

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter

Our AGM is rapidly approaching and that will mark my three years as Chairman. It has been a busy time with a good deal of focus on planning issues, including the Government's White Paper on planning reform which thankfully came to nothing after the groundswell of objections but changes will happen though not yet known. More recently has been consideration of the St Albans Draft Local Plan and through our regular review of all planning applications.

As the Constitution provides for, the Executive Committee have asked whether I will continue as Chairman for another year. I have agreed to do so mainly because this will give me an opportunity to take forward further work to improve the way we operate and the next steps on communications are outlined in this newsletter. This extension is for one year only so I will definitely stand down as Chairman next year and so our need for new volunteers and fresh ideas remains pressing. Also in our newsletter are more detailed descriptions for some of our existing roles and more will follow. Please consider whether you can help.

A permanent editor for our newsletter is still needed and in the meantime I am very grateful to Mary Conneely and Roy Bellamy for putting this together.

Freda Chaloner

Our strategy and vision This is an update on the work that we have been doing to refresh our message and to make sure that it meets the needs of our City and of members.

We recognise that not everyone is clear about what we do and why we exist, so we are keen to clarify that and also to improve our communication, as well as retaining and building our membership.

Thank you to those of you who responded to the survey and came to the meeting to discuss the results. Your responses will help us to shape our future activities. The members' survey we carried out in the spring confirmed your support for our restated vision and strategy.

There is a definite need to have more volunteers to help with a range of activities and you told us that we should set out more clearly the roles of different volunteers the society needs and what commitment that would entail and as a start, there is a separate piece in this newsletter. At the AGM there will be more details available for those who want to be more involved.

Improving our communications is one of our key priorities, we will update and refresh our website and we plan to share more of the things we have been doing and achieving. Over 80% of the questionnaire respondents felt that responding to planning applications was a priority for the society, so we will be letting you have more details about the comments we make on planning applications, together with how successful our objections have been. We will also issue email messages after each committee meeting summarising the

months activities and decisions made.

One challenge was our use (or non use), of social media and so the next phase of our work will be to develop a strategy for it's use. So if anyone has expertise in social media please contact me

(chair@stalbanscivicsociety.com)

Freda Chaloner

An enjoyable and successful quiz night



The Civic Society pub quiz was held at the Lower Red Lion, on Tuesday 3 October, it had been mooted at the last members meeting and it was a most enjoyable and entertaining evening.

Eric Roberts was a demanding quiz master, with some challenging and quirky questions, they were well received. Cheese and biscuits were provided by the Society and the night ended with David, the hospitable landlord, putting everyone through their paces with a game of Play Your Cards Right, a fun way to finish.

Another quiz night will be planned for mid 2024.

AGM

Thursday 12 October 2023
7:45 pm - 9:30 pm
Jubilee Centre, Catherine Street AL3 5BU

As well as the formal business of the AGM, this is an opportunity to meet and socialise with fellow members. We will be providing drinks and light refreshments after the meeting. The AGM agenda and papers will be available on the website and will be emailed to all members.

We are keen to hear from members, who would like to get more involved. If you would like to find how you could assist, please come along and talk to one of your committee members. Further details on page 4.

This is a members only event

The new (old) Local Plan shows a lack of ambition

As you know St Albans has the dubious distinction of having the oldest Local Plan in the country so it is good to know that the Council is preparing a new Plan. The current draft was out for Regulation 18 Consultation with a closing date for comments of 25th September.

Thank you to those members who came to the meeting we held to discuss our draft response and we have submitted a response on behalf of the Civic Society, we also worked with the City Centre Resident's Associations (CCRA), on their submission. Overall we acknowledge that this is a well researched plan, but are disappointed in

that it seems to lack ambition.

The Plan is designed to last until 2041 so we would expect a clear picture of what St Albans will be like by then, however this is not evident.

We reluctantly accept, both that there is no alternative to using the Standard method for calculating housing need and that this means inevitable incursion into the Green Belt, 81% of the District is Green Belt. However, we expect that once updated figures are available the current figure of 15,000 new homes, will be significantly reduced with consequent greater protection of the Green Belt.

Our main concerns relate to the lack of ambition, particularly in relation to the City Centre where, although the draft plan refers to a City Centre Vision, such a vision is absent. Why no reference to urban tree planting or provision of water fountains in the centre? Imprecise and subjective language will not provide clarity on what is expected of developers.

Our full response will be available on our website so please look at it.

There is a long way to go before the Plan is finalised. After considering all the responses to the consultation a revised draft will be subject to further consultation next summer and then there will be a public examination and, if all goes as expected, the new Local Plan will be adopted by December 2025. So there will be further opportunities to have our say, but there remains a concern about the period until then when we have to rely on the outdated 1994 Plan.

Blue Plaques St Albans, has now installed 10 plaques with more to come



The plaque to E.R.Hughes, a Pre-Raphaelite/Symbolist artist at 3 Romeland was installed in July. The plaque to Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, first film animator in Britain, was installed at The Odyssey on 6 October with Jan Harlan, Stanley Kubrick's producer and brother-in-law as guest of honour.

A plaque for Thomas Kitchen, 18th century engraver and cartographer, is now ready for installation in Fishpool Street.

A Listed Building Consent application has been made for Betty Entwistle, first female Town Clerk, for installation at the now named, Saint & Sinner, St Peter's Street, a Grade II listed, former Mayor's residence and seat of local government.

Succubus restored

On the 3rd October at 1 pm the Mayor of St Albans, Cllr Anthony Rowlands, attended a short ceremony to celebrate the completion of the conservation of the Christopher Inn Succubus.

Over a period of weeks during the summer the Conservator Paul Ferguson worked to preserve the wooden succubus which had suffered from water penetration. He also restored her to her original colour of devilish black.



Paul Ferguson, Mayor Anthony Rowlands and Tim Boatswain

Civic Society Awards 2024

This much admired and core aspect of the work of the CS, has not occurred since 2021. The key reasons for that, post the Covid-19 Pandemic there was a negative impact on new buildings and on renovators starting projects. High costs, staff and materials shortages, meant sometimes long delays on completion and we had far fewer nominations than in previous years.

We want to be ready to deliver an event in Spring 2024, however, it is clear that we need some dedicated volunteers to help us make this happen. We need people with an interest and enthusiasm for events, we

need a small team with some knowledge of architecture, who could be part of the judging panel and most of all, an ability to support the management and delivery of an action plan to pull the whole endeavour together. If you're interested please contact chair@stalbanscivicsociety.com

When the Awards started in 1986, the Society gave an award to what was then called The Limes in Upper Marlborough Road. In recent years the plaque had deteriorated but we were delighted when the new owners of the building, Glencar Construction, contacted us about refurbishing the plaque at their now completed new



The first plaque at The Limes in Upper Marlborough Road

Head Office. It has now been restored to its former glory and we appreciate the initiative shown by the owners in carrying out this work.



2021 Award winners. From left to right: Cathedral Welcome Centre, Beaumont Gardens, Barncroft Way, The Co-op London Road.

Four new information panels on the top of the Clock Tower help visitors identify significant features

Clock Tower visitors were originally able to work out their bearings and identify significant features from a table type 'toposcope' up on the roof. This has not stood the test of time, but new clear, informative panels has been installed to enhance our visitors' experience.

The new signage was officially unveiled by the Mayor, Councillor Anthony Rowlands, who was joined by the Museum and Clock Tower teams, on Friday 18 August 2023. The Mayor thanked the group for inviting him to see the fantastic new signage on the roof of the tower.



Graphic designer, Roy Bellamy



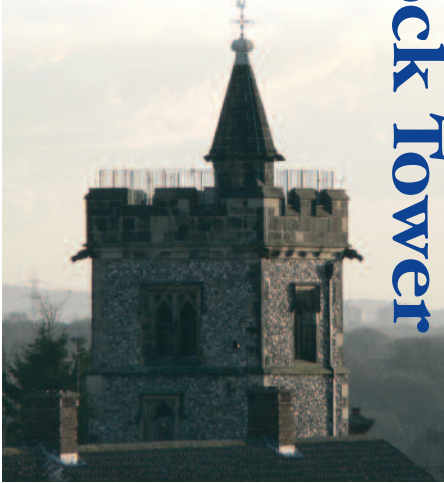
From left to right: John Morewood - President SAHAAS, Sarah Keeling - St. Albans Museum service, John Johnson - City guide, Mayor - Anthony Rowlands, Terry Turner - Chairman City Guides, Robert Osborne - Chair of the Clockateers, Freda Chaloner - Chair of the Civic Society, Caroline Howkins - Clockateers and SAHAAS.

One of his major themes in his mayoral year is recognising the work done by so many local community organisations to promote the history of the city, particularly as an ex-history teacher himself, and he thanked all the associated groups for providing these services to local residents and visitors to the city.

The four information panels, funded by the City of St Albans Tour Guides, were produced by graphic designer, Roy Bellamy, working with Terry Turner, Tour Guide Chairman, and Clockateers representative, Robert Osborne.

The panoramic photographs were taken by Ricky Barnett.

The Clock Tower season has just come to an end with a total of 9800 visitors over the six months from Easter to end of September.



Clock Tower

This is the first time since the pandemic that we've been able to open for the full period as last year opening was delayed whilst the platform on the roof was replaced.

The new information boards have been well received by visitors with comments about how informative they are and help bring the city to life. The city guides provide a volunteer on Saturday morning who is on the roof to talk to visitors and they've been able to use the boards as a way of engaging with people, so much so that one of the guides admitted to being a bit hoarse as he'd been talking so much!

The next project is to look at replacing the toposcope, which is so worn it's illegible, with a board giving information about the Clock Tower.

When you help out at the Clock Tower, one of the things you regularly hear visitors say is that they've lived in St Albans for many years but never been up the tower. Another interesting fact is the number of people we see who are visiting from further afield, such as USA, Malaysia, Germany to give just a few recent examples. We open free on Heritage Open Day in September and that always generates high numbers of visitors with this year seeing 670 across the weekend compared to around 220-250 on a typical weekend.

Working with our colleagues in the Architectural & Archaeological Society, we have a small group of volunteers who keep the Tower open. We need more people to help spread the load and in doing so not only are you keeping open the best value visitor attraction in the city but you are generating funds for us as any surplus is split between the two Societies. If you're interested then please email secretary@stalbanscivicsociety.com

We are entirely run by volunteers and we are looking for members who can help us in a number of roles.

Please come to the AGM as it's a great way to find out more about what is going on in the Civic Society. There will be a chance to talk to the committee and to find out about the opportunities to get involved at different levels, with the amount of time required varying depending on the role and what you can commit to.

The Committee meetings are monthly, usually on Wednesday evening, being on the Committee is a role for anyone who cares about St Albans and whose interests are wide ranging. Meetings cover a number of issues from planning to heritage and how best to liaise with the Council and very topically, how the CS should respond to the Local Plan.

Genuine interest in these issues is far more important than an existing knowledge base, other committee members are happy to share information on issues and explain the detail for how planning works, for instance.

Newsletter Editor

The quarterly newsletter keeps members informed of all the society is involved in. Much of the content is supplied and written by other members, so the editor is liaising with others and identifying items of interest and showcasing them within the newsletter.

This is a role for anyone who enjoys writing and collating and has basic computer skills. It's a fairly autonomous role and not too onerous. Others can help and get you started.

Communications: emails, the website, social media

Alongside the newsletter, is our regular monthly email to members. This usually contains dates for the diary, items we want to highlight that might interest members, or short news items that won't wait until the next quarterly newsletter. Its produced using online software and can be put together in your own time subject to meeting any deadlines for activities that are mentioned in the mailing.

Our website needs more timely updating and refreshing, with new items uploaded, so if you're interested in this or are keen and knowledgeable we also need to create a profile on social media. If anyone has expertise, or experience in this area and wants to help us create one, please contact chair@stalbanscivicsociety.com

Planning Advisory Group

Every month we look at the current applications and pick out those where we need to comment. These might be major developments but are more likely to be items that are contrary to the Council's Local Plan, or detrimental to other residents and the appearance of the street or over development of a small site.

We need one or two people who can scrutinise applications online and contribute to a monthly discussion where comments are agreed. This is a regular monthly commitment but some preparatory work can be undertaken in own time.

Support and training from the existing committee will be given and we think this is a key part of the CS core work and we need new interested volunteers.

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 see the website or contact the Membership Secretary, Jan Cropper, tel: 01727 844363 or email membership@stalbanscivicsociety.com or post to 7 Upton Avenue, St Albans AL3 5EW

The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support from the following Corporate Members:

- Austin Trueman Associates
- Debenhams Ottaway
- National Pharmacy Association

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.