

Alton – a good place to live



James Willis

One of the visitors to the Society's stand at this year's (outstandingly successful) Alton Show told me that she has recently moved from North Dakota to live in Alton.

(There are not many such, so she may recognise herself in this.) Having said what a good place Alton is to live in, she went on to say that this is first and foremost because of the people.

Someone else once told me that he always knew when he was in Alton because cars stopped at pedestrian crossings. Recently finding myself without change for the car park behind M&S I asked a man climbing out of a van if he could help me. In spite of turning out to have his arms full of tools he dextrously found the coins in his pocket and just gave them to me. He was delighted when I said I would pay him back by doing the same for someone else. I told him what a good place Alton is to live in.

So while the preoccupation of the Alton Society is necessarily with change and progress, it is equally important for us to bear in mind, and indeed to celebrate, the strengths of our community and of its social and architectural heritage. There is something honest, down-to-earth and unpretentious about Alton, yet it has quality and strength in great depth. Unlike many towns today we still have a vibrant town centre with excellent specialist shops, and one that is astonishingly rich in places of pleasant refreshment.

Long may that continue.

The town possesses numerous bands, choirs, dramatic societies, sports clubs, the Sports Centre, the wonderful Library, and the Community Centre with its vigorous University of the Third Age (U3A). I am retired long enough from the local medical scene to be able to say how lucky we are in Alton in that department too, and to remind people that tucked away off Chawton Park Road we have a Community Hospital of exceptional quality. Indeed I welcome this chance to celebrate a facility whose excellence, and especially the excellence of its nurses, has too often been unfairly eclipsed in the long-running, bitter battles over the demise of the Lord Mayor Treloar's Hospital. Like any other form of insurance, few of us, fortunately, will ever need to go there, but it is ready for those of us who do, and for our families, for whom it can be life-saving.

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STOP PRESS!!

ECO-TOWN STATUS

Whitehill/Bordon has been given the go-ahead.

Eco-towns will help to relieve the shortage of affordable homes to rent and buy and to minimise the effects of climate change on a major scale. They will provide modern homes with lower energy bills, energy efficient offices and brand new schools, community centres and services, says Gordon Brown.

What does this mean for Alton?

See Page 8

PLANNING MATTERS

The rate of submission of planning applications has picked up again over the last three months.

Some of the more important ones are being dealt with, including:

66 The Butts. This semi-detached pair of houses has been 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 has actually been built in disregard of the approved drawings in several respects, to its detriment and that of the Conservation Area. Our strong objections to the omission of the chimneys were upheld by the retrospective planning application passed by EHDC on 16th July, and they will be reinstated to match neighbouring houses. It is an unfortunate development that some builders feel that they can ignore the conditions set down in the permission, even in a Conservation Area, and it is important that EHDC take a strong stand in this case.

Former Day Care Centre, Chawton Park Road. The slightly reduced proposal for 54 homes came round again and eventually won approval from EHDC. We had maintained our objection on grounds of design, density and, particularly, lack of improvement to the junctions at each end of Chawton Park Road.

Iceland, High Street. A retrospective application has been received for work converting the old Woolworth's store into the new Iceland store. The alterations seem to be acceptable but are not likely to be approved until 16 July, although they have been carried out and the store opened to the public on 9 July. It is regretted that the planning process is pre-empted in this way.

Town Hall, Market Square. ATC's proposal to erect a CCTV camera on the corner of the Town Hall has been approved. We had no objection in principle but were concerned about the impact on this important Listed building. It has been approved by EHDC although we have seen no detail drawings.

Tesco, Mill Lane. The proposed Tesco superstore at the Holybourne end of Mill Lane is a really significant event. We organised a meeting of our members to discuss the merits and disadvantages of the scheme and opinion was equally divided for and against. A meeting with the Alton Town Partnership produced a similar result. In our letter to ATC and EHDC, we stressed the advantages (improving that end of Mill Lane, providing competition to Sainsbury and additional shopping at that end of town) but drawing attention to the probable damage to facilities in the town centre. We also stressed the need to ensure that the building is of high architectural standard (the drawings so far looked encouraging), high standard of sustainability and energy Conservation, that Mill Lane is provided with a frequent and reliable bus service linking the whole of it to the town centre, and that necessary improvements are made to both ends of Mill Lane to cater for increased traffic movements. On 16th July, EHDC followed their Officers' recommendation and rejected Tesco's planning application.

Alton House Hotel, Normandy Street. 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. This is in the curtilage of a prominent Listed Building, adjacent to some specimen trees. The design is similar to that of the other blocks of flats completed a few years ago. We have drawn attention to the Listed Building aspect, to the loss of open-air leisure facilities which are used by many Altonians, and to the increased traffic on the narrow but already busy York Mews. Discussion has now been closed.

Edward Hepper

BUILT ENVIRONMENT GROUP contd.

Other important developments, not yet the subject of planning applications, include:

Coors Playing Fields, Anstey Road. Both Asda and Morrison are reported to be interested in developing supermarkets and petrol stations on this site. The fundamental prerequisite 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?

New Allotments, Hawthorns. ATC is to be congratulated on its efforts to provide more allotments to satisfy the growing demand. The site off Hawthorns is near to the building skyline so important to the Town Design Statement and so will need special provision for parked cars and for sheds in order to avoid unsightly visual impact.

Public Gardens. Again, congratulations to ATC for its planning to maintain the excellence of this area so appreciated by Altonians. It will be interesting to see the results of the consultation held early this month.

South Downs National Park

Nick Heasman, Area Manager, South Downs Joint Committee, Hampshire Team, has accepted our invitation to speak at our AGM on November 14th. We hope he will clarify some of the likely effects on Alton from living next to the National Park.

Alton Community Association and the new Community Centre

We understand that EHDC's Feasibility Study leaves many questions unresolved, that more work is required and that alternative sites are now being considered but there still seems to be a reluctance to let the public know what progress has been made. We have continued to press for information and have been invited to a meeting with EHDC (hopefully before the end of July). We are told that there will be a public statement at the end of the month. We continue to ask for proper consultation with all Altonians, who are the stakeholders.

The Local List

We have restarted our walks and completed the High Street. This work is being verified as usual by Nick Carey-Thomas (architecture) and Jane Hurst (history) before being passed to EHDC's Conservation Officer, John Townsend, whom we have met and briefed on this Local List project. The only outstanding area is Holybourne which will be tackled in conjunction with some Holybourne residents.

Edward Hepper

CORE STRATEGY

The outcome and report from the Core Strategy work which has been carried out by the ATP, but with heavy input from members of the Alton Society, has been finalised. It has been presented to both Alton Town Council and also EHDC where it was very well received. The Town Council were so enthused that they asked for an extract to be put into 'The Altonian' so as to maintain the momentum of the work. However, when we reported to EHDC, who as stated were very appreciative of ATP's contribution and said that it had already obviously affected their thinking (eg opposition to development in SW Alton), they said the work had now been superseded by new Government policies.

The situation has in fact been changed by the new Planning Policy Statement Number 3 and by the 'Silent Garden' (the Firs, Liphook see <http://www.easthants.gov.uk/ehdc/committee2000>) decision. This decision results in the release of Reserve sites for building and as a result of this EHDC has sufficient sites available for required new housing (4,000 per Core Strategy East Hants requirements to 2026). There are currently 12 reserve sites in South Hampshire, 8 in Central and 4 in the South, which must be considered as commitments, but none in Alton. The government-required housing for East Hants which has no current identified location for development is now expected to be fitted onto the Reserve sites. For Alton therefore, instead of the additional housing we expected (up to 965 on our consultation assumptions) and for which we were

considering potential green field sites, there will be no requirement as things stand at present. However the 700 already identified plots with planning permission (565 on larger sites and 135 on smaller ones) will go ahead. A paper titled **Housing – Preferred Spatial Option** was passed for us to see. It summarises the changes and the intent to use the Reserve sites to meet East Hants requirements for 4,000 houses and by now has already been for Development Policy Panel review.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment which EHDC was conducting to identify sites for development now is no longer relevant in Alton, but will be kept on file as will the outcome from the ATP Core Strategy work and consultation.

The South Downs National Park (SDNP) is expected to treat new development like the existing AONBs whereby some is permitted if well designed. However, after Reserve sites are used up, perhaps after 2026, it is unclear how that will be managed.

There remains work to be done with respect to development and Core Strategy however. For example, affordable housing at the customary rate of 35 – 40% of new developments will not meet Alton's needs which are currently at 470. Both the ATP and Alton Society are now reflecting on how to carry this work forward and will take a leading role in the EHDC Core Strategy consultation planned for November this year.

Mike Heelis

Landscape Planting

We have met some of the local residents and representatives of EHDC and HCC concerning some sites in Anstey and Manor estates and also the Draymans Way boundary of the car park behind M&S Simply Food. It is hoped that we can plant in the Autumn.

Sponsorship will be welcome. Please contact Edward Hepper or Norman Isham (details on back page).

Tree and bush planted a year ago
in front of the Fire Station in Butts Road.



Alton – a good place to live—contd from Page 1

The great thing about the Alton Society is that it is unofficial, non-political and open to anyone to join on payment of the modest subscription. Those who choose to become more actively involved have brought a range of impressive talents to bear as they watch the state of the town, and especially as they monitor planning applications. They continually provide informed, articulate and responsible comment which achieves real effect simply by having earned the respect of the statutory authorities. These activities are all summarised in the quarterly newsletter, and increasingly, we hope, on the website, www.TheAltonSociety.co.uk.

Because the Society recognises Alton's local, human scale as the very heart of why it is such a good place to live, it often has reservations when welcoming investment by large, external corporations. Where they show sensitivity to local values and more than token commitment to environmental concerns and sustainability we

applaud and support them and are grateful for the modern enhancements they bring. But the recent experience of the horrific consequences of unrestrained self-interest, greed and short-sightedness on the part of large financial organisations and corporations throughout the world have underlined how vital it is for ordinary people, who often live by a higher moral code, to be watchful and to stand together when they see the need. That is why we need this Society more than ever.

When we arrived in Alton getting on for forty years ago the joke was that to be considered an Altonian you had to be either born here, or to die here, or preferably both. Nothing could be further from the truth today; we have a vibrant, welcoming, open community in which newcomers play an extremely active part. I am proud to be an Altonian, and proud to take my turn as rotating chairman of this extremely worthwhile Society.

James Willis
Chairman

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE APPEARANCE OF ALTON TOWN

Your Committee has for a while now been greatly concerned that the Town has become rather more in need of improvements than in the past, although we are only too well aware of the difficult times that are being experienced by traders in the town as, indeed, is also the Alton Town Council.

Nevertheless, just recently, the Society decided to embark upon our "Improvements in the Appearance of Alton" Campaign, with the willing co-operation of the Alton Town Council and the Alton Chamber of Commerce.

This Campaign involves seeking the co-operation of Institutions, Government Departments, local Town Council, the Greening Society, our Trees Advisor and some building premises Owners.

Following an inspection we have prepared a survey of work needed to improve the overall appearance of Alton Town including in the High Street, Normandy Street, Market Square and other nearby areas.

We are pleased to be able to report that repair work to the footways in the Town Centre is being undertaken now by the HCC. Improvements to the High Street and the Public Gardens are to be undertaken shortly by the ATC, which will take into account feedback received by them from the display held recently in the Assembly Rooms, and consideration is to be given by the ATC for planting and surgery of some trees.

The principal objective of this Campaign is to make Alton a more attractive place to visit, or in which do business, or shopping or, indeed, perhaps just to have fun with friends.

There can be little doubt that an Alton Town Centre that is neat and tidy, well maintained, looking spic-and-span with footways that have pavings level and free from trip-steps, well placed shady trees, traffic well under control and commercial premises being welcoming, with the streets properly policed would become a great attraction for the surrounding area and beyond.

It is to be hoped that the Authorities, the Commercial enterprises and the general public will support the objectives of this improvements Campaign to help it becoming a successful venture for the benefit of the Town in order to ensure that living, working, shopping and playing in Alton becomes even more enjoyable than it is at present.

Norman Isham



High Street pavement repairs in progress



and completed

POTHOLE HOTLINE

0845 603 6533

or a form can be filled in online at

www.hants.gov.uk/roads/highwaysdefects

UPDATE ON ALTON & HOLYBOURNE GREENING CAMPAIGN

The Alton & Holybourne Greening Campaign are making good progress on their two main projects: growing local food and supporting home insulation.

Growing local food

The Alton Local Food Group, an offshoot of GAHC has re-branded themselves Alton Local Food Initiative, or 'ALFI' to their friends. The largest of the projects - The Cloisters Community Garden - is well in hand, with a newsletter about the scheme dropping into 650 virtual mailboxes every fortnight. So far, the ALFI management group have designed the plot, with 50 individual plots and several community areas side by side, agreed that the land will be cultivated by pigs (this will be a maximum of 5 small grass-eating Kune Kune pigs for no longer than 6 months in order to clear the ground) once water has been connected to the site, accepted the offer of two bee-hives on the land, and opened membership with interest from about 15 people so far. Local residents have raised concerns about potential vandalism and noise from the site and the management committee are actively working with them to allay fears, through regular newsletters, emails and meetings. The committee are also planning a tea-party for the residents close to the first ground-breaking day on site - now scheduled for the beginning of September.

Supporting home insulation.

The home insulation subgroup surveyed over 200 residents recently, to gain an indication of how many have good insulation and to elicit people's views on the topic. Both aims were realised and are guiding the next phase of the project: to provide detailed information on cavity wall insulation, loft insulation

and grants to those who requested it and to provide a home-based 'household energy survey', again, only on request. Volunteers have been trained to use a unique and proven approach developed by a Shropshire organisation, with an average reduction in carbon emissions of 30% per household and subsequent savings in fuel costs. Over a quarter of the UK total carbon emissions come from residential energy consumption and the government has set a tough target to reduce total CO₂ emissions by 80% by 2050. This means that all homes will need to be virtually 'zero-carbon' and the first step is better home insulation. We await details of the government's latest scheme to offer low-interest loans for energy-saving installations that will be off-set by reduced fuel bills. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) estimates that 500,000 homes need to be improved through a 'retro-fit' over the next 40 years. Our local survey showed a good uptake of cavity wall insulation (nearly 60%) but much lower levels of loft insulation, with only 15% having the full recommended 10.5 inches. Over 50% of those surveyed want further information and nearly one quarter asked for the home survey. The subgroup is preparing to start this work over the coming weeks. The potential to save energy, reduce carbon emissions and save money is enormous.

For further details on either of these projects contact Chris Chappell on 01420 544422, or view the website <http://www.greeningalton.org.uk>

LITTER HOTLINE

01730 234295

out-of-hours for emergencies, glass etc

07850 358156

AN ECO-TOWN NEXT DOOR

This week it has been announced that the proposed ‘eco town’ on MOD land at Whitehill and Bordon will be one of four in a first phase of development. Altogether thirteen potential sites have been identified across the country. The others in the first phase are to be in Norfolk, Oxfordshire and Cornwall.

The decision to phase the eco towns is not unexpected given the financial crisis; nor is the extended timetable – development will not commence until 2016. Nevertheless, we should be aware that when it does happen Alton and the surrounding area will be affected permanently and fundamentally. Whitehill and Bordon will have a population greater than Alton’s, especially as we now hear that no further new development will be required in Alton, beyond that which has been approved already, in order to meet the government’s housing targets.

It is inevitable that enormous resources will have to be put into infrastructure and services for the new town, some of it most probably diverted from Alton. There are questions as to patterns of movement in the surrounding area; for example the only direct road between Alton and Whitehill/Bordon is the B3004 which runs through East Worldham and Kingsley – hardly suitable as a major link. As there is no rail service to Bordon there is talk of

establishing a spur line from Bentley; but what will that do for Alton’s rail service?

Will there be enough local employment for the new population, or will the eco town become just another dormitory settlement, thereby adding even further to pressure on the local transport infrastructure?

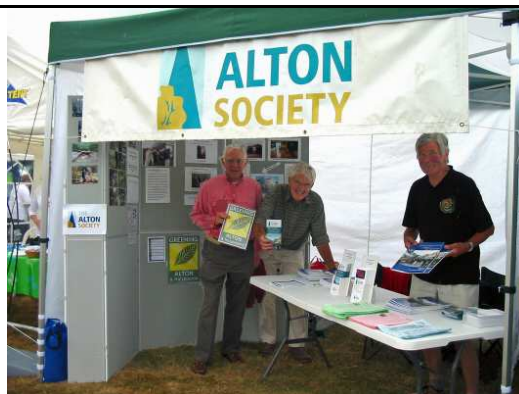
Gordon Brown’s announcement of the eco towns idea in 2007 was mostly welcomed. Since then the full implications have begun to sink in. What effect will this have on the surrounding area and neighbouring settlements? Will sufficient resources be devoted to services and infrastructure? Now we hear that the government will not expect the new housing to be built to the same environmental standards as new housing everywhere else in the country – Level 4 as opposed to Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. One wonders how much more watering-down will happen before development starts.

One thing is clear: short of complete financial meltdown, the first four eco towns are likely to go ahead. We should be prepared for this.

Nick Carey-Thomas

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT ALTON SHOW —WE WERE THERE!

The Society had an informative ring-side stand at the Alton Show, resulting in considerable interest and new paid-up members who are welcomed.



Brian Alexander, James Willis and Edward Hepper armed with information for passers-by.

NOMINATIONS, PLEASE!

INDIVIDUAL AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICES TO THE TOWN

We need your nominations as soon as possible, but **at the latest by 31st August 2009**, to Edward Hepper—
Uplands, 61 Queens Road, Alton, Hants, GU34 1JG, or by e-mail to ejhepper@btinternet.com.

A reminder of the two main criteria:

- To acknowledge the personal contribution made by an appropriate individual towards work, voluntary or otherwise, that has been of outstanding value to the Alton community. For this purpose, the Committee believes that 'services' should be interpreted in a very broad sense, so as to recognise a record of achievement related to one or other of the Society's principal aims.
- The rules restrict nominations to those outside and not related to members of the Committee.

2007 winner: Luath Grant Ferguson

2008 winner: Jane Hurst

THE 'USELESS' TREE - A LIVING LINK WITH ALTON'S HERITAGE

A tree stands within a few paces of the small public car park provided for visitors to the Kings Pond. The lustrous dark green leaves are deeply lobed back into the leaf towards the midrib. The acorn cups are 'mossy' with dense strands. Dry strands also appear at many buds, giving the twigs a whisky appearance in winter. This tree is a **Turkey Oak**. In 1735 William Luccombe introduced it into the country through his nursery at Exeter.

The natural range of this tree runs from Italy to Turkey, so it will be quite happy here in increasing heat due to climate change. Massive Turkey Oaks up to 40 metres high and over 200 years old can be found thinly scattered throughout the land. They resist exposure and even salt-laden sea winds. They were originally promoted for deer parks and large estates as a major landscape feature, the straight trunks appeared to promise excellent timber. This became a bitter disappointment to landowners and sawmillers, as the wood is not durable and often contains large splits and cracks.

The sap transport cells in this timber were found to be large and continuous, so breweries

found that it was ideal for a special purpose. Final fermenting within the wooden barrel made excess gas. After filling, a flat bung was driven into the filling hole. The bung already had a tapered hole about one centimetre in diameter cut into the centre.

A spile peg, or other names with other breweries, was driven into this hole. It was made from Turkey Oak as a tapered cone a few centimetres long. This valuable fermentation lock ensured that excess pressure escaped from the barrel without blowing the bung out, but the fine tubes of the wood were too small to allow the tiny Vinegar Fly to get in and ruin the contents. Many brewers planted a few Turkey Oaks within cooperage land holdings, as profits were transformed by the large reduction in spoilage losses.

An industrial archaeologist, with no knowledge of an area, is prompted by sighting a Turkey Oak to wonder if a brewery was once nearby. The technology moved on and spile pegs were little used after the second world war.

Jim Dickinson

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:-

James Willis 01420 83416 (June—Aug)

Nick Carey-Thomas (Sept—Nov)

Treasurer & Newsletter Editor

Jan Nicholas 01420 88411

OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:-

Norman Isham OBE

01420 542114

Chris Chappell

01420 544422

Jerry Cullum

01420 543881

Built Environment

Edward Hepper

01420 544176

Mike Biddiss

01420 543132

Brian Alexander

01420 549552

James Willis

01420 83416

Nick Carey-Thomas

01420 82195

Alton Town Partnership Liaison

Mike Heelis MBE

01420 82780

Natural Environment

Mike Heelis

TREE WARDEN:-

Jim Dickinson

01420 84729

(a members-only consultation service)

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held at 10.00 am
on Saturday 14th November

Followed by:-

Presentation of Awards and

‘Alton and the South Downs National Park’

Speaker: Nick Heasman,

Area Manager, South Downs Joint Committee,
Hampshire Team

ALL WELCOME

(Members and Non-Members)

The Alton Society Award for a person who has given
outstanding services to the town and
the **John Ambrose Award** for the best building
or development will be presented.

(More information in the next newsletter.)