

Optimism at the Business Forum

by Bob Booker and Rod Eckles



Photograph by James Willis

On March 15th an Open Business forum was held at the Alton Assembly Rooms. We were there in force adding our own expertise to the lively workshops. These were very constructive and full of innovative ideas to boost the Town's future. Those present came from a variety of backgrounds including our local authorities, business organisations and the voluntary sector. There was a lot of agreement as to what should be our objectives though there were some differences as to how these could be achieved.

The Society's approach was to use our own Sustainability survey to put forward policies and ideas which we felt would lead to a more prosperous town which was safe, inclusive and had an awareness of the threats to our livelihood.

It was agreed that Alton should become a "Destination" town and in particular take advantage of its rich and diverse history. This would attract new tourists and new businesses with its excellent links to major

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markets and access to a highly skilled workforce. It was recognised that we need to “talk up” the town and emphasise the positive side of living and working in Alton. Everyone felt we must tidy up our High Street so that it is attractive, a safe environment and free of litter. This would include finding new tenants for our empty shops. One fact that came out of this debate was that the number of shops empty has already reduced and at present stands at 17.

There was an interesting speech from Alan Donegan from the Popup Business School concerning the invisibility of Alton Businesses on the net. He said there was a woeful lack of Internet use amongst our retailers (a large proportion did not have their own website), little use of social media and they need to ‘put themselves out there’.

It was recognised that shoppers now tend to go online and so our businesses need to have a “digital presence”. It is no longer enough to rely on passing footfall so it is planned to see what demand there is for training to help businesses to set up and run their own websites and make sure they are visible online.

It was felt our local market could be improved and we must take part and encourage our events to promote the town

such as the “Walking with Jane Austen” project, our successful Walking Festival and Regency Week.

To attract visitors there was a massive demand for free parking and our own view was put forward to have free parking in the Town car parks from 11am onwards. Many other variants were discussed but everyone expressed their dislike of the current arrangements and the District should experiment with making their car parks free.

There was a big cheer when we asked for a proper Tourist Information Centre, staffed by people who are properly trained in the industry and that its position should be on the High Street or at least in a well used public building such as the Library.

Our overall view was that this was an event which brimmed with optimism and just by being there it gave all the participants a lift in their spirits. One of the speakers was the manager of Specsavers and he was so complimentary about the town and its environs that it filled your correspondent with pride. Our new Business Development Manager is one of those behind this effort and is to be congratulated for what has been achieved so far. We hope that this is just the beginning of a revitalisation in our Town’s fortunes.

Built Environment Group

by Rod Eckles, Built Environment Group Chairman

The proposal for 180 houses on land to the east of Will Hall Farm has reached a new phase, with the developers submitting revised plans, mainly affecting layout and overall design. Although some improvements have been made, including a modest increase in the variety of house styles, we are still disappointed with the quality of what is proposed, especially given the sensitivity of this ‘gateway’ location. There are also outstanding issues with the road infrastructure, and lack of on-site renewable energy provision.

Quality and design issues will continue to be at the forefront of our appraisals of major applications. We are seeing too many bland ‘potato-print’ housing schemes come forward, and we feel strongly that Alton should not be settling for second-best, but frustratingly we are seeing an

unwillingness on the part of the planners to stand up to developers. In discussions with EHDC we are striving to re-instigate pre-application Design Review Panels, operating successfully in other parts of the county, to which we feel we can usefully contribute.

Following additional architect appointments to the Built Environment Group, the membership is as follows: Nicky Branch*, Tony Cohen*, Mark Penfold, Andrew Aldridge, Michael Fawcett and Rod Eckles*. * = *full committee member*.

By the time this newsletter is published the Appeal Hearing for the Holybourne Roundabout Service Area application will have been heard. We would expect the inspector’s decision to take some weeks.

Sustainability Group

by *Martyn Dell*

The Sustainability Group now comprises Bob Booker, Rod Eckles, David Simpkins, Simon Stoodley, James Willis, Charlotte Wigzel and Martyn Dell. The Group met in February.

Following up on the results of the comprehensive survey, Shaping Alton's Future, is one major priority for the Group. After extensive discussion, it was agreed that town/High Street 'vitality' should be a main focus for work; it was clearly a matter of great concern to many residents in the survey. It was noted that the Society had previously done considerable work on this and that currently many people within the town were taking a keen interest, often through social media.

This should be viewed positively, 'talking Alton up'. It was vital that any actions taken should dovetail with others, particularly Julie McLatch, Business Development Manager, with whom Bob Booker and others met regularly.

Specific suggestions included –

- Recognising that the town's population is going to increase, to develop some kind

of 'welcome pack to Alton' to residents in new developments. This could take the form of a targeted mail-shot which introduced the Alton Society as well as commending the town and area to recipients.

- Holding a special 'Backing Alton Day' which celebrated the qualities of the town.
- Some work to be done on 'what makes some businesses successful'; the Society had done some earlier work involving interviews with many High Street businesses.
- Recognising that the Mary Portas report on the future of the High Street published in 2011 was still very relevant.

The Group also discussed the 'greening' dimension of its brief. It has a close relationship with 'Energy Alton' with some overlap of membership. It was agreed that the issue of developing more solar panels on business buildings should be pursued in conjunction with "Energy Alton".

Natural Environment

by *Brian Good*

Litter Pick – 10am to 12 noon, Saturday 4th March 2017

This was very successful with 40 volunteers on the day and a significant amount of litter being collected. We filled two large skips in the space of two hours. Congratulations to Barbara Burfoot for organising the event and running it so efficiently on the day. Thanks to Alton Town Council for providing the skips and the Landscape Group for providing the equipment.

Rubbish man! (4 March 2017)

Photograph by Brian Good

See also a fuller report on page 8.



Flood Meadows (third Sunday of each month) Working Party

At the working party session on Sunday 19th March, the focus was very much on tidying up and clearing away the branches of willow and other woody growth that tends to dominate the vista if it is not kept in check. This month we were blessed with good weather and an impressive turnout of 20 volunteers, enabling us to make good progress in our work. There was an impressive range of ages, too, and it was heartening to see so many younger volunteers in action.

At the session on Easter Sunday, 16th April, the focus turned to mulching the “trees for life” that were planted on the sloping part of the site in the early 1990s. This is quite a labour-intensive operation, as it involves hauling wheelbarrow-loads of hay uphill. Almost inevitably, the task was not completed within the time available, so we will be looking to continue the work at the next session on 21st May.

Come and join in the fun!

Alton Town Council’s proposed Open Spaces Management Plan

“Footprint Ecology”, the Alton Town Council’s consultancy firm tasked with producing a management plan for all of the council’s managed “natural” open spaces has produced an initial set of proposals. This is a follow-on from a meeting at the Town Hall on Wednesday 8th February which I could not attend due to other commitments. It is anticipated that further work on this document will continue in the weeks and months to come.



Photograph by Brian Good

Surrey Wildlife Trust and the upper reaches of the River Wey

There was a separate working party initiative, run by Surrey Wildlife Trust, at the end of February to trim back the hazels and willows which were overhanging the river between the Lenten Street Bridge and New Odiham Road. These tend to cut out much of the natural daylight from the riverbank, and from the river itself. The trimming has further enhanced the amenity, and it is hoped that benefits will be seen in the form of increased diversity as the year progresses. We cleared away some of their debris on Sunday morning, too.

Come and join us!

As a working party we usually meet from 10.00am to 12.00noon on the third Sunday of each month at the Tanhouse Lane entrance to the Flood Meadows. The next sessions after this will be on Sunday 21st May, then 18th June, and so on...

Photographs by Pam Jones



Photograph by Brian Good

Alton Men's Shed project

Bringing men together to support the community

by Mike Loxley

Established as an idea just over two years ago, Alton Men's Shed realised a major goal last summer with the construction of its shed. The shed, situated in the car park of All Saints Church Hall, Alton, provides a base for the 'shedders' to meet and work on practical projects.

The Alton Men's Shed is part of a growing nationwide movement which brings men together in sheds to socialise and work on a wide range of projects. An important element of the Men's Shed project is fostering friendship and promoting the physical and mental health of men who otherwise might find themselves isolated.

Men of all ages who find themselves retired, bereaved, redundant or just bored can now support each other by sharing their experience and skills. Our new shed provides a welcoming environment for men to have a cup of tea and a chat. Equipped with basic wood and metal working tools the shed enables men to make and repair useful things ranging from simple toys to complex furniture.

Of particular importance is supporting the Alton community with a wide range of practical projects. Recent examples include:

- Refurbishing local bus shelters, public benches and notice boards.
- Building compost bins and installing rain water butts.
- Refurbishing a local charity shop.
- Decorating the backstage rooms at Alton Assembly Rooms.

In addition to the above, the Men's Shed team has helped with many jobs ranging from painting a ceiling to clearing an overgrown garden. These small but important jobs have helped local disadvantaged people.

The future for Alton Men's Shed

We are very grateful to the many individuals, charities, public bodies, businesses and organisations who have supported us. We feel we have come a long way in achieving our goal of bringing local men together to realise their self-worth and help serve the many practical needs of Alton's community.

Such has been the success of the project that we now find ourselves in desperate need of additional space. Our shed is a modest size and can barely accommodate more than four men when they work at the benches.

We long for a good sized workshop that would enable us to open for longer hours and to accommodate more 'shedders' with some basic woodworking machines.

To find out more about us:

Our shed is open on Mondays, 9 to 4.30 and on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings 9 to 1. Should you be interested in joining the team do come along and meet us – the kettle is always on!

You can find our shed in the car park to the rear of All Saints Church, adjacent to the Register Office in Queens Road, Alton.



Two men complete the repair of a local notice board.



Chairman's Corner

Nicky Branch

“What a difference a day makes”. I will always remember Bob Ormond, the redoubtable Chairman of Governors of Alton College, making this surprise announcement at the start of a Governors’ meeting, followed by the explanation that he had just been diagnosed with an untreatable cancer. I’m in the same position myself now, so I know exactly what he meant – shock,

coming to terms, and a careful review of priorities for the next year or so.

I would like to continue as Chairman for so long as this is practical for me and my Colleagues on the Committee. There are lots of good things going on at the moment; and involvement in them is a real distraction from horrible chemo! In particular I’m keen to see our new website being used to give highlights of the Committee’s activities, so that all the Society’s members can see, in real time, just how active we are on their behalf.

Your New Management Committee Member

David Simpkins



I am David Simpkins and I work as a solicitor in Alton. I am particularly interested in supporting the Society in its efforts to maximise benefits in new trade and business for the attractive High Street and to work with and support the Sustainability Group.

I live in Alton and when not working spend my time with my family. In any additional time that becomes available I pursue my interests in fishing and in classic cars.

I believe the work of the Alton Society is fundamental to the constructive shaping of the future of Alton when responding to the changes that will impact the town following the very significant planning development decisions coming up now and in the future.

Litter! Litter! Litter!

Litterbugs

by Bob Booker

One of the curses of modern life is litter. Many of our members have put this in their top ten of problems they would like tackled in our town. Like many of you, I have invested in my own litter picker (purchased from the nice people in Alton Home Hardware), and by the time you read this, the Society has had its annual litter pick to spring clean the town. Over forty people turned out on a sunny Saturday morning and collected as much rubbish as they could, filling two commercial litter containers made available by our Town Council.

Why do people drop so much of their rubbish? I really would like to understand the mentality of these “litterbugs”. Is there anything done in our schools and colleges to encourage a more responsible attitude to

litter? As a youngster in the the town, I was taught at an early age not to drop litter but to use the bins. I am aware that increased packaging and a “throw away society” has made that message increasingly difficult to get across. I recall confronting a gentleman who had dropped his cigarette packet outside one of the banks. His response was “I pay my taxes so why not?”. I told him he was an idiot: if he and others put their waste in the bins, he could save on his taxes! I picked it up for him and put it in the bin.

I am particularly intrigued by car drivers and passengers who fling litter out of the car windows. Are we now one of the dirtiest European countries for roadside litter? It’s no good blaming it all on our recycling plant as there are roads covered in coffee

containers, plastic bottles and bags, that are not used by Veolia vehicles. The plastic bag charge has had an effect, but we need a deposit/refund system on plastic and glass bottles (as they have in Germany). This would cut the amount abandoned on our roads, parks and pavements.

As a member of our Flood Meadows Working Party, I witness at first hand the litter problem. Whilst I am convinced we are helping to keep it in check, there is still too much dumped in our beautiful meadows, creating danger for wildlife and pets. One area is used by people as a drug den. It

is covered in rubbish: much being plastic wraps used for illegal substances. I took a black bin bag into this “hideaway” and came out with it full!

No one admits to being a litter bug, but if you come across one, please do just ask why they do it and what could be done to discourage them. The council had adopted a more aggressive approach to those caught littering, and this appeared to have an instant effect. However that service has now subsided and the litterbugs are back. I just don't know the answer. Do you?

What do you look for as a customer in Alton?

by Karen Booker

Am I alone in looking for more than the goods I want?

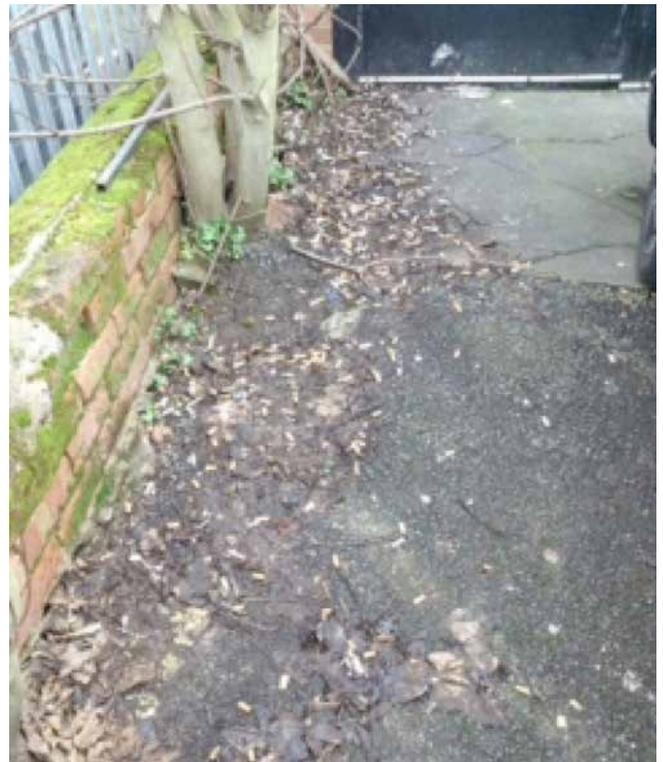
I am drawn into a shop by an eye-catching window display, particularly a themed one, perhaps based on colour, season or a local event. How many shops put regular thought into this?

I appreciate being greeted on arrival and served with good humour – a positive feature of most businesses in Alton.

In a coffee shop I expect clean toilets; one High Street chain has lost my custom as they cannot consistently provide this, nor are two toilets sufficient for their anticipated number of customers. In this respect The Ivy House wins my top rating!

Are you put off buying food and drinks from staff who smell of smoke and can regularly be spotted smoking in the adjacent alley or across the road? I am. During the recent Alton Society Litter Pick it became obvious that the culprits leave their cigarette butts in the brick crevices of alleyways or in an unsightly pile at the back door. Only after persistent nagging was this cleared by a certain High Street outdoor clothing specialist – not an image the front of store promotes.

If local businesses depend on us for sales, we can expect them to offer us clean facilities and a clean environment. Please praise local shops and businesses who do make the effort and who exceed your expectations but do also use “customer clout” to raise the standards of those who don't!



Photograph by Karen Booker

Alton Society Members' Meeting

Tuesday 13th June 2017 Members' Room Alton Community Centre

Starting at 7pm with a glass of wine and nibbles
Tell us what you want to hear about and discuss!

Contact the Secretary, Barbara Burfoot

Email: ba.burfoot@btinternet.com Telephone: 01420 89553

Alton Society Litter Pick Saturday 4th March 2017

by Barbara Burfoot

More than 40 people turned out on a chilly but unexpectedly sunny Saturday morning to take part in the Alton Society's contribution to the Great British Spring Clean. The youngest picker was just six years old. Perhaps we shouldn't speculate on the age of the oldest but some participants were certainly in their ninth decade!

People were happy to report that there was less litter in some parts of the town than there had once been. The Public Gardens, the High Street and the Butts were remarkably clear although the High Street is still blighted by carelessly discarded cigarette butts in spite of the bins provided with panels to stub out lighted cigarettes. Car Parks, unfortunately, are still litter blackspots.

The Alton Society would like to thank everyone, members and non-members alike, who turned out to help make Alton a town of which we can all be proud. Thanks are also due to the Landscape Group and East

Hampshire District Council for supplying equipment and to Alton Town Council for providing us with large commercial waste bins for the bags of litter collected.

Since the Litter Pick, Rachel Palmer of the Ashdell Residents' Association and friends have done a separate litter pick along Wilsom Road which they intend to do regularly in future.



New Directions Event Tuesday 11th April 2017

by Karen Booker

The New Directions event, held at Alton College's Wessex Arts Centre, brought together local Employment, Training and Volunteering opportunities for the over 50s, making it easier for this cohort in our community to find out about the wide range of possibilities open to them with all the information being offered in one place.

Bob Booker staffed the Alton Society stall all day with a new assistant every two hours. He also took the opportunity to suggest the possibility of becoming involved in leading guided tours of Alton to anyone who was interested.

Talks were given every 15 minutes in the Theatre after the opening address by Alastair Stewart OBE, ITN newsreader.

As well as running a short free Dementia Friends Information Session in the afternoon, our MP Damian Hinds was very much in evidence supporting the event.

The Alton Society was one of many exhibitors in the Volunteering section

upstairs. It was a privilege to speak to so many over 50s: enquiring about plans for the Coors site; considering family participation in the monthly Flood Meadows Environment Group; supporting the Society's engagement with the town. A number of new members were signed up.

It was very impressive that so many of those staffing the stalls were familiar faces from other contexts: the townspeople of Alton spread their skills and offer support to several organisations – an intermeshing that creates “community” and attracts others to join in.

Alton WI supplied excellent refreshments all day.

“Put your skills to work in a new direction” was the motto of the event. The attendance and buzz of the day suggested that many do and more will in future.

newdirections
JOBS • TRAINING • VOLUNTEERING

80th Anniversary of the electrification of the Portsmouth and Alton Lines

by Peter Desmond-Thomas

Following the electrification in 1937 of the Portsmouth and Alton lines, the Southern Railway introduced handsome, well appointed and comfortable new electric stock, I speak from personal experience, known as 4-COR/4-BUF electric trains.

With electrification the few through scheduled passenger services from London Waterloo to Southampton ceased.

The service between Alton and Southampton terminus operated as a push-pull steam traction shuttle, being replaced, sixty years ago, by Diesel Electric Multiple Units (DEMUs) in 1957.

The new electric trains consisted of eight carriages: a 4 corridor unit coupled together with a 4 carriage unit including a buffet, with a walk through facility between the two sets of four carriages, enabled by containing the diving cab on one side.

The train was divided at Woking – one four carriage, complete with buffet, for Portsmouth and Southsea, the other four carriage unit, all stations to Alton. Units in the reverse direction, up to London, were conjoined at Woking.

The trains were half-hourly from London Waterloo, at 27 and 57 minutes past the hour. The journey time to Alton from electrification in 1937 through to 1967, was exactly 80 minutes.

Fifty years ago, in 1967, when steam services on the Southern Region were eliminated, new timetables were introduced throughout.

At around the same time, new Electric Multiple Unit stock (EMUs) designated as “CIGs” were introduced onto the Portsmouth and Alton lines, replacing the, then, thirty year old EMU units affectionately known as “Nelson’s”.

“Nelson’s” were so called because, from the front, only one forward cab (driver’s) window was visible. The other window incorporated a stencilled running route numberplate. The number was there to identify the train route for signalmen (the stencilled number was illuminated from behind outside daylight hours).

Footnote: For those curious as to why Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) Class 421s were classified as CIGs, they were so called because these units were first introduced in 1964 to modernise rolling stock on the Brighton Lines (where some electric units still had whistles, rather than the familiar two tone horn!). The “C” stands for corridor and the “IG” stands for the old London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR) telegraphic code for Brighton.

From 1967, as CIG construction continued, some of the new stock was destined for the Portsmouth and Alton lines but retained the CIG designation, despite the Brighton connotation. The CIGs, the last conventional slam door train stock then remaining in service, were in turn replaced on the Portsmouth and Alton lines in 2003 by the class 444 and 450 EMUs that we see in service today.



Photo by Stephen Lewis – an electric train at Alton Station.

Nominations invited for Alton Society Awards

This is the time of year when the chairman invites nominations from Society members for the Society's Individual and John Ambrose Awards.

Individual Award

This was created to acknowledge the personal contribution of an appropriate individual towards work, voluntary or otherwise, that has outstanding value to the Alton community

The contributions should relate to one or more of the Society's principal aims. These are:

- Stimulating interest in the past, present and future of Alton and District
- Working for the preservation and enhancement of local features of particular historical, cultural, environmental and aesthetic importance
- Promoting and encouraging the rational and appropriate development of the Alton area and its amenities
- Acting as a focus for obtaining and giving relevant information and advice and to provide a forum for public discussion
- Representing and advancing the views of the Society on the said matters to the authorities concerned as well as the wider community.

Recent recipients of the award have been Ann Foulkes (2016), Pat Lerew (2015), Jennie Marlow (2013) and Peter and Ysanne Legg (2012).

Members of the Society are now invited to submit nominations for the 2017 award. Please submit your nomination with a note of about 150 words to the Society Secretary, Barbara Burfoot, 3 Sandown Close, Alton, Hampshire GU34 2TG or Email ba.burfoot@btinternet.com **by 31st August 2017**.

It should be stressed that all suggestions and discussions will remain confidential to the awarding Panel, headed by the Society's Chairman, which aims to reach a decision in time for the usual presentation to be made at the November AGM.

Please note that the rules exclude current members of your Committee, and any persons related to them, from being considered as nominees for the Award.

John Ambrose Award

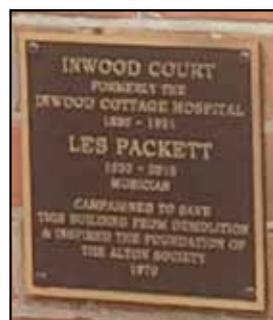
Each year the Society also aims to present an Award at the AGM for the best project completed during the previous 24 months. For this purpose, we set up a viewing panel made up from our Committee members, two co-opted ordinary members and a representative of Alton Town Council. A morning is set aside, usually late in October, for viewing the candidate projects. The shortlist will be agreed just before this. Please send any suggestions for projects that might be considered to the Society Secretary, Barbara Burfoot 3 Sandown Close, Alton, Hampshire GU34 2TG or Email: ba.burfoot@btinternet.com **by 1st October 2017**.

Unveiling of a Plaque to Les Packett at Inwood Court, 23rd April 2017

This ceremony commemorated the pivotal part that one of our founder members, Les Packett, had in saving the Inwood Cottage Hospital (now Inwood Court) from demolition in the 1970s. The success of the campaign led to the birth of the Alton Society. The building provides sheltered accommodation operated by Sanctuary Housing Association.

Nick Carey-Thomas recalled Les's achievements from an architectural point of view. Bob Booker spoke as a former Chairman of the Society.

Bob is seen here after the unveiling.



What's On in Alton

ALFI (Alton Local Food Initiative) www.altonlocalfood.org.uk

Saturday 13th May 2017 10am-3pm in Cross and Pillory Lane as part of the craft market

SEEDLING SWAP – Bring seedlings to swap or collect some for a small donation.

Energy Alton Email: energyalton@gmail.com Telephone: 07811 462659

Monday 15th May 2017 at 7.30pm Wesley Room Alton Maltings GU34 1DT

Invitation to **Reception and Film “Before the Flood”** – an acclaimed documentary about climate change with Leonardo DiCaprio

The Curtis Museum

Saturday 5th August 2017 Come and celebrate our ancient Saxon town

Alton Anglo Saxon Festival with Weorod

Admission Free

If you would like to promote your event here, please contact the Alton Society Secretary, Barbara Burfoot, in very good time. The next issue of this newsletter will be produced in the early Autumn. email ba.burfoot@btinternet.com

Join the Alton Society now – have a say and a role in the future of our town

The membership subscription is now £12.50 per year per individual. A second person at the same address can be added without further charge. Our membership year begins on 1 October. Application forms for membership, including standing order forms, are included in our leaflet or can be downloaded from www.altonsociety.org.uk for printing and sending. As we are a registered charity, members who are tax payers may opt to increase their effective contribution by agreeing to Gift Aid. For existing members who already pay by standing order, please use the Standing Order Renewal Form below to instruct your bank to increase the amount payable to £12.50 if you have not done so already. Contact our Membership Officer:

Bob Booker, 76 Victoria Road, Alton GU34 2DE Tel: 01420 83570 e-mail: bbooker@btinternet.com

ALTON SOCIETY – MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

Standing Order renewal form

Please return this form to: Bob Booker, 76 Victoria Road, Alton GU34 2DE

My details may be held on computer in connection with my membership of the Alton Society



STANDING ORDER REQUEST

To The Manager, Bank plc

Address

I, (full name) request you pay to The Alton Society, Account No. 00026566 at Lloyds TSB (sort code 30-90-15) the sum of Twelve Pounds Fifty Pence (£12.50) every year starting on 1st October.

My Account No. Sort Code

My address

..... Postcode

email Phone number

Signed Date

Gift Aid: Give more at no cost to you!

Please tick (✓) if you are a UK taxpayer and wish us to reclaim tax on your subscription.

Photograph by Pam Jones



**Join the Alton Society now – have a say
and a role in the future of our town.**

Use the form on the other side of this page, or check our website:

www.altonsociety.org.uk



Space for personalised label
for hand-delivered copy.

Committee members

Nikki Bird	84367/07977	192764	Brian Good	542819
Bob Booker (<i>Membership</i>)		83570	Peter Holden (<i>Treasurer</i>)	549521
Nicky Branch (<i>Chairman</i>)		562698	Louise Parker	07966 450054
Barbara Burfoot (<i>Secretary</i>)		89553	Kate Sills	07780 691813
Tony Cohen		82026	David Simpkins	83799
Martyn Dell (<i>Vice Chairman & Publicity</i>)		82978	Simon Stoodley	
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This edition of the newsletter has been edited by Barbara Burfoot