

**W**elcome to the Spring edition of our newsletter. Many thanks again to Roy Bellamy for producing this edition.

I am delighted to report that we have now agreed our Social Media Strategy. Thanks to our member Andrew Hill, we now have Civic Society accounts on Facebook, on Instagram, and an updated presence on X, formerly Twitter.

We will be using these accounts to provide up-to-date information about what we are doing and what's happening in St Albans. This is part of our agreed marketing and communications objectives to build awareness of the Society, what we do, and how we benefit the city.

If you already use these social platforms then please follow us, and like, comment on and share our posts with your friends, relatives and networks.

*Link to our Facebook account:*

<https://www.facebook.com/people/St-Albans-Civic-Society/61556456139073/>

*Link to our Instagram account:*

<https://www.instagram.com/stalbancivicsociety/>

*Link to our X/Twitter account:*

<https://twitter.com/stalbancivicsoc>

If you are new to social media please open an account and start to follow us.

1. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/>, <https://www.instagram.com/> and <https://twitter.com/home>
2. Follow their instructions to register for an account (you will need to provide your email address and create a password you will remember)
3. Once confirmed (they will email you to confirm the account), search 'St Albans Civic Society' in their search function to find us
4. Follow our accounts
5. Then you can start liking, commenting on, and sharing onward our posts

*Thanks for joining our social media journey and good luck!*

**Freda Chaloner**



## Our 2024 Awards night

**Tuesday 21 May, Abbey Theatre, 7.30pm**

Everyone is welcome to attend including non-members. Thanks to members who nominated a building, our judges are now in the process of viewing a number of strong and distinctive projects.

The Awards celebrate imaginative development and design initiatives - anything from an entire housing block to a beautiful new wall. We aim to celebrate restoration as well as new builds. All projects are eligible as long as they have been completed in the two and a half years to August 2023.



Photo ©Roy Bellamy

## PUB QUIZ

Following on from our last successful event, our next Pub Quiz will be held again at the Lower Red Lion

Please get there early to ensure the best seats in the house. We will aim to finish around 9.30.

The entry fee is £2 per person, which we will collect on the night. Teams of up to a maximum of six will be eligible. There will be a winners pot of £20 and, to end the night, we shall 'Play your Cards Right', with two prizes of £5.

There are spaces for up to 32 people. If you want to take part please send your name and details, including your team name and size to; [maneely56@gmail.com](mailto:maneely56@gmail.com)

Cheese and biscuits are included and provided by the Civic Society (CS), with all drinks to be purchased at the bar.

**Please come along to meet and socialise with other CS members; support your Society and a great local pub. But most of all to have some fun. See you there!**

**Monday 22 April\***  
**Lower Red Lion**  
Fishpool Street  
**Start 7.30pm**

*\*Please note the change of date from that shown in the 12 March email News. This is to avoid clash with a SAHAAS talk.*

## Changes to Planning Rules and what it means for St Albans

**T**here have been two significant recent developments in relation to planning – the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued before Christmas and the changes and proposed changes to Permitted Development Rights (PDR) announced in February. What do these mean for St Albans and what impact might the changes have on the possibility of the Council making fresh Article 4 Directions for its designated Employment Areas?

The new NPPF introduces two important changes. Firstly the new guidance makes clear that the “standard method” for assessing local authority need is an advisory starting point and in exceptional circumstances a smaller number may be used. Secondly there is no longer a requirement for local authorities to review or alter Green Belt boundaries if this would be the only way to meet housing need. These proposals apply to our draft Local Plan. So, whilst in theory the Council could take the view that the Green Belt should not be amended the fact that 80% of St Albans

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### REMINDER

Your Membership Subscription is due on **1 April**. See page 4

**Changes to Planning Rules and what it means for St Albans** *continued*

District land is Green Belt means that in practice little can change if the “standard method” of calculating the required volume is to be met.

**Domestic properties**

The proposed changes to PDR for domestic properties include increases in the size of rear and side extensions and will permit wrap around L-shaped extensions. It also includes removing the limit on the sizes of roof conversions so that householders can convert the whole of the available roof space. Additionally it is proposed to remove the restriction that the total of extensions cannot exceed 50% of the curtilage of the original house.

If all of this can be done without any application for planning permission then is this a welcome simplification or is there a risk that the character of residential areas may be adversely affected? *What do you think?* The consultation ends on 9 April.

**Commercial Properties**

For conversion of commercial properties to residential the PDR rules have been changed to remove both the requirement that a property has been vacant for a continuous period of three months prior to the application for prior approval and the upper floor space limit of 1500 sq m has been removed. So a building of any size can be converted under PDR. Where does this leave the designated Employment

Areas in our draft Local Plan?

In 2017 the Council issued Article 4 Directions in respect of its designated Employment Areas. These Directions meant that permitted development rights were suspended in relation to proposed conversions of office accommodation to residential. Any proposals to convert offices therefore required planning permission. When the changes to use classes were made these Article 4 Directions fell away.

The council has not so far issued new Article 4 Directions to cover these Employment Areas. The current conversion of part of AECOM House to residential has made use of PDR.

Although areas including the Core City Centre are shown in the District Plan as Protected Employment Areas with a Policy that any development proposals must avoid net loss of office floor space, it is difficult to see how this can be possible.

Members of the Civic Society met with Council officers at the end of January to discuss the possibility of new Article 4 Directions. The officers said that they hoped to be able to issue new Article 4 Directions when the new Plan was finalised, around the beginning of 2025. The officers stressed that the NPPF did not encourage new Article 4 Directions and made clear they were for wholly exceptional circumstances. However, both Watford and Hertsmere have new Article 4 Directions covering their key employment areas so why not St Albans? The existence of these would not mean that no

conversions could happen – just that the Council would have a say. Without these then the council has no control over where, how many and when offices are converted, with the consequential impact on infrastructure.

**Finally: Designation notice issued to St Albans District Council**

On 6 March, Lee Rowley, the Housing Minister, issued a Designation Notice to St Albans District Council. This was on the basis of delays in dealing with planning applications, though somewhat bizarre as it is only recently that the Council was awarded a grant of £100 000 by the Government to deal with the backlog of cases!

This Designation Notice means that applications for non- major developments (that includes applications for one to nine houses or projects on a site less than one hectare) can go straight to the Planning Inspectorate if the applicant chooses.

Our current understanding is that there will still be an opportunity for residents and bodies like us to comment but the detail of this is still unclear. It does though mean that there will be no possibility of the applications being called in so no role at all for local councillors.

**WHAT HAPPENED TO LOCALISM?**

*Please let me have your thoughts on any of the above.*

**Freda Chaloner**

**Later this year the CCOSS (the former police station site) will open. How successful in commercial terms will it be?**



Photo © Roy Bellamy

**T**o remind you, the scheme has three elements: apartments, office space and commercial space.

Sadly economic conditions appear to have already hit the Council’s expected financial return. Of the apartments, 33 were to be for social housing and 60 were to be sold. A year ago this was still the plan but inflation and the rise in mortgage rates have impacted the market and the Council has sold all the properties to Watford Community Housing. Inevitably the sale will have produced a lower return than originally projected.

It is important that the commercial space is managed so that the Council claws back some of the loss on housing. However, demand for office space has fallen as working from home has continued.

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Later this year the CCOSS (the former police station site) will open. How successful in commercial terms will it be? *continued*

Much office space is being repurposed as residential. Were this to happen with CCOSS it would seriously erode the design integrity of the whole scheme. The office space, on Victoria Street, is located to announce the whole development, making it residential would jeopardise the success of the scheme as a whole. It is vital that the Council finds an organisation that wants to make known its presence, to the city and to the wider world. There could be such businesses in St Albans. Burton's Biscuits or Premier Foods might be persuaded or perhaps Skechers and if Skechers also took a retail unit, it would be good for both the company and the city.

Letting the retail space in the scheme will be problematic because it will be



Photo @Roy Bellamy

detached from other retailing in the city centre. The link to the Maltings is uninspiring, pedestrian movement across Victoria Street will be weak and the link to St Peter's Street is remote. It is important that the Council takes a considered approach to letting the retail space, not to take just anyone but to consider which retailers will pull in shoppers. Two types

come to mind, one is fast fashion such as Primark but this is a fickle sector. New Look, for example, which has a shop in the Maltings, closed 19 stores in 2023. The second is to attract anchor stores in an under-represented sector such as homeware, stores like H&M Home or even Ikea. Certainly a smaller scale Ikea store like the one in Hammersmith would be a significant draw.

Will CCOSS be a commercial success? If it had opened before the pandemic the answer would almost certainly have been yes - but now? Despite falling inflation, prices will still be increasing and with a weakened economy the Council's financial return will be less than anticipated. Choosing the right type of retailer and office tenant is the way to mitigate its loss. Let's hope the Council employs good advisors.

**Peter Newby**

## Blue Plaque for Betty Entwistle

On 23 Feb 2024 Blue Plaques St Albans installed its 11th plaque on the south entrance to the building on St Peter's Street known as The Grange (now The Saint & Sinner pub). The plaque commemorates Betty Entwistle (1912-1975), who was the first female Town Clerk in England and the first Chief Executive of the City and District Council of St Albans.

The guest of honour was St Albans' MP Daisy Cooper and the short ceremony was graced by both the Mayor of St Albans, Cllr Anthony Rowlands and the Town Cryer, Steve Potter. Over 50 members of the public turned up to observe the ceremony, which just finished before a mighty hail storm came down!

Daisy Cooper MP for St Albans, said: "Betty Entwistle was a trailblazer here in St Albans and it was an honour to join in the unveiling of her blue plaque. Betty's life is an inspiration for the next generation of women here in St Albans to get involved in the civic and political life of our area. I would also like to thank McMullen's & Sons and Tim Boatswain, the Chairman of Blue Plaques, who have made this possible."

Professor Tim Boatswain, the Chairman of Blue Plaques St Albans, stated:

"Betty Entwistle was a wonderful role model of female empowerment at a time when there few women in senior positions in local government. She had a deep commitment to the community of St Albans and is fondly remembered. We are delighted that another female role model, Daisy Cooper, MP for St Albans, and

Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats, has been able to officially install the plaque. Blue Plaques St Albans is also very grateful to McMullen's & Sons, who not only gave permission for the installation but have also sponsored the blue plaque itself. I hope this blue plaque will inform more people about the important contribution Betty Entwistle made to the city."

Betty Vivian Entwistle was born in Lancashire, the daughter of Joseph Entwistle and his wife Nora (née Buckley). She attended Lancaster Girl's

Grammar School and then obtained an Honours degree in Law at Manchester University. She worked in the Morecambe and Heysham Town Clerk's office until she moved to St Albans in 1939 as a Legal Assistant to the City Council. She then became Assistant Solicitor and Deputy Town Clerk (1944) before being appointed Town Clerk in 1960 – in competition with 67 other applicants.

She was the first woman in England to be appointed to such a position. The Council Offices at this time were in The Grange in St Peter's Street. During her tenure, she conducted the ceremony when



Photos ©Shjezana Boatswain



the Queen Mother was given Freedom of City in 1961 and also in May 1962 when freedom was given to Herts and Beds Yeomanry.

She became Chief Executive Officer of the new St Albans City and District Council in 1973. She was closely associated with the expansion of leisure services, including those of Westminster Lodge and the Civic Centre, and was greatly respected for her dedication to the city community. Betty was also active in local arts and conservation societies and was Secretary of the Eastern Orchestral Association.

She died suddenly on 2 August 1975 at her home at 4 York Road.

Andy Lawrence has produced a video of the ceremony which can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64YX2PbZ5Ro>

Photo ©Roy Bellamy



## The Clock Tower season starts on Good Friday 29 March for the 2024 season, with the Mayor conducting the official opening ceremony at 10.30am

Last year we had over 9000 visitors and this is only possible due to the help provided by our volunteers and those from the Archaeological & Architectural Society.

New information boards were installed on the roof last summer showing the view in each direction and these have been well received. The boards were generously funded by the City Tour Guides who provide a guide each Saturday morning to talk to visitors at the top of the Tower.

This year we hope to replace the toposcope with a new sign explaining more about the history of the Tower, such as its use as a telegraph station.

Please consider joining the willing band of “clockateers” who cover a 90 minute session at weekends and bank holidays and keep the Tower open. If you would like to help please contact [secretary@stalbanscivicsociety.com](mailto:secretary@stalbanscivicsociety.com)

# We need your help!

Remember life during Covid? Fewer casual face to face chats with friends, limited access to public places.

To some extent all this lies in the past but the effects are still being felt. We are all older and some of us are feeling left out by the now universal enthusiasm for technology in all its aspects. The Society’s membership numbers are slowly declining; none of us is getting any younger. Yet the challenges of ensuring that St Albans retains its special character and attraction as a pleasant place to live remain as important as ever.

The Society needs new blood! Who better to act as recruiting agents than our existing members, who have first hand experience of quietly – and sometimes not so quietly – drawing attention to the heritage of St Albans and the need to balance 21st century expectations with a

sympathetic approach to conservation?

We are intending to restart face to face members’ meetings in the near future and are making a special ‘Spring offer’ – until further notice any member attending a meeting is invited to bring a friend free of charge. The hope, of course, is that the invitee will be enthused to join the Society, so to that end we would ask that they are happy to provide us with their contact details so we can keep in touch with them.

If you would like to take up this offer, or have any questions, please get in touch by email to [membership@stalbanscivicsociety.com](mailto:membership@stalbanscivicsociety.com) or leave a message with your name and contact details on 01727 844363.

**And a reminder that your membership renewal is due on 1 April.**

**Jan Cropper**

Membership Secretary

### Forthcoming events 2024

*Monday 22 April*

**Pub Quiz**

Lower Red Lion, Fishpool Street from 7.00pm for 7.30start

*Wednesday 24 April*

**Jill Singer: Why St Albans should be proud of St Albans**

Jubilee Centre, Catherine Street at 7.30pm  
Drinks will be provided

*Wednesday 8 May*

**Theresa Smith and Nuala Webb: The rail freight terminal – a disaster that can be avoided**

Jubilee Centre, Catherine Street at 7.30pm  
Drinks will be provided

*Tuesday 21 May*

**Civic Society Awards Night**

Abbey Theatre at 7.30 pm

## 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	<b>Free</b>
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](mailto: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.

## David Lloyd

*18 September 1936 – 10 July 2023*

(Newsletter space limitation has unfortunately delayed this appreciation of David Lloyd.)

David was a member for many years, serving on the Executive Committee and, latterly, on both Planning and Design Advisory Groups. In the most recent years he has offered his Architect’s advice to the Planning Advisory Group which met, and despite his loss, continues to meet, every three weeks to

scrutinise the weekly planning lists, which include application for tree works. This is an important role for the Society and his wise and professional contributions are very much missed.

Some of us were able to attend his funeral and we extend the Society’s belated condolences to his wife, Christel, and family.