

Press Release 10/07/2019

Conservation 50 Conference – Celebrating and Safeguarding 50 years of St Albans Conservation Area (CA), 6th July, 2pm at Dagnell Street Baptist Church

At two o'clock on Saturdays BBC Radio 4 presenter Julian Worricker, is more likely to be found in a studio as *Any Answers* prepares to go on air. This Saturday, however, Julian was chairing Conservation 50's first conference, which was celebrating St Albans Conservation Areas as well as looking to their future.

The first speaker, Prof Tim Boatswain Chairman of St Albans Civic Society and Conservation 50, explained how conservation areas came into being in 1967 when Parliament passed an act to protect areas of *architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*. Local authorities now have a duty to designate areas of historic interest as conservation areas. The USA, however, had introduced conservation areas back in 1920s, so UK has been relatively late coming to this particular party!

The next speaker Cllr Mary Maynard emphasised the importance of the voice of residents and the need to create collaboration across the community to recognise what was valuable and in need of conservation. Conservation areas need to be brought into the modern world, so there was always a measure of balance that should be applied to preservation and change. Buildings should be brought to life by talking about their usage so the community cares about their conservation.

At a national level, Ian Harvey of Civic Voice, warned, with financial pressure on local authorities and the need to provide more homes (nearly 3 million) throughout the country, some conservation areas are in danger of being neglected or ignored. An illustration of the threat to conservation areas was the fact that there were so many local authorities that now had no conservation officer – over a third of conservation officers since 2006 have lost their jobs.

The keynote speaker, Emily Gee, South East Regional Director of Historic England, emphasised in her talk the importance of protecting both the context and character of localities, as these were crucial in place-making. Communities needed to be the guardians of their localities, especially conservation areas and they can and do make a difference. There, inevitably, will be change, but this needs to be sensitive, incremental and carefully managed so the community is fully involved. Historic High Streets have also been under increasing pressure because of new ways of shopping but, interestingly where heritage buildings have been adapted for retail and commercial purposes business has actually thrived, demonstrating the important connection between where people want to go and their purchasing behaviour.

The conference finished with a Q & A session. The speakers were joined on the panel by Peter Wynne Rees, ex-City Planning Officer for the City of London and now Professor of Places and City Planning, University College London. Right at the beginning, he made the important point that it is people that make places not the buildings and there need to be places where people can 'gossip'. Predictably, there was an interesting discussion around sustainability which led into the problems and dangers of climate change, resulting in the recognition of the importance of planting more trees; there should be a concerted effort put into finding ways of adapting historic buildings in conservation areas to be energy saving and sustainable without damaging their special character.

At the end of the conference, Tim Boatswain gave a summary of the key themes and made a plea for planners to be more supportive of those living in conservation areas rather than merely being negatively reactive. From the celebration of 50 years of St Albans Conservation Areas, it is planned to continue the organisation under the name C50+ which will work with the local authority and other community groups not only to protect but also enhance the character and environment of St Albans. Its immediate ambition is to liaise with the Council in creating Conservation Area Advisory Committees, who as their name suggests, advise and promote conservation areas, and push forward with the development of a 'blue plaque' scheme for the City, which would both inform residents and visitors of both its heritage of famous people and its rich history.

For further information, contact: Tim Boatswain: timboatswain@hotmail.com 07873586074
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PHOTOS BELOW:



Q & A Panel : Julian Worricker, Cllr Mary Maynard, Emily Gee, Prof Peter Wynne Rees, Ian Harvey



Prof Tim Boatswain, Chairman of Conservation 50