

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Looking to the future-
with an eye on the past

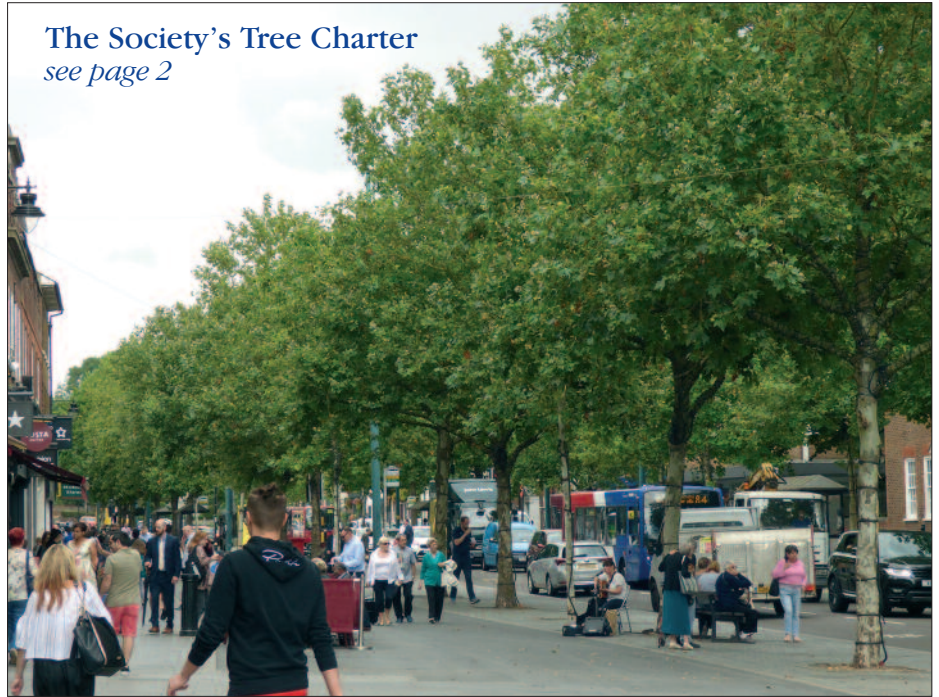
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Newsletter | Autumn 2019

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.

The Society's Tree Charter
see page 2



NEWS & COMMENTS



We welcome the new members who have joined the Society this summer and

are grateful for their support. Indeed, we hope a few will offer to help the Society in its various activities. An article in this edition refers to this in more detail.

The AGM on the 27 June was most successful, with several questions asked by members and duly answered. One question concerned the former Hatfield Road museum's exhibits. Where are they? We are concerned. Do you agree? Please tell us.

There was a most convivial atmosphere afterwards whilst people stayed to enjoy the wine! Equally successful was the Conservation 50 conference and reception held on 6 July. Eight new members joined.

The Society had a stall at 'Larkus in the Parkus' in Victoria Playing Field which saw much interest and five new members joining.

As previously advised there is no longer a **Programme Card**. Forthcoming events feature on the back page. We recommend the **email news**. Sign up at stalbanscivicsociety@gmail.com

Members can still book for the **Visit to Stamford and Burghley House** on Saturday 28 September. See Events and flyer.

ANNUAL AWARDS EVENING

This was held in Kingsbury Barn on 24 July and attracted more than one hundred people. Full details are on the website and there is a supplement. The Civic Society Award went to the new St Albans Museum + Gallery and the Trevelyan Prize for conservation to an Art-Deco house in Marshalswick.



NATIONAL PLANNING

In early July the then Government was advocating that Councils "should shame developers of the worst housing plans". A report that came out on 9 July stated that planning authorities ought to "say no to ugliness". James Brokenshire MP said: "We should be building the conservation areas of the future". A great idea, but we wonder how, when and where this can be achieved.

LOCAL PLANNING

Public hearings into the new Local Plan will start on Monday 14 October in the Council Chamber. The Inspector will decide if the Plan is "sound" and that it meets all legal and procedural requirements. The draft covers the years 2020 to 2036 and conforms with a government edict that 913 new homes a year (14,608 in total) should be built in our District in that period. Eleven sites in the Green Belt have been proposed.

We are somewhat surprised that **Verulamium Park** has managed to obtain

a Green Flag award this year given the current state of the Verulamium lake with its silt and weeds. Pages 6 and 15 in the 1 August edition of the Herts Ad said it all. It raises questions on how the Green Flag system works.

Watch out for the planning application for the City Centre Opportunity Site South (CCOSS). The Society has been much involved and it will be interesting to see if any of its design suggestions have been taken on board.

Flats are proposed, but we will be looking to see if, given the state of retail in the city centre, the previous retail units have been replaced by offices. It is now accepted that the city has lost too much existing office space through conversion into residential accommodation. A report by the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to the County Council highlighted the impact of changes to "**Permitted Development Rights**". Introduced in 2013, these have resulted in considerable losses. Councillor Andrew Stevenson said that it was "an urgent and serious problem for Hertfordshire" and that it was "degrading town centres".

As reported in the Winter 2018 newsletter, it was estimated that in St Albans alone, **2,000 jobs had disappeared as a result**, thus diminishing the city's employment and economy.

We eagerly await the new hotel building on the former BHS site and trust recent reports that both Boots and M&S are proposing further store closures does not affect our city. As a recent article from the Society in the Herts Advertiser said "Use them or lose them!" which applies to all our city centre shops, both independent and national chains. Their future is in your own hands and wallets!



Tree Charter

THIS CHARTER IS FOR OUR CITY, ESPECIALLY OUR PARKS, PLAYING FIELDS, OPEN SPACES, ROADS AND GARDENS. IT IS NOT AIMED AT THE RURAL LANDSCAPE OUTSIDE THE CITY, BUT NATURALLY THE URBAN PARTS OF THE GREEN BELT WILL COME INTO ITS SCOPE.

TREES REALLY MATTER to our city and the people who live and work in it. They are individually beautiful and in groups they can have as great a visual impact as architecture. But they are much more than decoration – they are the lungs of the city and a major natural engine for removing carbon emissions and pollutants from the air that we breathe. At a time when Earth's ecosystem is under extreme threat from Man's mismanagement, we cannot afford to ignore the vital role of trees. They must be respected as beautiful and dependable allies, not treated as a nuisance or a disposable resource.

The trees that touch us most are those that live among us, along our street, in the local park, beside our school or place of work, and in our gardens. Trees give the best urban landscapes their distinctive character. Like us, they grow and change, and eventually die. They need space to breathe and support to thrive.

- Trees are a vital part of the environment, both rural and urban. They provide variety in colour, form, texture and balance. Their aesthetic value contributes to our quality of life and sense of well-being. They induce peaceful contemplation and help to reduce the stresses that we experience in our busy lives.

- Trees filter the air, reducing pollutants such as ozone, oxides of nitrogen, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide, smoke, dust and ash. They capture and absorb carbon dioxide and instead release life-giving oxygen.

- Trees are a living presence, both in themselves and in the abundance and variety of life that they support – every tree is in turn a city of biodiversity, sustaining insects, birds and mammals.

- Trees can have further value in the built environment, where if appropriately selected they help to

reduce the destructive power of wind, protect us from the heat of the Sun, suppress noise levels, control flood water and limit soil erosion.

- The role of trees should be widely recognised so that their value is taken seriously. We should encourage them to prosper for our own good. In urban situations trees need special care to flourish, and when they die they need replacement. Well-informed planning is essential to providing sustainable benefit. Local community networks have a vital role to play in caring for the City's trees, ensuring their health and longevity.

HOW SHOULD WE TREAT TREES?

Different species of trees have different life spans and different preferred environments. They grow at different speeds and to greatly different sizes. They are also susceptible to a variety of diseases that are changing quite rapidly with the climate. Our intervention is often necessary to ensure that they are looked after, develop appropriately and flourish alongside city life.

Properly informed and skilled reduction or pollarding of trees may be needed but there must be objection to the felling of trees unless they are demonstrated and independently verified to be diseased or unsafe, or where felling can be justified by approved planning permission for new developments. The default position should be not to fell. In all cases there should be commensurate planting of new trees in an optimum location. There should in any case be a strong policy for widespread planting of new trees as part of our defence against climate change.

There may be special cases where tree growth results in damage to foundations or underground services. This should also be taken into account in the planting of new trees. Judgement in these circumstances will need to be carried out by those with demonstrated expert knowledge.

The wonder of trees lies between the earth and the sky, bringing life, beauty and joy to the planet and humankind. Trees are poetry, a part of Nature's journey of life through the organic elements of earth, air and water.

Marking 50 years of Conservation Areas in the City

CONSERVATION 50

CELEBRATING AND SAFEGUARDING 50 YEARS OF THE ST ALBANS CONSERVATION AREA

Conservation 50 was established by the Civic Society, Abbey Precincts Residents Association and Aboyne Residents Association. It celebrates 50 years since the first conservation area was designated in St Albans. A series of events to mark the anniversary were held during this summer. A photographic exhibition opened at the Museum + Gallery, attracting much attention, and subsequently displayed at a pop-up shop in Christopher Place.

A well attended conference (nearly 80 people) was held at the Dagnall Street Baptist Church on 6 July, with a range of national and local speakers, finishing with a question and answer session chaired by the BBC's Julian Worricker. This was followed by a reception at the Museum + Gallery, attended by the Mayor, Cllr Janet Smith, and where the results of a Primary Schools Art & Design Competition were announced. The first prize went to Fleetville Infant and Nursery School. Competition entries were displayed first in the Assembly Room at the Museum + Gallery then at the pop-up shop.

The next day the City of St Albans Tour Guides put on a special guided walk to celebrate Conservation 50.

The feedback about the activities organised by Conservation 50 has been very positive. The events and the accompanying publicity have drawn attention to the importance of



The Q&A session at the conference with, left to right, Julian Worricker, BBC Journalist; Cllr Mary Maynard; Emily Gee, Historic England; Professor Peter Wynne Rees of UCL; Ian Harvey, Executive Director of Civic Voice.



Primary Schools Art & Design Competition winners being presented with their prize of a tree to be planted in the school grounds.

conservation and highlighted some of the issues associated with conservation areas.

The Conservation 50 group that organised and managed the events will continue promoting conservation areas within the City and District. It is planning a 'Blue Plaques' scheme for the city, associating people and events with buildings and places. It will also promote the formation of a Conservation Area Advisory Committee to support the maintenance and development of conservation areas. The Society continues to support Conservation 50 and its future programme.

For more information see the website: <http://conservation50.org/>



‘The devil is in the detail’. True of many things and certainly true in the case of buildings, where an incorrect material or colour scheme may strike a jarring note. That is why the Society carefully reviews planning applications. Attention to detail is also important in another key part of our built environment: our pavements.

‘Black Spot’ is a common disease of roses. Unfortunately this nasty blight is now affecting the city’s pavements. The affliction manifests itself in the form of a

rash of patch repairs with dollops of tarmac used to infill missing paving stones.

A tour of the city’s pavements would make for some pretty depressing viewing, for while some have retained and had their traditional blue bricks re-laid, many of them are in a parlous state of repair and look like a patchwork quilt of bodge-ups.

Does it matter? Well, granted it is not up there with the loss of Green Belt, the state of the River Ver, or the city centre redevelopments. But things like this set the tone of our urban environment. When you aggregate sub-standard paving with other minor degradations such as potholes, damaged and dirty signage, unkempt kerbs and verges, unnecessarily obtrusive double yellow lines, unauthorised retail ‘A boards’, banners, graffiti, etc. the result is that the streetscape looks a mess. It becomes ever harder to take civic pride in our city.

Our watchdog role is to keep an eye on all aspects of the city’s physical environment

and how they impact on our enjoyment of St Albans. We are therefore unapologetic about highlighting these smaller issues across the district, not just in the city centre or in the ‘showcase’ areas.

If there are issues like this affecting your neighbourhood, take it up with your councillors and, often the culprit, the Utilities. Please let us know too.

Paul Brecknell



Verulamium Lake! Green Flag?

Your Society needs you!

Many thanks to all members who attended our recent AGM. They will have heard that the Committee is finalising both a five year strategic plan and a specific action plan for the next 12 months. These are designed to ensure that, while we react to issues as they arise, we do not lose sight of the key overall priorities. We also need to ensure that those are the same as members' priorities.

Last year we asked for your views on a range of issues in our questionnaire. We are grateful to all who responded and your views have informed the new draft plan. Now we would welcome comments on the plan itself. There is a draft on our website.

As a charity it is appropriate that we should keep our activities and deployment of resources under regular review to make sure they are aligned with our charitable objectives. That also involves ensuring, so far as possible, that the Society reflects the views of its members and is accountable to them. This is essential to our credibility

as the city's watchdog. We have nearly 500 individual members and a number of corporate members and there are the twin aims of engaging more with them and increasing their numbers. This will give the Society more clout.

We are keen to hear your views on the draft plan. Please take a look and e-mail us any feedback.

We are always looking to find people who are willing to contribute. There are so many issues where, ideally, we could be involved but with which we do not have the human resources to take on.

Whether it is an interest in joining the committee or in taking on a particular role, we would be delighted to hear from you. There are therefore opportunities for a number of our people. Broadening the range of members who become actively involved makes us more capable and thus even more representative and responsive.

Paul Brecknell

CONSERVATION 50 IN COLLABORATION WITH ST ALBANS CATHEDRAL PRESENT:

"Against Vulgarly": Exploring the Arts and Crafts Movement

A study day with **Tim Boatswain, Geraint John and Chris Macintyre**
Saturday 23 November, 10.30-15.30, Alban Room, Chapter House, St Albans Cathedral.

In a reaction to the excessively ornate style of the Victorian era – described by Nicholas Pevsner as "vulgarity in detail" – the Arts and Crafts movement promoted traditional craftsmanship, using simple forms, often medieval and romantic.

Bookings at £25 pp online at www.stalbanscathedral.org/event/against-vulgarity-exploring-the-arts-and-crafts-movement or through the Cathedral once the Adult Learning Autumn Brochure is published. This event is kindly supported by St Albans Cathedral

So as to avoid any possible confusion or misunderstanding, members are respectfully asked that if they attend 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 by any member. Also, the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is consulted about any plan or proposal this should not automatically be deemed as leading to consent.

Forthcoming events

13 to 22 September
Heritage Open Days

See national website and look out for the Society's email news and brochure.

Saturday 28 September
Autumn coach visit to Stamford and Burghley House

Depart Chime Square 08.00 hours; arrive back 19.30 (approx.)
Book now by email to eilyholmes@live.co.uk tel: 01727 843389 or write to Brian Holmes, 16 Trevelyan Place, St Albans AL1 2DT.
Cheques to 'St Albans Civic Society'.

Thursday 24 October
The Society's 5-year Plan and Feedback

Come along and give us your views.
Octagon Room, St Peter's Church at 7.30pm – FREE.

Wednesday 13 November
The Cathedral's new Welcome Centre its design and development

Speakers: The Dean The Very Reverend Dr Jeffrey John and architect Andy Davey.
The Welcome Centre at 7.30pm – FREE.

We are sad to report the death of Sue Jameson and offer condolences to Michael and the family.

Membership Matters

To join or renew membership

Subscriptions remain unchanged and are renewable on **1 April** each year.

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|---------------------------|-------------|
| 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
- St Columba's College
- T&B (St Albans) Ltd

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

Paul Brecknell*
Michael Fookes (Co-opted)
David Lloyd*
Peter Newby*
Robert Osborne*
Eric Roberts*

Members assisting

Tony Mason - Verulamium Park
Rita Waldron - Licensing
Dawn Wheeler - Clock Tower

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

