is for an evening of celebration, both interesting and fun as well as including architectural analysis.

In an effort to make the event more inclusive, we also want to encourage more nominations from the public who may

not be members of the Society.

To give you some ideas, past winning nominations have included the restored watercress beds, the Alban Pilgrimage giant puppets, as well as buildings like the Odyssey and, last year's winner, the new St Albans Museum + Gallery. Already nominated this year is the Cathedral's Welcome Centre and the light projections

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Awards Nominations Wanted, continued.

of the mediaeval wall paintings. Also put up are the recently planted mature robinia tree by the Clock Tower and the Community Vegetable Garden in Russell Avenue (behind M&S). A nomination for the best restoration has been 11 Fishpool Street, which otherwise might have succumbed to rot and Death Watch beetle!

There are two main categories. One is

the St Albans Civic Society plaque and the other for restoration / conservation is the Trevelyan Prize.

Details about who is on the new Awards Advisory Group and when and where the celebration evening is to be held will be in the Spring Newsletter.

Meanwhile, over to you. Let us have your nominations – for projects big or small. Encourage your friends to do likewise –

they don't have to be members. They may even consider joining the Society so as to be able to come along and enjoy the event and its free hospitality!

Send nominations to

stalbanscivicsociety@gmail.com or post to Awards Nominations, c/o Kingsbury Manor, 2 St Michael's Street, St Albans AL3 4SE.

The Civic Centre Opportunity South Site

Planning Application 5/2019/2001

When the Society was first invited to engage with the Civic Centre Opportunity South Site (CCOSS) it had already declined to take part in the 'Look St Albans' charrette. The Society did not want its hands tied by such a consultative consensus (it does not have confidence in 'design by committee') nor did it feel this was actually the right point in the process to seek public consultation. This position was reaffirmed when the Community Design Review was set up, run by the same person who facilitated the charrette, which both excluded organisations from taking part and stipulated that participants must sign up to the Review's conclusions before it had even met!

The Society now has a Design Advisory Group (DAG) which was specifically established for pre-consultation with developers. There is also a Planning Advisory Group (PAG) which looks at selected planning applications and then advises the Executive Committee whether to lodge an objection or not. Both Advisory Groups report back to the Trustees on the Executive Committee with their advice and it is the Trustees who make the final decision on a planning application. It is important that developers understand that working with DAG does not automatically guarantee the Society's support for their planning application.

The Society, subsequently, was invited by the Portfolio Holder for Development to meet with the officers and Council's consultant to discuss CCOSS. Members of DAG attended. The Society's chairman also attended several sessions as it was considered such an important development for the City. It was made clear at the beginning of the first meeting and at a subsequent meeting with the new Portfolio Holder, after the Council's Cabinet changed, that the Society did not like the starting point of the plan (Angle Properties' permitted planning application)

and would have preferred an architectural competition. Its argument was that, for such an important development in a critical location, there should be an open competition which would provide options that were far more likely to produce a 'wow' scheme. This would then meet the Council's own brief to create "listed buildings of the future" and "a landmark building as a key gateway feature".

A competition had been ruled out by the Council. The Society, recognising the political realities of the situation, agreed for DAG to work with the Council and the architects, BDP, to achieve a design which made the best of the existing planning application. However, such were the changes a new planning application had to be made.

There were several meetings between DAG, the Council and BDP. The latter two were always willing to listen to DAG and were most accommodating. Thus it was understandable that the officers became frustrated as, despite the explanation of the protocols of DAG and PAG, there was, apparently, a belief that the Society was fully on board with the application that was subsequently made.

The Society, as a democratic body, had for some time promised its members a meeting on the planning application. This was held on 23 September at which the Portfolio Holder and officers made a presentation. This meeting was conducted in a neutral manner but it soon emerged that the mood of those present was hostile to the application. This opposition reflected the written submissions the Society had already received from members unable to attend. The reasons given for this negative response to the planning application were: the development was seen as 'standard and ordinary'; 'too bulky'; not reflecting St Albans' heritage; not 'enhancing' and therefore, given it would be there for many years to come, was not 'good enough' for St Albans.

At the Society's Executive Committee

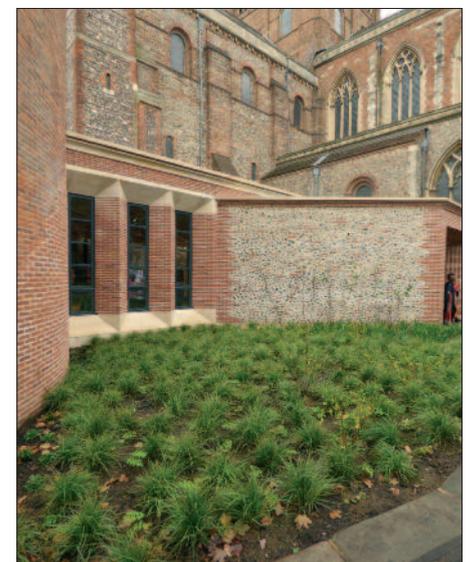
meeting later in the week PAG advised the Society to object to the planning application. The Trustees, recognising members' views and understanding the change in the political situation, voted unanimously to support PAG's recommendation to object.

Dialogue is now taking place with the Council about a way forward. This aims for the withdrawal of the present CCOSS planning application and the development of a set of new architectural options for the site. These would then be made available so that the citizens of St Albans can express their views and a preference.

The Society seeks a development that:

- enhances St Albans through excellent quality of design and detail – a 'wow' factor;
- has high levels of sustainability and greening;
- avoids being entirely driven by cost;
- is not designed by committee;
- reflects the character and uniqueness of St Albans.

Tim Boatswain Chairman



The Cathedral's new Welcome Centre with landscaping.

City Vision revisited - St Albans or St Anywhere?

Recently there have been three significant planning applications in St Albans city centre. Two were for five storey buildings of flats with ground floor retail in St Peter's Street at 67 and 69 – the two Pound Shop premises. A third was for the old Police Station/NHS/Bricket Road site referred to as the City Centre Opportunity Site South (CCOSS). As these applications start to progress through the planning system there is a danger that we might be getting a somewhat piecemeal approach to how our city centre could end

up looking in the years ahead.

It thus raises the question as to what sort of place we want St Albans to be in the future. Is it a city with some character and distinction or ending up being like so many other towns in London's extensive commuter belt?

This is particularly important for our younger citizens. There is, however, a responsibility for everyone of all ages living here to get things right about how our great city looks and functions. Back in 2009 there was a comprehensive

and expensive City Vision exercise by the Council conducted using consultants Urban Practitioners. Residents were encouraged to participate. Various proposals emerged culminating in a public exhibition at a then empty shop in The Maltings. There were numerous documents with illustrations and even two city centre models. People were encouraged to give their preference and thus an overall plan and vision were established.

Now, ten years on and with these various (sometimes piecemeal) plans coming forward, perhaps it is appropriate to revisit the results of 2009. Remind ourselves and review whether these are still relevant or in need of change in the fullness of time.

Not to do so risks ending up with a bit of a hotchpotch. All that time, talk, effort and money will sadly have been wasted. What sort of city do we want St Albans to be? Still a St Albans or a St Anywhere?

Editors' note: we are optimistic this subject will be revisited in 2020. Watch this space!



PEOPLE WANTED

The Society now needs help in various ways. There is no need to be on the committee and it won't necessarily entail a regular or even a long term commitment. Hours can be whatever suits you.

CLOCK TOWER

Open weekends and Bank Holidays between Easter and the end of September. We cover alternate weekends. The Arc and Arc covers the others. There is an online rota for people to sign up. There are two people on each one and a half hour shift. You just do as many or as few shifts as you wish.

A shift consists of welcoming and taking the entrance money. You meet local people but also visitors from all over the world – and they are very enthusiastic about their experience. Contact Jill Singer on: joxhey@gmail.com or St Albans 838965.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

We would like to develop the resources on the website with content from the committee and increase our existing Twitter account and Facebook presence. Any help would depend on the time available. Contact Robert Osborne on: robert-osborne@ntlworld.com.

ARCHIVES

We have accumulated various boxes of archives and need some people to help catalogue and record what we have. The time commitment is whatever people choose. Contact Jill Singer.

NEWSLETTER

We have a quarterly newsletter and will soon need some people to put this together using material from the committee and other sources. If anyone is interested in finding out more Peter Trevelyan and Eric Roberts are the current editors and estimate it takes around three or four hours each quarter to compile and edit. They are happy for anyone interested to shadow them on an edition before making a decision. Contact Eric Roberts on: ericlowerred@gmail.com or St Albans 830521.

THE SOCIETY'S AWARDS

There are various vacancies. For example: a

position in the group advising on the Awards; the team doing the publicity and presentation on the evening and those arranging the hospitality. Contact Jill Singer.

MARKETING AND PUBLICITY

Help and ideas would be appreciated. Again, time would depend on the people involved.

TREES AND GREEN SPACES

We are putting together a group interested in monitoring and promoting trees and green spaces. Time commitment depends on the individual. Contact Tim Boatswain on: timboatswain@hotmail.com .

PUBLIC REALM

As above – to monitor local conditions and advise when things need attention. There is also some liaison with appropriate Residents' Associations who are often involved in local street scene issues. Contact Tim Boatswain



The Pop-up shop continues and we are very grateful to Catherine Morris (Manager of Christopher Place) for allowing us to use these premises.



Autumn Visit to Stamford and Burghley

Saturday 28 September 2019

In 1967 Stamford was the first town in England to designate its centre as a Conservation Area. Along with over 600 listed buildings, many in local limestone, there are five mediaeval churches, numerous independent shops, restaurants and cafes, most with original, historic shopfronts. The town therefore does not disappoint.

Propitiously our visit coincided with the town's Georgian Festival, with many locals in period costume, some as red-coated soldiers. A horse drawn omnibus touring the centre and a splendid series of cultural events over the weekend added

to the atmosphere.

We were only able to enjoy these all too briefly as in the afternoon we moved on to nearby Burghley House. This is a formidable Elizabethan mansion in Capability Brown designed parkland, with Contemporary Sculpture Garden and Water Garden of Surprises. Here the Georgian theme continued with dancing in the Great Hall and a mail coach tour in the park.

It was a fascinating trip. Thank you to Eileen and Brian Holmes for making the arrangements.

Peter Denney

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, Moragh Ormiston, tel: 01727 865421 or 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

Officers and Committee

President

Geraint John 01727 844585

Elected Members/Trustees*

Chairman

Tim Boatswain* 07873 586074

Vice-Chairman

Freda Chaloner*

Hon. Secretary

Jill Singer* 01727 838965

Hon. Treasurer

John Thomson* 07711 696417

Membership Secretary

Moragh Ormiston* 01727 865421

Committee Members

Michael Fookes (Co-opted)

Peter Newby*

Robert Osborne*

Eric Roberts*

Members assisting

Tony Mason - Verulamium Park

Rita Waldron - Licensing

Dawn Wheeler - Clock Tower



A programme of talks in 2020 on this important subject. All of them will take place at 8pm at the Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street Baptist Church.

Greening the City

Thursday 13 February

St Albans District Council's policy on Greening

Councillor Chris White (Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for the Environment).

Thursday 19 March

The role of trees in cities

Sara Croft (The Woodland Trust).

Thursday 9 April

The Landscape of the City

Johanna Gibbons (J & L Gibbons LLP).

Thursday 21 May

Trees and the Architect

John Milligan (Milligan Knight Architects) – joint talk with Hertfordshire Architectural Association.

Parking is only for disabled persons. There are public car parks nearby.

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.

The St Albans Civic Society is on Twitter. Follow us at **@stalbancivicsoc**

