

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

This is probably the last time that I will take up the chairmanship as part of our rotating system. It could scarcely be a more 'interesting' time as far as Alton is concerned.

To start with, the South Downs National Park now appears to be a certainty. No one is quite sure how Alton will be affected as one of the 'gateway' towns on the park's borders. On the one hand it could bring many more tourists and more trade along with them; on the other it could increase pressures for development in Alton as there will be tougher restrictions within the park. A case of opportunities and threats.

Then, rather out of the blue at least two, possibly three, national supermarket operators seem to be falling over themselves to move into Alton. Tesco were refused planning permission for a site at the far end of Mill Lane but we do not expect them to go away quietly. Meanwhile, Asda are trying for the Coors sports field site on Anstey Road. Aldi did gain permission for a store on the Old Maltings site but it's anyone's guess when this will happen. Our view is that another major supermarket outside the centre of town is likely to harm the town's commercial life even though it would provide welcome competition for Sainsbury's.

Having been worried about the government's housing targets for East Hampshire we were relieved to hear that Alton will not be expected to provide any more housing sites than the ones that have already been earmarked. There are of course a number of

permissions that have not been implemented yet, due to the recession. Largest of these is the Chandos Lodge site behind the Grange Hotel.

The issue of the moment is the redevelopment of the Community Centre. As this goes to press the public consultation is in progress. We have been excited at the prospect of a new structure that we have been promised will be a 'landmark building', but we are concerned that in trying to fit in a facility for the Holybourne Theatre the scheme's main objective will have been compromised. The suggested site on part of the Lady Place car park offers possibilities that wouldn't have been the case with the other suggested sites, but there are many unanswered questions that will need to be resolved before we will be able to give the proposal our wholehearted support. We hope that as many of our members as possible will have been able to write in to the District Council as well as to fill in their questionnaire. The latter asks questions that are difficult to answer without a lot more detailed information. See our more in-depth article on Pages 4, 5 and 6.

Finally I very much hope that you will be able to join us at the Assembly Rooms at 10am on Saturday 14th November. The meeting will commence with the presentation of the Alton Society and John Ambrose Awards and after the AGM will be followed by a talk about the South Downs National Park, by Nick Heasman the Hampshire Area Manager for the park. It promises to be a very interesting morning.

Nick Carey-Thomas

PLANNING MATTERS

A few important planning applications have come in over the last three months.

66 The Butts (33821). This semi-detached pair of houses was built in the Conservation Area to replace a bungalow. The design of the building went through various modifications until it fitted in well with its neighbours and met with our approval. Unfortunately it was then actually built in disregard of the approved drawings in several respects, to its detriment and that of the Conservation Area. As a result of our objections, supported by the Conservation Office, the missing chimneys have been reinstated. It is hoped that this will be a warning to builders and developers that there are teeth in the planning regulations and that agreed designs should be adhered to.

Iceland, High Street (26692). A request to Iceland to tidy up their windows facing the High Street has been heeded and the appearance of the store much improved.

Tesco, Mill Lane (22467). The proposed Tesco superstore at the Holybourne end of Mill Lane is a really significant event. Our membership was split on whether to support or oppose the scheme. After a close debate, EHDC decided that the store was too large in the wrong place and it was rejected.

Alton House Hotel, Normandy Street (22766). The proposal is to build two more blocks of flats in the garden on the site of the present tennis court and open-air swimming pool. After close debate, this was rejected.

Treloar's College, Holybourne (22387). Treloar's propose to close down their Froyle facilities and move them to new buildings on the Holybourne site. Although the buildings appear to be reasonably well designed, they will impact on

neighbouring Complins. Increased traffic will complicate the already busy junction between Holybourne and Montecchio Way, Alton. The Environment Agency has reservations on the effect of the site on flooding from land drainage. A second public consultation is planned based on the revised plans.

Another important development, not yet the subject of a proper planning application, is for **Coors Playing Fields, Anstey Road. (30667).** Asda has consulted on its interest in building a supermarket and petrol station on this site. The fundamental objection to immediate development is the alternative provision of land to replace the lost sporting facilities; simply moving them to other sports grounds still leaves a loss of total area of open-air facility, with which Alton is under-supplied. Although an alternative petrol station at that end of town would be beneficial, the other question concerning more supermarkets is how many does a town the size of Alton need, in addition to Sainsbury, M&S Simply Food, Iceland, Aldi and, perhaps, Tesco? And what will be the effect on the town centre? There will also be substantial environmental issues for neighbouring houses, including noise, light pollution and the risk of oil spillage. Increased traffic on Anstey Road will also be a major issue and, as always, we press for a holistic view of Anstey Road's traffic from so many new or proposed developments along its length.

Edward Hepper

BUILT ENVIRONMENT GROUP contd.

The South East Plan

The old South East Regional Assembly which had a small (and insufficient) semblance of democracy, has been replaced by a new Whitehall quango (with probably even fewer democratic credentials), the South East Partnership Board. This is the highest planning authority for our region outside Whitehall, with which it is closely allied. It lays down the number of new houses to be provided in the region over the next twenty years and, with less obvious power, the provision of social and infrastructure services to go with them. The region extends in a crescent from Kent to Buckinghamshire around the south east side of London and represents about 16% of the population of England.

★
★ *Check out our new website!* ★
★ www.altonsociety.org.uk ★
★ *Brimful of up-to-date information* ★

South Downs National Park

Nick Heasman, Area Manager, South Downs Joint Committee, Hampshire Team, will speak at our AGM on November 14th, on The South Downs National Park – past, present and future. We hope he will clarify some of the likely effects on Alton of living next to the National Park. We have invited representatives from the neighbouring parish councils and from Alton organisations to attend, as well as putting posters around the town.

The Local List

We have completed our work on Alton itself and the results are going to EHDC’s Conservation Officer shortly. We now have to arrange survey walks with representatives of the Holybourne Village Association, and then will have completed the field work for this exercise.

Transport

We have investigated the situation with regard to improved facilities at Alton Station for disabled people. The recent provision of £110,000 from Access for All (Central Government), EHDC and HCC is welcomed. It is intended to improve and lower the booking office window to make it easier for wheel-chair users, and disabled toilets are to be provided. These are most welcome and long overdue improvements. The remaining obstacle is access to platform 2. Network Rail has undertaken extensive studies into what can be done and has ruled out any platform level access at the Winchester end of the station, due to Health & Safety regulations. Lifts and a new bridge near the present one are too expensive and disfiguring to the old buildings. They propose instead to move the barrow crossing at rail level nearer to London so that it clears the new 12-car trains

likely to be introduced soon. A telephone will be provided on Platform 2 from which South West Trains train staff can ring the signal box and ensure safe crossing even though a train may still be parked in the station. It will be their priority to assist disabled passengers before the train moves out to London. This will be a great improvement on the present system by which disabled passengers are subject to long delays and even missing their trains; it will however still leave them with a long and uncomfortable detour, especially when it’s raining. However we are grateful for the pressure that has been brought by, amongst others, Passenger Focus and the personal attention of the new Wessex Route Director of Network Rail. Parents with buggies and prams should also benefit from these improvements.

Edward Hepper

PROSPECTS FOR THE NEW ALTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

Most members of the Society will already be aware via the local press that your Committee has been very active in debate about this topic over recent weeks. Our position has been one of warmly welcoming the willingness of the EHDC to make significant new investment in the future of the Community Centre. But we have also felt obliged to raise some entirely justifiable queries about the kind of arrangements being initially proposed and about the inadequacies of the information so far provided and the public consultation so far conducted. We are therefore pleased to have this opportunity of reporting to members our current perception of the general situation.

All of us have been excited at the prospect of a fine new building; and the suggestion to include theatre facilities seems complementary and visionary.

EHDC's commitment to a 'landmark' building is to be welcomed, and we are keen to see one erected that will comply with the principles of the Town Design Statement. However, it is sad that the veil of confidentiality imposed by EHDC for over a year has resulted in some ill-considered ideas being developed without any community input, which might have been able to do much to improve them. We did offer to the Trustees of Alton Community Association consultation over building design matters but this offer was not taken up. However, at last the veil has been lifted and during the past three months, first Alton Town Council and more recently the general public have been brought into some of the picture.

The initial public consultation conducted in early October posed only three very general questions without any of the necessary background information on which to make meaningful replies. The Report of a Feasibility Study dated July 2009 is now available on the EHDC website in the documentation for its Cabinet meeting on 9 September this year. This study addresses the combined Community Centre and theatre building on the Lady Place car park. However, at the time of writing and despite repeated requests, EHDC has not yet made available the earlier Feasibility Study (dated 18 March 2009 and revised 29 April) into the combined building at the Bank car park, or the study rejecting Bank in favour of Lady Place. For the 9 September meeting, Cabinet were presented with two appendices with four page summaries of the Bank and the Lady Place reports. It was worrying that most of the advantages quoted for Lady Place applied equally to the Bank site.

Nevertheless, the Lady Place car park site does have many attractions, not least the possibility of using the Public Gardens in conjunction with the new building.

In October, EHDC gave presentations to members of the Community Association and to the public. These included parts of the second feasibility study that are now in the public realm. We have to say that they raise more questions than they answer. In particular:

- continued on next page...

PROSPECTS FOR THE NEW ALTON COMMUNITY CENTRE— contd.

- The diagrammatic concept plans in the study show clearly that the allocated site will not be large enough to accommodate satisfactorily both the theatre and the Community Centre. Certain vital components of the latter have been left out altogether or relegated to the upper floors, while others have been squeezed as a result of the theatre occupying a large part of the building's footprint. It has been argued that the plans are indicative only, but they show the site and the rooms to scale and that gives enough information to cause us grave concern. At the Alton Town Council meeting on 14 October, it was demonstrated that the ground floor footprint would need to be enlarged by 50% in order to accommodate the essential services (old people, nursery children, entry foyers and theatre) and Lead Councillor Andrew Joy undertook that the footprint would be enlarged as required and, if necessary, moved towards the north and east.
- Will a three-storey building – which will probably be needed to accommodate all these facilities – be too oppressive in the designated location in Lady Place car park?
- The financial arrangements are at best unclear. It seems certain that the Holybourne Theatre Group's contribution, mainly from the sale of their site, will raise only a proportion of the overall cost of this element of the building. This has now been acknowledged and their use of it will be by a much more flexible arrangement giving reasonable access at peak times to other performance groups. EHDC was very clear that its 'gap' funding represented their long-standing commitment to

improving facilities for the youth of Alton.

- It also needs to be demonstrated that Alton can viably support another theatrical performance facility in addition to those already in the town.

These are not the only issues that the current proposals raise. They made it very difficult to reply to the EHDC questionnaire. For instance:

Do we agree that Alton needs a new community centre to replace the existing building?

Yes, but only on the assumption that the new building can provide better and more extensive facilities than the present one.

Do we agree with the idea of including theatre facilities within the new complex?

Yes, but not at the expense of the Community Centre in terms of space, capital expenditure and in the financial arrangements for running it. We look forward to seeing a much clearer presentation of what is being proposed concerning these aspects.

Do we agree with the choice of Lady Place car park as the site?

Maybe. It seems to offer potential, but only if large enough for the building and its setting. We do not have enough information to reject consideration of Bank car park and other sites.

We note that the Town Council meeting on 14 October was unconvinced by the plans or the validity of the consultation so far. Its votes in favour of inclusion of

continued on next page...

PROSPECTS FOR THE NEW ALTON COMMUNITY CENTRE— contd.

theatrical facilities and of Lady Place car park were narrow (3 in favour in principle subject to more information, 2 against and 4 abstentions – hardly a ringing endorsement).

We very much hope that the consultation process that has at last begun will give the sponsors of this exciting project pause for thought. It would be tragic if it became a huge compromise where neither the Community Centre nor the Holybourne Theatre

Group nor the town would have the facilities that they need. We are heartened by EHDC's commitment to continuing iterative consultation with the public and with all the Community Centre's user groups in order to refine the design and that there will be much more ample provision for ongoing formal consultation before the project is approved.

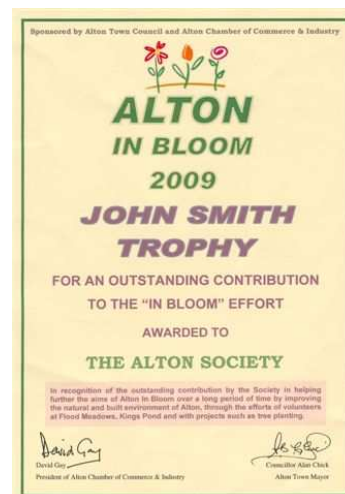
The Committee of the Alton Society

Copies of the key documents and plans that we have found can be consulted on the Alton Society website at "www.altonsociety.org.uk > Planning > Community Centre" or alternatively the direct URL is <http://altonsociety.org.uk/page12.html>. We welcome your comments via info@altonsociety.org.uk

THE ALTON SOCIETY IS AN AWARD WINNER!

The Alton Society has won another award as part of Alton in Bloom for 2009. The Alton Society was presented with the Alton Town Mayor Special Award for Alton in Bloom. The very smart award in the form of a silver cup was given by Councillor John Smith and has been made on an annual basis since 2001. The citation for the award reads "In recognition of the outstanding contribution made by the Alton Society by helping the aims of the Alton in Bloom over a long period of time by improving the Natural and Built Environment of Alton through efforts of volunteers at Flood Meadows, Kings Pond and with projects such as tree planting."

Congratulations to all who have contributed selflessly to the good of Alton by their hard work through the Society!



UPDATE ON ALTON & HOLYBOURNE GREENING CAMPAIGN



Growing Local Food

Just after our last newsletter went to press (early August) we were informed that the owner who had so generously offered us a small plot for growing local food withdrew his offer. This was very disappointing after months of negotiations and many offers of practical support from other local organisations. But the team have risen to the challenge and are widening their scope to look at other possibilities for bringing local fresh food closer to our town.

Two ideas are foremost at present:

1. searching for a farmer who would consider a tried and tested scheme whereby local customers commit to purchase vegetables in advance, enabling the farmer to calculate the economies and grow to order; and
2. finding out how best to help local people make effective use of small spaces for growing fruit & veg.

Meanwhile the Railway Station plot is a real 'show-stopper' for highlighting the possibilities of a cosy veg patch. Last week the bright yellow and green chard were shooting up beside the tall beans and lording it over the spreading courgettes - a feast for the eyes.

Reducing plastic bags

In early September Bill Jabelman and his team encouraged local shoppers at Marks & Spencers to stop and feel the weight of one kilogram of carbon, as an indication of how much CO₂ is released in the production of just 3-5 plastic bags. Many were duly impressed and one man even returned his new plastic bag back to the store. The survey of shoppers showed that most people try to remember to bring a shopping bag and for others the charging for a new bag helps focus the mind: 'Seconds to make - decades to decompose'.

Home Insulation

Early October and we are still basking in sunny weather. Home insulation may be the last thing on our mind. Not so for the Home Insulation team; the pilot of the Shropshire's 'Household Energy Service' has proved so popular that the Campaign has unanimously voted to go ahead and establish the scheme here in Alton. Gill Jackson will complete the next level of training this month so there will be a seamless transition of the service from 'up north to down south'. Not only do we think it's a great scheme - it is also highlighted in the Government's Dept of Energy and Climate Change, as an example of an excellent community initiative that helps everyone improve home insulation, decrease fuel bills and reduce carbon emissions.

Details of how to obtain a free Home Energy Service or information on any aspect of the Greening Campaign are available from Chris Chappell, tel. 01420 544422.



Two members of the Home Insulation team from the Greening Campaign, preparing an experiment that highlighted the benefit of different types of insulation materials. Taken at the St Lawrence Green Festival, September 26th 2009.

Award to an Individual for Outstanding Services to the Town 2009

The winner is... Dr JUNE CHATFIELD B.Sc., Ph.D., A.R.C.S.

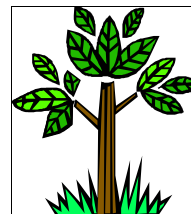
June is a local biologist, of international standing. "Whenever there is a major planning application for new development in Alton, it will be June who knows the natural history of the site and can ensure that appropriate protective measures are taken, whether it is flora or fauna that might be at risk; she is unstinting of her time in attending meetings and public enquiries to achieve this." (The full profile will be published in the New Year edition of the newsletter.)

June will be presented with her award at the **AGM, Alton Assembly Rooms,**
10 am, on Saturday 14th November.

Landscape Planting

Trees and sites have been selected for parts of Manor and Anstey estates and for the Drayman's Way boundary of the car park behind the Methodist Church. Helpful talks have been held with Alton Town, East Hampshire District and Hampshire County Councils. It is hoped that we can plant this Autumn or next Spring. Sponsorship will be welcome, either private individuals or companies.

Please contact Edward Hepper or Norman Isham (details on back page)



MEMBERSHIP INVOLVEMENT

COME TO THE AGM (details on back page & in supplement)
GET TO KNOW YOUR COMMITTEE AND OTHER MEMBERS!

You are invited to join us and the speaker for lunch at

The Crown Hotel—

after the Annual General Meeting

(members pay for own lunch)

If interested, please contact Jan Nicholas on 01420 88411 or

jnich1515@aol.com - by Saturday 7th November

Join the Alton Society Now - have a say and a role in the future of our town

The membership subscription is £10 per household from 1st October.

Ask for a leaflet for its standing order form and to agree to the subscription being treated as Gift Aid.

Contact our Treasurer: Jan Nicholas, 10 Barton End, Alton, GU34 1LD.

Tel.: 01420 88411. E-mail: jnich1515@aol.com

For existing members who already pay by standing order, please note that if you have not done so already, you need to instruct your bank before 1st October to increase the amount payable to £10. Thank you.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN—currently on rotation:-

Nick Carey-Thomas (Sept—Nov)

Treasurer & Newsletter Editor

Jan Nicholas 01420 88411

OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:-

Chris Chappell

01420 544422

Jerry Cullum

01420 54388

Contact by e-mail : info@altonsociety.org.uk

SUB-COMMITTEES:-

Built Environment

Edward Hepper James Willis

01420 544176 01420 83416

Mike Biddiss Nick Carey-Thomas

01420 543132 01420 82195

Brian Alexander Norman Isham OBE

01420 549552 01420 542114

Alton Town Partnership Liaison

Mike Heelis MBE 01420 82780

Natural Environment

Mike Heelis

TREE WARDEN:-

Jim Dickinson 01420 84729

(a members-only consultation service - temporarily suspended)

CONTACT LINE

FOR

STRAY SAINSBURY'S SHOPPING TROLLEYS!

Ring the store

01420 544252

POTHOLE HOTLINE

0845 603 6533

or a form can be filled in online at

www.hants.gov.uk/roads/highwaysdefects

LITTER HOTLINE

01730 234295

out-of-hours for emergencies, glass etc

07850 358156



Working together for the future of Alton

www.AltonSociety.org.uk

A talk of major current interest to the people of Alton
and the surrounding villages

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Past, Present, and Future

by **Nick Heasman**

Hampshire Team Manager of
the South Downs National Park



OPEN TO ALL

- as part of the Alton Society's AGM, at which we shall also be presenting our two ANNUAL AWARDS, one honouring an architectural project of merit and the second an individual Altonian who has given outstanding service to the town.

Saturday 14th November 2009
Alton Assembly Rooms, 10.00am