

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future -
with an eye on the past

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Tim Boatswain 07873 586074

Newsletter | Summer 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

W

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

Thursday 29 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 must be a paid-up member. **Subscriptions were due on 1 April. Why not set up a Standing Order?** Contact John Thomson 07711 696417.

Nominations for the Committee are invited. Write the nominee's name with their signature of acceptance, together with signatures of proposer and seconder. All three persons must be paid-up members of the Society. Send to Jill Singer (Secretary), 2 St Michael Street AL3 4SE or email joxhey@gmail.com by 22 June 2017.

The Society continues to be active. We give reports of two meetings involving plans and services for St Albans. Plus the good news as things take shape to rebuild and reopen the Hatfield Road entrance into **Clarence Park**, and to repair the **Cricket Pavilion**. These have been achieved after considerable efforts by local people and organisations. Well done everybody.

There is **an opportunity for members to find new recruits**. We urge that full advantage is taken of this £1 offer – see the article about the Civic Day and Larks in the



Ver Road today. See "Hand in Hand" (back page).

Park. If every member recruited just one person, the Society would be well past the 1,000 membership target. Go for it!

National planning – the Green Belt remains under threat. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has recently advocated building on the Green Belt. We trust that the Government will remain steadfast on its promise not to do so. The proposal to build 1,130 homes on the Green Belt at Symonshyde by Welwyn and Hatfield Council will be a test of this promise. Extreme vigilance is needed.

Local planning – there's progress on developing part of the **Civic Centre South site** – the former Police Station and Hertfordshire House – see article about Angle Properties.

The Council has acted at last to try to protect **the city's office stock** and, therefore, local employment – again see article. We hope this will be incorporated into the **Strategic Local Plan** although worryingly, this is still in limbo and the deadline for its completion is fast approaching.

Plane noise over St Albans continues to be an issue. This has come about since a campaign, backed by Harpenden's former MP (previously for St Albans), Peter Lilley, successfully shifted the flight paths south, away from Harpenden and over north St Albans. This is now creating much noise nuisance for residents and can be heard across the city. There is even talk of moving

the routeing further south, over Verulamium and the Cathedral. It is all totally unacceptable and would make a mockery of the historic conservation area affected, the tranquillity of the Cathedral, and enjoyment of the parks.

Members are urged to comment and make their views known to the St Albans MP, Council and Civil Aviation Authority. Please don't be complacent. If you are, expect more noise to be dumped on St Albans, thus spoiling the peace of your home, garden and affecting your sleep. Even house prices could suffer. View at www.consultations.caa.co.uk. Deadline is Friday 30 June 2017.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

8pm Thursday 29 June 2017

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 29 June 2017 then, regrettably, **membership will cease**. The Society values your support
Rates are unchanged - see back page.

Action at last

The Council has acted to stem the tide of office blocks being converted into flats. Is the stable door finally being closed?

It was back in June 2013 when the Government announced its latest wheeze of easing planning rules by granting permitted development rights for change of use without the need for planning approval. That meant that Local Councils, Councillors and other interested parties, had no say in the matter. Would-be developers gained automatic prior approval for conversions.

The Society warned of the likely consequences – loss of potential jobs in the city. At a City Centre Partnership/Retail meeting that 2013 Autumn, it was accused of inventing such a policy (wrong!) and that ‘of course the Council would still have a planning control input’ (wrong again!). So said a local business and commerce representative. Little did he know!

The policy, initially temporary, was made permanent in 2016. You only have to look around the streets between the city centre and the station to see the number of conversions. Twice, in 2014 and 2015, the Society provided the Council with

information as to what could be done. Namely, to seek Article 4 Direction zones like councils in Brighton, Richmond (Surrey) and nearby Watford. These steps were taken to protect office premises and thus local employment.

The Ziggurat building by the station is the obvious monument to this undermining policy. The Herts Advertiser’s Danny Loo took a superb picture showing the beauty of this modern building in the summer of 2015 when it was planned to be converted. The Society objected, but the change was unstoppable because of the revised rules. Now the building is clad in brick over the glass to meet residential requirements. It looks lumpen and uninspiring. This is a great loss in both employment and visual aspects.

The Herts Advertiser’s Debbie White did an in-depth article on the growing trend on 22 October 2016. Then both 45 Grosvenor Road, by the station, and Abbott House in Griffiths Way were up to be converted. It was



Ziggurat’s former glory. Photo Danny Loo.

estimated some 900 potential jobs had been lost from the city. It now must be over 1,000 – far more than the 300 recently quoted in a press article announcing the Article 4 action.

Why does all this matter? Such loss must be having an adverse economic and commercial impact. It has lessened opportunities for people to work locally, condemning them to commuting. St Albans becomes even more a ‘commuter’ and ‘dormitory’ town.

Plans Portfolio Holder Councillor Alec Campbell’s recent announcement of Article 4 action is welcome and must be supported. It’s good that the Chamber of Commerce is now backing such steps, like the Society. Well done the Council – but why did it take so long? It’s several years too late.

Thameslink meeting

Thameslink requested a meeting with the Society following our comments and reports about the threat of the Railfreight terminal to future services. It has taken place. We were told:

- the new, enhanced Thameslink timetable will be introduced in 2018, thus completing the £7billion (up from £6.5billion) investment programme including the remodelling of tracks and a new station at London Bridge.
- the fleet of new (Siemens Class 700) trains will be operated with many services formed of 12 coaches, giving extra seats at busy times.
- there will be some new services. Thameslink will then include not only the Bedford-Brighton across London route, but also services to/from the Great Northern via Stevenage to more destinations in the South. Frequency between St Pancras – Blackfriars will sometimes be every 3 minutes or less at peak times. The potential delay domino effect if problems arise will be considerable. The knock-on could impact on punctuality

miles away – for example around Leicester, Sheffield, York and Newcastle.

- St Albans will get more and longer trains. There are plans to redevelop the station. An additional footbridge will be included.
- The 2018 timetable factors in proposed new stations at Brent Cross and Wixams (between Flitwick and Bedford) and the opportunity for an additional (6th) inter-city service each hour on the fast lines.
- timetable meetings between Thameslink and Network Rail have yet to consider the SRFI on the line near Radlett. In fact, the Terminal never gets a mention! There you have it. The Society thanks Thameslink for arranging the meeting. We wish the new 2018 service every success because it potentially greatly improves the lot of commuters and all other travellers, including visitors from a wider catchment area. Thameslink 2000 will have finally arrived!

It was significant actually to hear from this Train Operating Company, GOVIA, an important customer of Network Rail, what the Society has been claiming for years,

even back to the planning inquiries nearly 10 years ago, that the impact of a Railfreight Terminal near Radlett has NOT been properly worked out by Network Rail. Neither have the necessary engineering works been programmed, nor how the extra freightliners will be timetabled. Even our local MPs have so far been unable to clarify this.

The consequences are surely ominous. Just as our spanking new trains and timetable start running, Network Rail will pop up and say it needs to disrupt them for infrastructure works in order to accommodate the SRFI and additional freight trains. Service upset caused by engineering works, and the associated delays and cancellations, will again become a daily pain.

Until Network Rail comes clean, the County Council should not sell the land to Segro. There is a distinct risk that the so-called Railfreight Terminal will turn into a road-based juggernaut depot – something very different from what it was originally purported to be.

The decision to approve by Eric Pickles will have been based on a false premise and therefore should be rescinded. County Councillors please note.

Be proud – take pride

Saturday 17 June 2017 is Civic Day, a national celebration of civic pride. St Albans Civic Society will be taking part. You are invited to join in.

The focus will be the Clock Tower in the High Street. Built in 1405 it is a symbol of local people power and civic pride spanning over 600 years. The tower will be open over that weekend as usual from 10.30am until 5.00pm and you can climb up for just £1 adults and accompanied children are free.

You can also contribute to the Society's Civic Day Post-it poll, and you don't have to go climbing to take part. There will be a special post-it board on which to place what you are proud of in St Albans – and what you are not! This will help the Society focus efforts towards caring for the best of our city's assets and giving appropriate

attention to those aspects that could be improved. A veritable people's poll of civic pride – or not, as the case may be. If you can't get to our special poll, don't worry. Email your nomination(s) to stalbaniscivicsociety@gmail.com or post to SACS, c/o 30 Fishpool Street, St Albans AL3 4RT.

Starting at 2.30pm from the tower's entrance, there will be a 1 hour stroll, free, entitled 'Civic Pride – some highs and lows'. It will take in some of the city's best parts and its heritage whilst highlighting some of the not so good issues. Perhaps you might suggest ways to help solve them? Do come along. Your views are important to us.

That's not all! From Saturday 17 June until Sunday 2 July inclusive, when the Society will have its stall at Larks in the Park in Victoria Playing Field, so concluding its Post-it poll, there will be a special offer 'Join for £1' per person trial membership lasting until April 2018. This will entitle a new member to the quarterly newsletter, an invitation to future events including the celebration Awards Evening in October. It's a bargain, and a great chance to be better informed and, perhaps, more involved in St Albans.

"Our ambition for England is a place where every individual can say I am proud of where I live." So states the manifesto of Civic Voice, the national HQ of the civic society movement. Join in and help make it happen right here in St Albans. Be proud – take pride.

Editors' comment: for members, comes a copy of the 'Join for £1' leaflet. Please use to recruit someone(s). Photocopy for extra or ring 830521 and request more.



Angle Properties and City Centre South

Tony Williamson, Angle's property director, gave a presentation to the Society's committee on 5 April 2017. It was most informative and outlined the planning application for this part of the City Centre Opportunity Site. He told us some interesting facts:

- Angle's consultation process dates back to May 2016 when members of the public, including the Society, were asked to comment on initial proposals. These have now been considered.
- The planning application shows that the scheme has dropped one storey – the highest building therefore is the same as Hertfordshire House (see picture).
- In some key locations, the building envelope has been drawn back from the site's boundary. As a result, some of the mature trees could remain.
- Mr Williamson explained that this plan deviated somewhat from the recommendation reached by the September 2016 charrette exercise.
- A supplementary application is proposed for cladding Hertfordshire House so that it blends in with the overall development.
- Mr Williamson said he was happy to receive comments on design details for consideration. (Another meeting is planned.)

The planning application (ref: 5/2017/1060) is available to view on the Council's website and make comment.

The Society thanks Mr Williamson for the presentation and offer of further liaison.

Verulamium Lakes

Whether it was a response to the Society's past letters and articles about the shameful state of the lakes, or the report in 13 April Herts Advertiser where a local resident threatened to deposit any dead birds on the Council's desks, (complete with distressing picture of a dead goose hanging out of a litter bin), we are unlikely to know.

Some action commenced in the last week of April when apparatus was brought in to suck out silt by the boating lake bridge. One of the workmen involved was the same pictured on 9 August 2016 (see last Autumn newsletter) up to his waist in the stinking filth by the toilets (and the ice cream van) area! Talking to them revealed this earlier action in the year might just stave off a repeat, for a third summer, of the stench and distress caused by the pollution. The general view was such periodic cleansing and judicious use of the sluice gates would considerably help improve things.

Meanwhile, the Council continues to consult consultants! As we said before, when you analyse, you paralyse. Given the past troubles in both Verulamium and Clarence Parks, we wonder if the Green Flag judges will be so ready to grant accreditation in 2017.

Last chance to nominate



The Awards Panel is putting together a shortlist of new buildings and projects that contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the character of St Albans (and were completed between 1 January and 31 December 2016). Nominations are open until 29 June 2017. Contact joxhey@gmail.com or write to: Awards, 2 St Michael Street, St Albans AL3 4SE.

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



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.

"Hand in Hand" film, 1961 (b/w)

Members might like to view or obtain this DVD film, shot in St Albans in 1960. It is a delightful, thought-provoking story, and has scenes in Fishpool Street, Abbey View, Offa and Ver Roads, (See cover picture) French Row, Sopwell Lane and the city centre. The latter sees shop fronts along St Peter's Street including the former BHS before its current ugly cladding.

There are also glimpses of iconic Green Line buses, early 60's cars and the old Pemberton School. (type 'Hand in Hand (film)' into Wikipedia) or visit <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053889/>

Forthcoming events

Saturday 17 June

National Civic Day

A celebration of civic pride.

(See "Be proud – take pride" article).

Thursday 29 June

Annual General Meeting

The Octagon Centre, St Peter's Church at 8pm, followed by drinks and light refreshments. Paid up members only.

Sunday 2 July

Larks in the Park

Exhibits and entertainment. The Society will have a stall with Post-it poll/£1 offer. Victoria Playing Field 12 - 4pm.

Sunday 16 July

Annual Cricket Match

The Society and Friends of Victoria Playing Field versus the Council. Victoria Playing Field 3-5pm. Tea and cake served!

Thursday 5 October

Awards Evening

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

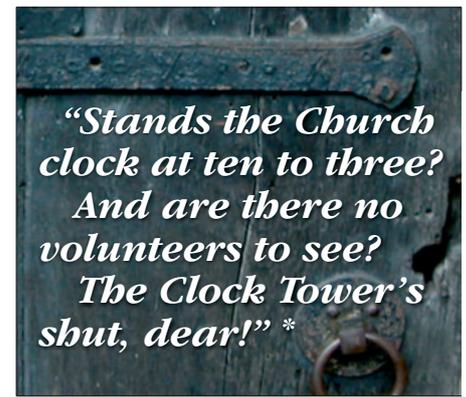
Saturday 7 October

Autumn Coach Visit

To Southwell (Notts).

Details in Autumn newsletter.

News from the Clock Tower



Please don't let this happen. We need some new volunteers to help this historic building stay open for visitors. Please can you spare one and a half hours a few times between now and the end of September. It's most enjoyable and you meet people from all around the world. Contact Jill Singer on 01727 838965 or joxhey@gmail.com.

Already, visitor numbers are up on previous years. If the summer is good, this could well be a record year.

Remember – Saturday 17 June Civic Day's Post-it poll and the 2.30pm walk are both here.

** with acknowledgement to Rupert Brooke (The Old Vicarage, Grantchester) and Peter Sellers (Balham – Gateway to The South).*

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