alton now

WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF ALTON

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALTON SOCIETY

AUTUMN/WINTER 2026



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welcome

www.altonsociety.org.uk

Alton Now, the newsletter of the Alton Society, is normally published twice a year. We welcome articles, letters, poems and images pertaining to our town and its environment, so if you have anything to share for the next edition, do get in touch. Please note that the views of individual contributors to the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Alton Society.



From the Chairman

By David Simpkins

Welcome to our newsletter, which we are now issuing twice a year.

The spring and summer have been very busy for us and we are involved in a significant number of community events and the giving of support to others.

We are aligned with the Swift Preservation programme, which has been very successful. Everyone enjoyed the very informative evening and presentation by Catharine Gale from the Hampshire Swifts charity in April.

You may be aware of the threat of closure to the Curtis Museum. We are involved in meetings concerning the arrangements that can be made for its future. Recently we attended a working symposium at Alton Town Hall, which was extremely helpful in generating some positive ideas using the results of local surveys, which at least could be a start to putting together a funding programme in the medium and longer term. It was recognised that the opportunity must be taken to refresh and revitalise this long-standing local amenity in order to preserve it for the future.

Another outstanding local amenity is King's Pond and we attend and contribute to discussions concerning its future. There will be a further public consultation to ensure that all aspects of the project are open to public view and questioning. We are very grateful that Alton Town Council has made such an effort to have an open and longer than usual period of time for the consultation to allow for an informed decision as to the way forward.

With the benefit of the members' continuing subscriptions and support, we carry on our Grants programme and I am delighted to confirm that we have supported the Arts Festival, Cycle Alton and Alton College, where we continue our scholarship programme.

We monitor planning applications and prospective developments in and around Alton and make constructive comments and objections as appropriate. With the new presumptions broadly in favour of granting planning applications and the government mandate for building, there will be immense pressure to build more new homes.

It is always a pleasure to deal with the Society's annual awards programme. We have the Ambrose Award, which briefly is in respect of excellence in building conservation or landscaping, and the Society's award for Outstanding Services to the town. We have received excellent nominations for both, and following the secret ballot, the awards will be presented at our Annual General Meeting to be held at the Maltings at 11am for 11.30am on Saturday 14 November. Please join us to enjoy this occasion. There will be speakers who will be of great interest to all.

To all members, thank you for your continued support, without which the objectives of the Society in pursuance of its constitution could not be achieved.

Annual General Meeting 2026

Saturday 14 November - 11am, formal business commences at 11.30am
Tyndale Auditorium, The Maltings, Alton, Hants GU34 1DT



Dear Members & Supporters

We look forward to welcoming you to the Tyndale Auditorium at the Alton Maltings for our 2026 AGM

- **Refreshments provided**
- **Programme for the event to be shared nearer the time**

Please let us know you're intending to attend. Email: **info@altonsociety.org.uk**
Do bring a partner or friend if you'd like to.

Thank you for your invaluable support which allows us to continue with our work.

The Alton Society

ALTON NEEDS YOU

HAVE YOUR SAY IN THE FUTURE OF OUR TOWN

Email us
info@altonsociety.org.uk

Follow us
The Alton Society

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Alton's INDEPENDENT TRADERS



Louise Bagnall is the woman behind Cheese! Louise and FillUp at 15 High Street, Alton. She is a passionate supporter of independent businesses, British producers and more sustainable ways of shopping. She has created a local destination where customers can discover exceptional British artisan cheese and refill their everyday household essentials.

When Louise is not behind the counter at 15 High Street she can usually be found planning or supporting a local event, working on business improvements or thinking about what combo should be next for that awesome cheese toastie.

Committee member Paul Ebbutt likes a bit of cheese and has been known to drop by. On this occasion, Paul could not resist asking Louise a few questions...

Why cheese?

What is there not to love about cheese? It has an incredible variety of flavours, textures and stories behind it and no two cheeses or cheesemakers are quite the same. I particularly love British artisan cheese because it connects us with skilled cheesemakers, British farmers and the landscapes where cheese is produced. There is always something new to discover, and I really enjoy sharing that with customers.

Why Alton?

I already had a strong connection with Alton having attended Alton College from 1999 to 2001. My family also lives in the town so it is somewhere I know well and I genuinely care about. I want Alton to be a great place to live, work and visit and opening my businesses here felt like an opportunity to become part of that.

What is your favourite cheese?

That's like asking me to choose my favourite child! My answer tends to change depending on the season, my mood and what has just arrived on the counter. One of the pleasures of being a cheesemonger is that there is always another brilliant British cheese to fall in love with.
PE – "She does a great selection of sheep and goat's cheese... Mmmm..."

What is your favourite cheesy dish?

A cheese toastie – simple as that! It's comforting and endlessly adaptable with different cheeses, and breads and fillings can completely change it, so there are always new combinations to try. The secret is choosing cheeses with the right balance of flavour, character and melt.
PE – "You can get lovely fresh bread at FillUp too!"

What do you like about Alton?

Alton has a fantastic sense of community and so much more to offer than people sometimes realise. We have more than 45 independent shops along with some wonderful cafes, pubs and other small businesses. There are passionate people working hard to make the town interesting and distinctive; customers genuinely want to support the business on their doorstep.

What could Alton do better?

I think Alton could be more confident about what it has and should promote itself more strongly as a destination. Our independent businesses are one of the town's greatest strengths, but we need to make it easier for people to discover them and give visitors more reasons to explore the whole town. Better promotion and joined-up events, free or cheaper parking and continued investment in making the town centre attractive and accessible would all help. Supporting the high street is a joint effort; businesses, local organisations and residents all have a part to play.

Why is FillUp important for us to support?

FillUp makes it easier for people to reduce unnecessary packaging by refilling everyday household products instead of repeatedly buying new plastic containers with each purchase. It isn't about being perfect or completely changing your lifestyle overnight, it's about making small, practical steps that add up over time.

Supporting FillUp also keeps money within the local economy and helps an environmentally focused service to remain an option of our High Street. The more people use it the more waste we can prevent.







CHEESE! LOUISE & FILL UP

15 HIGH STREET, ALTON HAMPSHIRE GU34 1FG

WWW.CHEESE-LOUISE.CO.UK

Phinna (Philippa) Brealey

The Alton Climate Action Network (ACAN) Committee announces with great sadness the untimely death on 10 September of Phinna (Philippa) Brealey, one of the founders of the charity.







A dedicated and passionate environmentalist, she had a warm and outgoing personality with a real talent for talking to people and drawing them into ACAN's activities. She had an infectiously upbeat attitude to life and was generous with her time, energy and enthusiasm. She will be greatly missed in our community and we all feel fortunate to have known her.

Phinna was active with Energy Alton for several years before becoming a very energetic Trustee for ACAN from 2019-2024, and remained active in ACAN until her death.

She was a "trooper" – she would always step in to help where needed. She contributed one way or another to most of ACAN's groups and projects, two Eco-Fairs, school assemblies and innumerable stalls at public events over the years.

Phinna ran the Eco-Café in Market Square throughout 2021-22, organising numerous displays, Terracycle sorting, Eco-Chats and Cuppas for the Climate.

She played a very active role in ACAN's initiatives linked to waste reduction and recycling, especially:

- The Alton Community Share for toys, games and jigsaws (commencing as a service to the community during the Covid pandemic)
- Action on Plastic and recycling: she was leading litter picks from her garage until the last weeks of her life, seeing this as an important way of engaging with people.

In June this year she organised a "salvage" display for ACAN, as part of the Alton Lions D-Day-themed Party in the Park.

Phinna leaves a huge legacy to the community of Alton. The ACAN Committee are considering an appropriate memorial or tribute to her - ideas are welcome.



The Vyne – home to the NHNTC

The North Hampshire National Trust Centre (NHNTC) – a National Trust Local Group

By Hugh Bethell, Chair

The NHNTC was formed 40 years ago to provide visits to National Trust (NT) properties, other historic houses and interesting venues, to provide talks from experts in their subjects and to hold social events. We also raise funds for the NT, mainly supporting projects at our local NT property, The Vyne.

Visits

Our visits are held in the summer months and are mostly coach trips to interesting properties and sites. Some of our recent trips included Ham House, Kingston Lacey, Greenwich (with a voyage down the Thames), Arundel Castle, Kew Gardens, Hever Castle and Basildon Park.

Talks

Afternoon talks are held monthly in the autumn and winter at Elizabeth Hall in Hook. Each event costs just £4 to members (£5 to guests) and includes tea and homemade cakes. Recent talks have included: The Post Office Scandal, The Butler's Christmas, Was Shakespeare really de Vere?, The Building and Flying of the Odiham Spitfire.

Fundraising

Most of the surplus from NHNTC activities is donated to The Vyne. Since 1985 over £100,000 has been donated. We have helped to fund a new visitor buggy, the refurbishment of the upper room in the Brewhouse, and several other projects.

Why not join us?...

We are an extremely friendly group. Other activities include Christmas lunch in a local hotel, a spring lunch and an August cream tea.





Above Visit to Chichester flower festival (top) & Fishbourne Roman Palace (bottom) - June 2026

Please visit **www.nhntc.com** for more info

Update on the Alton Society's Swift Box Initiative





By Catharine Gale - Trustee of Hampshire Swifts

Alton has long been one of Hampshire's hotspots for swifts. There is a large swift colony nesting in the tower of St Lawrence's Church, and swifts are known to nest in gaps or cavities in many of the town's older houses. But, here, as elsewhere across the UK, roof repairs, renovations and particularly the installation of uPVC plastic soffits and fascias has resulted in the loss of large numbers of natural swift nest sites. The UK swift population has declined by an estimated 70% since 1994.

The Alton Society's 2026 Swift Box Initiative aimed to help the town's swift population find somewhere to breed by sponsoring the installation of swift boxes, made and installed by Hampshire Swifts. East Hampshire District Councillors Ginny Boxall and Suzie Burns both sponsored the initiative through their Community Grants. The initiative was launched in April at a talk I gave in Alton's Assembly Rooms on Saving Hampshire's Swifts.

Over the following few months, Hampshire Swifts installed swift boxes on 29 houses under the Alton Society's sponsorship. Most of the swift boxes were single boxes designed to accommodate one pair of swifts, but we also installed several double boxes that provide nest spaces for two pairs of swifts. As a result, the total number of new nest chambers made available thanks to the Alton Society's initiative was 39.

We have high hopes that swifts may already have investigated several of these new boxes or chosen them as nest sites for next year. Most of the boxes were installed at the end of May, and a few more were put up



Top: Hampshire Swifts nesting box installation team,
Above: AS chair (David Simpkins) with Alton residents and a free double swift nesting box

in mid July, so they will have been available for young swifts when they were prospecting for a nest site for the first time. These young birds aim to find a place to nest before they return to Africa at the end of July so that it is all ready for them to breed in when they come back the following year. Several of the boxes were installed on or close to houses where swifts already nest. Swifts love to nest near other swifts, so putting the boxes close to existing nest sites makes them extremely attractive to birds looking for somewhere to breed. Alton's swift colonies should increase as a result.

Hampshire Swifts are very grateful to the Alton Society for launching their swift box initiative and thereby helping conserve the town's swifts.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION
COMING SOON

HAVE YOUR SAY ON KING'S POND



PUBLIC BRIEFINGS

Public briefings are an opportunity to hear a presentation about the options, followed by a question and answer session.

Wednesday 4th November
7:30pm - 9:30pm
Alton Maltings

Monday 9th November
10:00am - 12:00 noon
Alton Social Bowling Club

Wednesday 11th November
12:30pm - 2:30pm
Alton Rugby Club

Sunday 15th November
2:00pm - 4:00pm
Alton Masonic Centre

Thursday 19th November
5:00pm - 7:00pm
Alton Community Centre

Saturday 21st November
10:00am - 12:00 noon
Alton Assembly Rooms

DROP IN SESSIONS

Drop in sessions are an opportunity to ask questions of consultants and representatives from the Task and Finish Group.

Saturday 7th November
10:00am - 12:00 noon
Alton Assembly Rooms

Thursday 12th November
7:30pm - 9:30pm
Alton Town Council

Tuesday 17th November
10:00am - 12:00 noon
Alton Place

9 WEEKS
2ND NOVEMBER 2026
to 4TH JANUARY 2027

Scan the QR Code
alton.gov.uk/kings-pond-project
community@alton.gov.uk
01420 83986

ALTON
TOWN COUNCIL

Water, Water Everywhere? It appears not…

By Martyn Edwards

Since the last edition of 'Alton Now', a significant and fast escalating issue has gained increasing attention at East Hants District Council (EHDC) and even Westminster; that is, the sure, secure and environmentally sustainable daily water supply for existing residents alongside the required provision for proposed new housing developments.

South East Water (SE Water) are accountable to provide our incoming clean water and they divide their overall supply area into 'water zones'. They do this (so an internet search said) to 'safely monitor drinking water quality, comply with legal regulations, and manage network operations efficiently'. Yet SE Water seem to be having difficulty with at least the last piece of that sentence. I shall explain….

An issue about water supply security came to my attention in the early summer after seeing strongly worded letters to SE Water authored by (a) Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council, and, (b) jointly by Ofwat, the Environment Agency and DeFRA (the government Department for Food & Rural Affairs).

Both letters were highly critical of SE Water's lack of action in 'water zone 4' (which covers Basingstoke and much of Alton and surrounding villages). The Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council letter in particular was impressive in not pulling any punches. Each letter sought clarification on what concrete actions SE Water are going to put in place to provide positive solutions for water supply security, given that SE Water have reported:

1. A negative supply-demand balance in two of their 'water zones' including 'water zone 4'.
2. Above forecast leakages for the third consecutive year (also currently at record levels)
3. Water supply resilience concerns during dry weather with supplies being restricted.
4. An increased reliance on taking ever more water from the aquifers at Greywell Fen and Lasham.

Matters appear to have come to a head because the Environment Agency have refused to extend a water extraction license that SE Water have held for a long time at Greywell Fen due to negative environmental impacts from over-extraction. SE Water are now appealing this extension refusal, saying if they're not allowed to continue extracting from the underlying aquifer (in ever-increasing volumes) water supplies to homes are at risk.

The issues about over-extraction are:

- The aquifers are diminishing
- Water tables are impacted (lowering)
- Greywell Fen is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and one of the last remaining alkaline fens in southern England. It is degrading, leading to significant habitat and environmental losses.

Is there a solution to all this?

Yes, there is a solution to ensure a reliable supply of water to Basingstoke & Alton – in fact, it's been known about for years. It is a new pipeline into our area from the Surrey Hills Service Reservoir. But SE Water have never built it. They acknowledge the pipeline is essential for the area's water security, but it won't be in place until at least the early 2030s. In fact the pipeline route isn't even firmed up yet.

What's the impact?

There are risks to the security and continuity of water supply to existing houses served by 'water zone 4' and neighbouring water supply zones – not to mention the expanded water demand that will come from significant proposed housing schemes in our area, e.g.

- Land North of Basingstoke Road (225 houses, reference: EHDC-25-1488-OUT),
- Chawton Park Farm (1100 houses, EHDC-25-1383-EIA),
- Land to the rear of 136-150 London Road, Holybourne (156 houses, EHDC-25-0748-OUT)
- Plus the continued and significant proposals for the expansion of Four Marks & Medstead (multiple applications totalling several thousand houses).

In fact, the impact of unsecured water supplies to our area establishes a material change in circumstances that directly impacts planning applications. A lack of a reliable, secure and sustainable water supply renders the development of proposed

sites across the Alton area as structurally undeliverable, and in direct conflict with national planning policies to protect designated and sensitive ecology and habitats.

Basically, without secure, sustainable water supply in and sewerage out, no housing built can meet relevant planning law and policies. You may have read in the local press or online that EHDC have presently paused development applications to investigate the matter further. The area's water supply in (and sewerage infrastructure out) need to be in place first to meet the growing demand / capacity.

And building the correct infrastructure is the solution here. It is not to unsustainably draw more and more from our depleting aquifers, and destroying rare, protected SSSI habitats.
I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the Holybourne Resident's Association who are strenuously objecting to the plan for 156 houses at the heart of their village on many grounds including water security. I have also been engaging with our Town and District Councillors about this and I thank them for their energy and voice to bring this matter to the attention of both Town and District Councils. There's also been contact with our MP, Damian Hinds, and he is listening. He spoke in Westminster about water capacity and security issues exacerbated by expected new housing numbers in this part of East Hampshire.

What else can we do?
As residents and directly interested parties to this matter, I think it is very important that both EHDC and SE Water understand the strength of concern from residents and that we seek some direct and clear answers to this significant issue. When a new housing development planning application is put open to consultation on the EHDC planning portal, consultees can only comment on that specific application. But that is exceptionally myopic and blinkered. Water supply and infrastructure development must be holistic and with a long term vision, strategy and time horizon.

A cumulative impact assessment on sustainable water supply is required. This must be carried out and published in the public domain – addressing water supply capacity and pressure requirements for existing housing and each proposed housing development site in the Alton area – to demonstrate categorically and without semantics or 'corporate flannel' that it can or cannot be done sustainably for these developments for their lifetime (usually about 100 years).

We can also ask when the new pipeline for the Surrey Hills Service Reservoir will be online to support our town and surrounding villages – and if that will categorically answer the water supply question.

I've found an email for SE Water **developer.services@southeastwater.co.uk** that anyone can write to and ask if there is a definitive plan (and when it will be delivered) to ensure the security and sustainability of water supply for existing residents, as well as proposed new housing sites for Four Marks, Medstead and Alton. This must be achieved without the unsustainable policy of over-extraction from our local aquifers – a tactic that is depleting them and destroying the Greywell Fen SSSI.

There sadly isn't a similar 'central' email for EHDC Planning Services for the public to make contact and register their concerns. As mentioned, EHDC frustratingly funnel the public to submit their comments and feedback via its online planning portal under a specific planning application. My recommendation would be to contact your own EHDC Councillor and ask them to make full representation of your concerns to the Chief Planning Officer. If you are unclear who your EHDC Councillor is and you're online, you can visit the EHDC website www.easthants.gov.uk and scroll down to the box titled 'Councillors and Committees'. Under that is a link titled 'Contact your local councillor'. Click into this and there are various searches you can undertake to find your councillor and also their contact details.

I don't think the security and sustainability of our water supplies is a subject that's going to go away anytime soon – and neither should it. It is a basic and fundamental right and need. We cannot and should not let this matter drop or be brushed under the carpet.



A New Riverside Park and Enhancements to the Bank Car Park

By Tony Cohen

A few years ago, a plan was prepared showing how the Bank car park in the town centre could be enhanced by additional landscaping. At the time, the District Council's planning department was in negotiations with the developer of the Coors site over possible planning gain as a result of their proposed development. For a while it appeared that there was a real prospect of the developer providing a purpose-built Community Centre to replace the existing sub-standard one.

I realised that this prospect enabled the potential opening up of the River Wey, where it runs in a culvert beneath the existing Community Centre to form a part of a proposed linear riverside park and walk from Cut Pound almost to the High Street. This proposal was entirely dependent on the developer building a replacement for the existing Community Centre and therefore is no longer an option.

Regardless of the above, there is still great potential for re-creating the part of the proposal where the River Wey runs alongside the Bank car park to produce an attractive part of Alton's public realm between the library and the Community Centre. The sketch plan shows how this could be created by removing the car parking from the north side of the river.

If this landscaping was done as part of an overall enhancement of the Bank car park, which is in a pretty poor condition, the loss of parking spaces could be offset by a gain of five extra parking spaces simply by rationalising the layout of the spaces within the existing car park, which is also shown on the drawing.



The car park is currently in a very bad state with un-planted planters, large areas of cracked asphalt, unnecessary signage, dying ash trees, and an unsightly plethora of waste and recycling bins located in inappropriate positions. Also, the signage for the pay-stations is cluttered and unsightly and while it needs to be highly prominent it doesn't have to be ugly. It would not cost a great deal to change this situation; what is required is just a little more imagination and thought put into the design. Even the forming of the new riverside park wouldn't require major highway works and could easily be



Waste bins by the Masonic Hall



Waste bins outside the Community Centre

funded out of CIL funds. Surely this is expenditure that the people of Alton should campaign for.

Unfortunately, unsightly waste bins are a necessity but they can be contained and often screened from public view. The bins outside the Masonic Hall could easily be contained within one parking space rather than being spread over two spaces by putting a fence between the two spaces as indicated on our proposed plan.

Recycling bins are encouraged by the Council, however there is no reason why they cannot be grouped together in a recycling cluster. The three recycling bins shown in the second





photograph above are located on a barren central space, which is impossible for pedestrians to access without standing in the middle of the roadway serving the parking spaces. These three bins could easily be grouped together with the clothes bin besides the footpath. By doing this, the barren area of grass could provide four more parking spaces to offset the proposed loss of spaces on the north side of the Wey. This in turn would reduce the grassed area needing constant cutting.



The two car parking pay stations are cluttered with abandoned disused older-style payment machines and messy signage. It would be very simple to tidy up these spaces by removing the redundant machines and rationalising the signage. This could be done while still retaining the prominence of the locations.

The photograph above clearly illustrates this unnecessary clutter.

The Health of the Ash Trees

The Ash trees opposite the library are suffering from Ash die back and will need to be cut down within a year or two for public safety. When this happens the amenity of the land on the northern side of the River Wey will suffer unless they are replaced with a more robust species.



Alton Society Archive: Discoveries Made Digital

By Carol Palmer

A plastic box had been residing for some years in our house, I think since the time I'd wanted to look through old minutes for information for our 50th anniversary.

Inside the box, as well as minute books, was an interesting visual archive: four cases of over 300 slides and a couple of DVDs. The Society doesn't have too much in the way of archives, which makes these all the more precious.

The slides represent a slice of photographic history of Alton in the late 1970s and 80s, and I felt they should have the attention they deserve given all the work that went into creating them. We've not been able to confirm who took the photos, so any ideas are welcome!

I decided to convert them to digital so they could be accessed more easily. The Alton Society covered the cost of the slide conversion (which was about £100) and the DVD conversion was free online. The slides are fascinating and I've chosen a few to show you here. The link to them on our google drive is **www.bit.ly/AltonSocietySlides**

At present the slides are in the safekeeping of Jane Hurst for onward transmission to the Hampshire Archives. Jane has initiated plans with David Quick to set up an Alton Archive website.

Jane says: **"These slides will be joined by pictures from members of the Camera Club and others, as well as old postcards with descriptions, local history, etc. The starting area is the Market Place with pictures, 'house histories' and other information such as auction documents.**

We have been very lucky to have been given a collection of photographs of the Crowley/Watney Brewery which have never been shared before. Obviously it takes time to scan and research items but hopefully it will enable us to share the history of Alton with people around the world. If you have any queries, please contact janehurst1@gmail.com"

The Crowley/Watney Brewery photographs came to the Alton Society via the daughters of the late Mr Sid Pink.

Extracts from 'It happens in Alton'

Extracts from 'Down Your Wey'




ALTON!




LADIES
UPPER NEATHAM MILL

THE ALTON SOCIETY

Join us now and have a say and a role in the future of our town.
Check out our website
www.altonsociety.org.uk

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Front cover: Christmas comes to the Assembly Rooms
by Rosanna Lovegrove

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Membership is a positive statement about your investment in the town and environment.

JOIN TODAY

Go to our website by scanning the QR code below or visit www.altonsociety.org.uk and navigate to our membership page.

You can also keep up with all our latest activities by joining 'The Alton Society' Facebook group, or download our newsletter direct from the website.

