



Planning Betrayal by District Council

IT WAS WITH GREAT REGRET that we heard East Hampshire's District Council decision to approve the Reserved Matters application for the replacement Sports Centre on the 5th March. This was despite a valiant fight by the pressure group Alton Sports Centre Acton Group (ASCAG), to which we gave our full support. Thank you to all our members who took the trouble to lobby councillors on this hugely important issue.

There is much that could be said about the weaknesses of the planning process, the woeful lack of understanding of the real issues (only two of the twelve councillors at the meeting were there to represent Alton), and that the outcome appears to have been pre-determined by a contract already in place with the operator Everyone Active (sic). Suffice it to say that no less than fifteen separate sport activities will be disadvantaged, or completely excluded, by this totally inadequate scheme.

In the end, we believe this was a political decision. We know that EHDC's priority was always to build a profit-making leisure centre, totally at odds with the need to provide proper sporting facilities for today's users, never mind for the future growth in our population.

We were also alarmed by the total absence of any low carbon energy measures in a public investment such as this (as indeed reflected in council's own Energy Strategy!). Not only is this an abdication of the council's environmental responsibilities, it's a missed opportunity in terms of the potential saving in operational costs, and a quite inexplicable omission in our view.

We will continue our efforts to influence the final design, especially given the planners' insistence that the internal layout remains 'fluid', and only the 'shell' of the building and its external appearance have so far been fixed.

Also in this issue:

- Chairman's Corner
- Sustainability Group – report
- The Future of British High Streets
- What is happening to our water supply?
- Wey Valley Radio – our local station
- A note from our Tree Warden
- Vox Pop – Ginny Boxall
- Planning Matters
- Energy Alton – events
- Alton's Public Gardens



Chairman's Corner

by Nicky Branch

Noting the recent changes in EHDC's portfolio holders, I wondered whether they might herald a softening change to the hard-nosed, commercial approach to the funding of community services and investment. Wishful thinking, I suspect, so that the first opportunity to make any changes, including the balance between community support and council tax levels, will only come via the ballot box in May next year.

In the meantime I note that Councillor Cowper will continue to hold both the Finance and the Whitehill/Bordon portfolios. I do query whether this really amounts to good governance, and I fear that it will not bode well for Alton in the future unless Alton, too, can have a robust champion at Cabinet level. Decisions will have to be made quite soon on where to locate the extra 5,000 – 6,000 extra dwellings which EHDC may need to provide in the period 2028 – 2036; Alton must have a powerful and respected voice in making this

and other crucial decisions. Again, something for the ballot box – or maybe sooner?

Amid all this disappointment and concern, it is good to see that Alton College, often overlooked, is proceeding confidently and independently, and is as successful as ever. I and another Governor, Hector Brown, set up a private charity 19 years ago called The Alton College Foundation to help the College and its students towards excellence, which includes by now the funding of 293 "Scholarships for Excellence" from a total of over £500,000 raised. Handing out some of these scholarships at the celebration in February reminded me of how lucky Alton town and local families are to have this amazing institution so close at hand, and producing such talented and ambitious scholars. If any member might be interested in sponsoring a scholarship, please let me know.

PS. For fellow sufferers of cancers that can't be cured, I confirm that the best palliative is a positive outlook, good food and wine, cheerful company and keeping really busy!!

Sustainability Group

Report on latest activities

- The group is working hard to assist the authorities to carry out a proper Parking and Business survey. This would help to steer policy towards boosting business and tourism. It is our view that we should grasp the nettle and have a tourism expert come and assess the Town and its potential as a "destination town".
- We continue to support the Town Team and are helping in a number of projects. However it appears the Authorities' support for this team is not as firm as it was. The idea is to make it self sufficient with businesses leading the group. We are not convinced. It appears that the previous promise of funding for one of the Team's projects is no longer available. We shall continue to press for the proposal to smarten up the subway to Chawton and are actively involved with BT on the need to enhance the front of their building on Normandy Street.
- All this is aimed at helping the High Street (see the following article) withstand the cold drafts of the economic downturn in retail. A future issue we are intending to tackle is the use of plastic. This has become a major national problem and at last the Government appear to be accepting that it needs national leadership. For us the same goes for litter!

Please note our website has more information on all the work our Groups are doing, so go to www.altonsociety.org.uk for more information.

Get in touch!

Email us at thealtonsociety@gmail.com

Check out our Twitter account and Facebook.



What is the Future of British High Streets?

Are our High Streets doomed? In the last 50 years we have witnessed amazing changes in the retail businesses and this has been reflected in our towns. Many of you will recall the first supermarkets and the increase in choice they gave us as shoppers with items we all needed under one roof. Then came the out-of-town or edge-of-town developments with massive shops selling everything from hairdryers to milk, again in one venue. High Street shops found their loyal customers deserting to the new shopper's paradise and they could drive there without incurring the parking charges. It is fascinating that the very same shoppers often mourned the changes in their high streets, claiming that they would shop there if there was more choice.

However, the biggest revolution in retail has been the rise and rise of the internet giants and trading online. Some of you do not use this means to communicate or shop, but many of you do, and it continues to grow, seemingly without limit. The biggest retailer this Christmas was Amazon which does not have a presence on high streets but does own massive warehouses. These store and dispatch their goods. The company is efficient and has put in place systems that ensure good customer service. If there are problems, they are dealt with smartly. This is going to be our main shopping experience for the future.

This latest change in our buying habits sounds like the death knell for our high streets but is that the case? Your writer is always optimistic and can say that some towns and cities are tackling the competition, in a variety of ways. The "shopping experience" has to become just that: pleasant, attractive and offering a variety of goods and services. On a visit to Leeds he witnessed an innovative city with lovely indoor and outdoor shops, interesting features often telling you about the history of the area. Customer service was generally very good and pleasant. There were far more "services" provided than in the past, such as coffee establishments, nail bars, hairdressers and excellent pubs.

Alton cannot emulate Leeds but the concept of embracing change can be harnessed in a number of ways and that is what your Society is trying to do with the various organisations we work with and support. Our businesses need to compete and we believe they need to be visible online. This means having a website



which appeals and draws the customer into the town. It is no good depending on footfall past their shops alone. It is amazing the goods and services that are available! You only need to spend a few minutes looking at Tanya Applegarth's (Wildly Upbeat Printers) Town Map of businesses and their positions in the town and where you can find them (a copy is often outside the Swan Hotel).

The Town Council have tried to help with the business forums but having attended both, we feel that a number of businesses that could have benefitted from the sessions on how to use the internet and to make their shops/premises and shop windows more inviting, were the ones not present.

We think it is time to re-imagine our High Street. We should accept more conversions to premises (homes and flats). We know there is a need particularly for single person flats. Think of the Bon Bon shop. It is an eyesore and is falling apart. It is not looked after. This would make an ideal dwelling in our view. It should be made even easier to convert such premises and let's not worry if we lose a "retail unit". We are often critical of the increase in service premises such as hairdressers and nail bars. There is demand for these, so we must get used to more of the same. They sell what you can't get online. Planning should make sure these services are accommodated, even if next door to each other. Some areas may have to accept they can no longer be a street of shops but could become a street of living accommodation.

What we can say for certain is that many of us have witnessed so many changes in our lifetime and we will see more. Our Town is special and unique; just ask any visitor who spends time here. Let's make an effort to shop more in Town, support our local retailers but also embrace the changes that will ensure we survive for the next 50 years.

What is happening to our water supply?

by Bob Booker



The River Wey at the end of 2017 and now. Photo credit: James Willis & Nikki Bird

It is strange as I watch the rain pour down onto my garden to think that there is a water shortage. This is the case and now is the time to tackle the shortage with a much wiser approach to our use of this valuable and life-giving resource. Experts tell us that our aquifers are down (these are the stores of water below the surface and from which we get our supplies). We have been lucky in this country. We have not experienced serious drought as they do in some other parts of the world. However with increasing growth in housing and the upward trend in water usage we must take stock and look at our use of water.

Our local water supplier South East Water has produced an excellent leaflet that gives us tips on how to save water regularly. We gave out a number of these at our Yuletide Fair stall and they were all snapped up in the first hour so we felt it would be a good idea to reproduce the top tips from SE Water and ourselves:

1. Take the 4 minute challenge and have a shorter shower instead of a bath. Remember a "power shower" can use as much water as a bath if on too long.
2. Fix dripping taps as they can waste a litre of water an hour.
3. Fill the kettle with the right amount of water. Many kettles have the means to

measure the amount you need for a cuppa!

4. If you have a garden don't use a hose on the plants. Install water butts as the rain is free and is better for your plants. The extra exercise in filling and carrying is good for you. Water plants in the morning or late evening to prevent evaporation.
5. Consider installing a water meter. You pay for what you use and this can be a good discipline. Meters are not compulsory but may well be in the future.
6. Wash your car with a bucket and sponge instead of a hose.
7. Only use a washing machine and dishwasher when you have a full load.
8. Check your toilet for water continually running inside the bowl. Have you ever thought of installing a urinal? Some run without water and are fine.
9. Check regularly for leaks in pipes and wrap up pipes for winter to prevent bursts.

Many of you may have your own tips as well so why not let us know what they are and we can pass them onto our readers?

You can contact us at our email address:

thealtonsociety@gmail.com

or write to us at

The Alton Society

76 Victoria Rd Alton GU34 2DE.

Wey Valley Radio 101.1 FM Our local radio station



Bob Booker in the Wey Valley Radio studio

We have been invited to take part in a regular spot on Wey Valley Radio (WVR) and we know some of you have become listeners. However, some may not know about this new Community Radio Station. Let us tell you more. It may change your radio listening habits!

The station can be found at 101.1 fm. It is on 24 hours a day and has an interesting mix of programmes. They cover pop, classics, folk and other forms of music that cater for all tastes. The presenters are a mixture with some having years of broadcasting experience to others who are enthusiastic beginners. All of them have a great enthusiasm to bring you local news and highlight local talent. Tune in and tell us what you think.

If you have internet access then there is an app called myTuner that gives you free access to many radio stations and we helped to get WVR on the app. Download the app from iTunes then type in Wey Valley Radio.

Back to our spot – tune in on Tuesdays at 10am and listen to what your Society has to say on current issues in the Town and elsewhere.

Membership

Many of you will have noticed a change in how we acknowledge your support. The majority of you pay your annual subscription by standing order in the renewal month of October. Some pay in other months depending on when you joined. This year we have tried to acknowledge those payments with a “thank you” message. We sent them by email or letter. It has proved popular with many of you and we are grateful for the messages of support.

We have asked some of you for your email addresses if you

have one, as that does ease communication for us. We are grateful for those of you who have responded. Rest assured that we will ensure you hear from us either in the traditional way or through the internet.

If you do tell us your email address, can we remind you that we only use it for Society purposes or to tell you of events for other groups whose aims and objectives match ours. If you have any comments then please contact us at

thealtonsociety@gmail.com

A note from our Tree Warden

Free advice on any aspect concerning trees is another benefit of Alton Society membership, for land within the boundaries of Alton town. Contact the Membership Secretary to be put in touch (01420 83570).

Tree wardens are part of a national network and most parishes have such wardens. For areas outside Alton, refer to the relevant Parish Council. For trees on land within Alton, contact the current membership secretary,

as always, listed on the back page of this publication, and the tree warden will get in touch.

Recommendations for tree work contractors cannot be given, but East Hampshire District Council publishes a list of such firms. Go to www.easthants.gov.uk/planning and then select 'Heritage and Trees'. The list can be found at the foot of the page.



'Vox Pop' – Ginny Boxall

interview with Martyn Dell

Ginny Boxall has joined the Society and is already playing a prominent role in our Sustainability Group. Here is a special interview introducing her to you.

I have had a very varied professional life working as both a family and children's social worker in Alton and in several roles at Treloar's College and School. More recently, I have worked as a freelance photographer (*many of us will have seen Ginny's photos in the 'Weather slot' of South Today*) and latterly as an artist and newly fledged children's author. Married for 34 years, I have 4 grown children and 4 grandchildren.

My current interests are very much rooted in nature and preserving and protecting the natural environment. Enhanced by my own Christian faith and passionate interest in landscape, I very much believe we should be good stewards of the Earth and leave it in a good state for future generations. I am also passionate about sustainability and that we need to recycle as much as we can. I have a very keen interest in climate change and I'm proud that all my children have a strong interest in the natural world.

I have spent all of my formative years in and around Alton and was privileged to be able to roam freely in the beautiful Hampshire countryside.

I have joined the Alton Society because I feel our towns are subject to change on a huge scale with the influx of new housing and a growing population which has put our towns under pressure as we haven't seen since the programme of rebuilding that occurred following the Second World War. My father was

a post war architect and responsible for much of the craze for concrete shopping centres.

I think he would have loved the fact that now we can build sustainably and innovatively in sympathy with the natural landscape such as the Prince of Wales' Poundbury housing scheme.

I love Alton for its wonderful historic links and Market town feel, and I very much hope we don't lose this. We have an interesting mix of Victorian and Georgian buildings, I love Crown Hill and Market Street in particular. It's a friendly town and you can often stop and make small talk with folk. Having lived here since the age of 11, I consider myself fully an Altonian.

What I don't like is the lack of any real say over the way the town develops. I resent the fact that the Alton Neighbourhood Plan hasn't been adhered to by EHDC who are out of touch and remote. I feel we are treated as second best in Alton and have had a lot of extra housing 'dumped' on us.

I hope we can make a difference here in Alton but think we must stand up and be counted. I have a dogged determination once I get my teeth into something hence fighting since 2014 to have the top meadows above the former Treloar's site kept free of housing, to preserve our fabulous skyline and 6 hills of Alton. Yes, we need housing but we must fight for the right sites to be developed and for good design, infrastructure and services.

I hope that my children and grandchildren will still enjoy the fabulous Hampshire countryside in the way that I have and for generations to come.



Planning Matters

by Rod Eckles

At the 12th February planning meeting the proposed access arrangements for the **Lynch Hill** industrial development were also turned down, (although, curiously, the application was withdrawn before the refusal decision notice could be issued). A new turning onto Montecchio Way, half-way between the A31 and the existing Mill Lane turning, was described as a 'joke' by a number of councillors. We agree. In our view it would have had a devastating impact on this entrance to the town, as well as causing major congestion and road safety problems.



Footpath over Lynch Hill Hangar

It is hoped that plans for accessing the site will now revert back to Waterbrook Road (off Mill Lane), as originally intended. We do need to remain vigilant though, in view of the potential threat to our skyline posed by the detailed plans when they come to the planning committee as Reserved Matters.

In January we received confirmation of changes to the **Planning Policy** process, with far reaching implications for both the district-wide Joint Core Strategy and our own Alton Neighbourhood Plan (*see Chairman's Corner*). Following pressure from central government, these will become out of date next year, but before new planning policies can be adopted. We don't yet know the impact on housing numbers, but we share the district planners' frustration that despite having a robust Local Plan in place we risk being penalised by having to review it, whereas some local authorities have completely failed to produce a Local Plan for many years.

There are some positive aspects, notably the

requirement for EHDC to identify sites for all land uses – housing, employment, retail and - notably – infrastructure, all intended to avoid speculative development.

The Development Brief for the **Coors Brewery Site** identifies an opportunity for a new community facility on the brewery site, and residents are being invited to have their say on what form that could take. The engagement period will include a survey and four public events, to give every resident the opportunity to take part. The four public events are:

- Wednesday, 21 March, 7pm, Alton College, at the Annual Electors Meeting
- Saturday, 24 March, 10am – 2pm, Alton Assembly Rooms
- Tuesday, 27 March, 11am – 2pm, Community Centre
- Friday, 13 April, 1pm – 4pm, Alton Town Council Offices

There will be an on-line survey available from the evening of 21 March on the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/AltonCommunity>

The Society's views on the key priorities for the site, including our ideas for a 'community' facility, are available on our website Home Page: www.altonsociety.org.uk

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

Renaissance Retirement have now submitted their plans for 57 sheltered apartments on the Magistrates Court / Police Station site.

We wrote a detailed response to the public consultation held last Summer, which included a detailed design review. Sadly, at first sight, the developers have made little attempt to respond to our comments, apart from slightly reducing the building's scale. We are still formulating our response, but it is already clear that the internal space, the dark north-facing aspect of many of the flats, many facing car parking or busy roads, represent a very poor standard of design.

The plans are available for viewing and commenting on via the EHDC Planning website: <https://planningpublicaccess.easthants.gov.uk/online-applications/>, using Reference 56420. The expiry date for comments is **26th March**.



The Development of the “Smart Grid”

At a fascinating public talk organised by community group Energy Alton, Roger Munford explained how community energy schemes are bringing about the development of the Smart Grid – the biggest change in the distribution of electricity since the National Grid was invented.

The National Grid distributes power generated from four major sources. Coal is being phased out in the drive to reduce carbon emissions and pollution; electricity generated from nuclear power and gas is currently the bedrock of supply. But electricity from renewables, especially solar and wind (onshore and offshore) is growing rapidly and now generate about a third of our electricity supply.

Large-scale battery storage is also developing quickly, following the lead of pioneers such as Elon Musk’s big battery in Australia. Battery storage is especially useful in smoothing demand for electricity, which of course peaks in the evening. As technology continues to develop and electric cars become more common, their batteries could be used



temporarily to store electricity, as they are typically charged overnight.

About 40% of the cost of electricity is from its distribution. Community energy models are now being explored, for example in Cornwall, to make best use of the electricity generated locally from renewable sources, retaining its value locally and reducing the costs of distribution. So the Smart Grid will be much more local than the present centralised National Grid.

Technology is developing incredibly quickly. Watch this space!

Forthcoming events hosted by Energy Alton

Saturday 21 April 2018 – 11.00 – 2.00 – Alton Community Centre

Plastic Waste – What we can all do (drop-in event)



Across the nation people are becoming very aware of the problem of plastic waste and are keen to know what can be done about it! Come and see what alternatives are already available from sandwich wrappers and kitchen wrap to nappies, hygiene products and cosmetics. There will be displays of products, ideas, a video presentation, children’s activities and refreshments – in china cups!

Wednesday 16 May 2018 – 7.30 pm – Gary Wilburn, Managing Director of HPW Architecture: How do we deliver affordable low energy buildings as the norm?

- Applying fabric-first construction to mainstream housing development
- Integrating renewables into construction projects
- Costs of going beyond building regulation standards
- Can we adopt Net Zero Energy or Passivhaus to all new housing?

Alton's Public Gardens

by Bob Booker



Black & white image kindly provided by Memories of Alton, Hampshire Facebook group. This shows the old shelter as against the new one that we have now.

The Gardens once formed part of the Westbrooke Manor House. They provide a lovely area for rest and relaxation in the middle of the town. Recent years have seen a number of improvements including the refurbishment of the bandstand, the communal shelter area and the mound (the spiral path next to the shelter).

The gardens are also known as the “park” and have provided an outside playground for generations of local children and their families. I was brought up in the 1950s and lived in Westbrooke Road. The park was a natural extension to me and my sisters of our own play area. Did you know that a number of trees are in fact “rockets” providing essential transport to the planets, such as Mars? This was the era of Dan Dare and Journey into Space. Once the first satellite had circled the Earth our adventures took us out into the Universe to meet all sorts of aliens. The park also staged the Olympic Games (our version), the World Cup and numerous games of hide and seek! As I was one of a family of four I had plenty of team mates and with the additions of the “Andrews” and “Warrens” along the road there was a real gang of us all eager to be part of the fun. Occasionally we

were joined by the children from Kingsland Road and Rack Close Road!

They were happy times and we learnt to be “street wise” as well as using our imaginations. We did have TV but the time for watching was restricted to children’s hour. The phrase often heard in our house was “mum, can we go out and play?”.

There were plenty of places to hide but these spots have since been trimmed back so the adults can see their children. Was our childhood a better time? I do think the access to iPads and mobiles has transformed children’s lives today but is this a good thing? Imagination still plays a big part with the online games and puzzles, but not in the same way, and the lack of physical exercise has surely helped to lead to higher incidences of obesity. What do you as parents or grandparents think? I would love to know. Meanwhile if you would like to know which “tree” guarantees a space flight to Venus then I will meet you at the park and show you! Bring your space suit and helmet and be prepared to meet the aliens.

Email to thealtonsociety@gmail.com

Love on the Rocks

by Nikki Bird

The eagle-eyed among you or those with young children or grandchildren may have spotted beautifully painted, colourful pebbles in various places around the town over the last few months. Adults and children are painting stones with a design, adding 'Love on the Rocks Alton' on the back and leaving them in places to be found by others. My daughter found the lovely one in the photo at Flood Meadows. The Love on the Rocks – Alton Facebook page is run by Primrose Jones who said, “If you love it – keep it; if it made you smile – hide it for someone else to find; if it enthused you – join in and paint some to hide”. Finders are encouraged to post a photo to the Facebook group; it’s lovely for the hider to see their rock travel around the town, and further afield in some cases! With the Easter holidays approaching, why not get outside and see how many you can find?



Recommended!

We recommend these walks which will give you an insight into Alton’s colourful and fascinating history.

Alton Town Walks 2018



Picture by Pam (Pell) Jones

Join a guided walk around historic Alton,
starting at the Curtis Museum on the
following Saturdays at 11.00am

20th Jan	19th May	15th Sept
17th Feb	16th June	20th Oct
17th Mar	21st July	17th Nov
21st Apr	18th Aug	15th Dec

Price Adults £3 & Children (5-16) 50p
Bespoke walks for groups can be
arranged on other days.
For further information Tel. 01420 85057



Supported By





Heading towards Shalden, looking back towards Alton – photo by Nikki Bird

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: bbooker5951@gmail.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



Registered Charity No. 1077729

STANDING ORDER REQUEST

To The Manager, Bank plc

Address

I, (full name) request you pay to The Alton Society, Account No. 00026566 at 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.



Jack Frost pays a visit to Flood Meadows – photo by Nikki Bird

Join the Alton Society now – have a say and a role in the future of our town.
Use the form below or check our website:

www.altonsociety.org.uk



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This edition of the newsletter has been edited by Nikki Bird and Bob Booker