

***Our third Newsletter is rather overdue and hence a Bumper Issue. It covers progress and developing issues that have been most significant in the past year or so, although you will recognize that some have been on-going since we started in late 2013 - for background see our website***

## **APRA and the Conservation Area**

The APRA strap-line indicates our mission to protect a very special environment. Among many aspects, the appearance of our streets and open areas is perhaps the most obvious. This is taken seriously in other historic cities with which we might wish to be compared (e.g., Winchester, Salisbury, Oxford or Cambridge). At its best St Albans has unique examples of ancient buildings, charming street scenes and open areas of natural beauty, but is also an ever more densely populated commuter city close to London, with commercial pressures that grow due to its continued expansion. The sometimes conflicting requirements of conservation, residents, tourists and commercial interests need to be handled with care and sometimes compromise. Surely that is the major responsibility of our City and District Council, advised by independent organizations such as the Civic Society, the Architectural and Archaeological Society and the various Residents Associations. APRA brings the concerns of residents in our own highly-prized part of the Conservation Area to those with the authority to act upon them, but we have to acknowledge the diversity of opinions of those who live in the Abbey precincts. We need to know **your** views, so please let us know

**- by joining APRA NOW and making your voice heard!**

Individual membership costs as little as £5 per year. Please download a form from the website or contact the Secretary on 01727 569574 or [secretary@aprastalbans.org](mailto:secretary@aprastalbans.org)

## **APRA 2016 Committee:**

Peter Trevelyan (Chair, Abbey Mill End)  
Geoff Dyson (Vice Chair, College St)  
Andrew Yaras (Treasurer, Fishpool St)  
Robert Pankhurst (Secretary, College St)  
Gillian Field (George St) (resigned)  
John Hedges (Abbey Mill Lane)  
Justin Douglas (Lower Dagnall St)  
Norman James (College Street)

## **Street Reps:**

Abbey Mill End: Michael Ormiston  
Abbey Mill Flats: Marylyn Madden  
Abbey Mill Lane: Brigitte Paupy  
Bowes Lyon Mews: Mollie Kennedy  
College Place: Patricia Hicks  
College Street: Mike Hall  
Heritage Close: Sally Hickman  
Lower Dagnall Street: Beth Hall  
New England Street: Edgar Hill  
Orchard Street: Margaret Stone  
Romeland & George Street: Gillian Field  
Spicer Street: Alan & Renee Shenton  
Temperance Street: Kathy Goodchild

***We need new committee members for next year - please consider standing at the AGM in mid-November***

## **An Autumn Invitation !!**

**With enormous gratitude to The Right Reverend Norman Banks, Bishop of Richborough, we will hold an afternoon get-together for APRA members in the garden of Parkside House, Abbey Mill Lane, from 2 to 4 pm on Saturday 10 September. This will be FREE for paid-up members. RSVP: for our better planning, please e-mail [secretary@gmail.com](mailto:secretary@gmail.com) (or telephone 01727 569574) if you would like to come along - we hope to see you!**

## **Romeland**

Last summer there were problems in Tankerfield Gardens (a decommissioned graveyard) and the Cathedral porches, associated with camping, drinking and sometimes abusive behaviour by a small group of people. The Council has reduced the height of the hedges around part of the gardens to make it more exposed and perhaps less attractive as a camp site, but the main change has been its inclusion in the area covered by a Public Space Protection Order, giving the Police powers to move anyone behaving in an unruly manner. So far these measures seem to be working and, hopefully, the tranquillity of the Gardens has been restored.

Following pressure from APRA and Cllr Edgar Hill, the water streaming across the pavement in Romeland has finally been dealt with, but proper restitution of the culvert has yet to be made.

Our efforts to secure repairs to the crumbling flint and brick wall to the Abbey Orchard in Abbey Mill Lane have been less successful. There seems to be no agreement as to whose responsibility this is.

## **Council upholds claims of Public Nuisance at The Brickyard**

College Street residents backing onto this drastically redeveloped public house suffered throughout last summer from raucous partying in the rear garden of the premises, including shouting, cheering, screeching, singing and swearing. APRA supported the residents by calling for a Licence Review, which was held on 4 December last year. The Licensing sub-committee heard evidence and ruled that residents “have experienced an unreasonable reduction in their amenity”, and that “lack of management of customers in the outside areas has directly contributed to the public nuisance”. Concluding that the premises had not complied with the objectives of the Licensing Act 2003, the chief new condition attached to the licence is that the rear patio and garden areas of the premises are to be vacated by 10 pm rather than 11 pm, and that all external doors (including the front doors) should be closed at this earlier time save for entry and exit. The owner initially submitted an appeal against this ruling but withdrew before it came to the Magistrates' Court.

The outcome is a clear vindication of the residents' objections and APRA's action. It goes some way to showing that a simple Residents Association can be effective even when confronting powerful interests (The Brickyard was represented at the review hearing by a barrister and an environment consultant). It remains to be seen whether the premises will now be operated in such a way as to exist agreeably with the neighbours who share garden boundaries – changes to the rear patio this spring have further increased the open-air capacity for clients in this highly unsuitable location.

**Many long-established public houses in the Conservation Area operate on a scale and in a way that respects the neighbouring residents, but if you experience persistent problems with noise or client behaviour from entertainment premises our website gives details on how to complain.**

## **Shine a Light**

Have you noticed our lamps and lamp-posts? Installation of new LED lights led one concerned member, Valerie Treasure, to question the possible loss of historical fittings, prompting the APRA secretary to investigate and record their existing variety (see our website for a fuller picture). You may have doubts about the nature and spread of LED light, but the associated cost-savings are significant (and may mean that some can stay on at night, so that we don't have to stumble around in the dark). In general only standard sodium-vapour light heads have been replaced so far, but unfortunately three older-style globe light heads were lost in the Romeland area (see the small images below). This is surely contrary to the principles of the Conservation Area. HCC Councillor Sandy Walkington has contacted the project leader to avoid further losses. There are still quite a few original Victorian lantern-style lights like this wonky one in Abbey Mill Lane, and others round the Cathedral and Waxhouse Gate and near the Fighting Cocks PH (as well as in St Michaels and parts of Sopwell ward). These may have been gas-powered when first installed, but were converted to sodium-vapour lights, so we expect equally respectful conversion to LED. All these lantern heads are fitted to stylish Victorian lamp-posts, which are actually quite common in the area. Unfortunately many interesting lamp-posts are neglected, rusty



and in a sorry state. Most are disfigured and festooned with shrouds of notices (both Council and private ones) - a sort of lamp-post abuse! Should we press for a clean-up and re-painting programme? Please let us know if you think this deserves priority.



**We welcome our new Verulam Ward Councillor Chris Davies (cldr.c.davies@stalbans.gov.uk) who was elected in May 2016.**

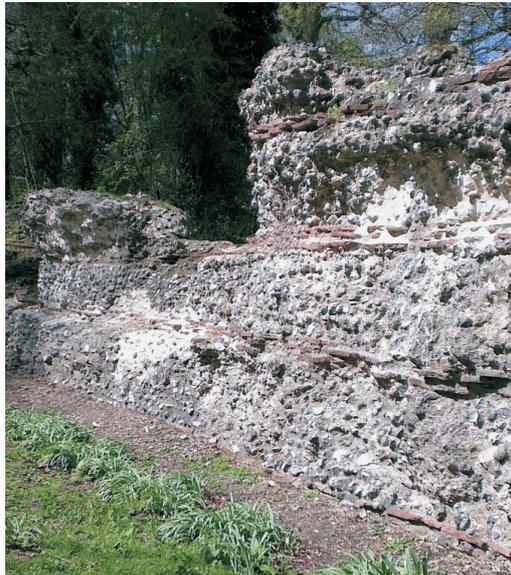
**He joins Cllrs Jessica Chivers and Edgar Hill, both of whom have shown great commitment to the Conservation Area and with whom we have a very co-operative relationship.**

## Verulamium Park

How lucky we are, not only to live in a historic city, but to have Verulamium Park close at hand. With the Cathedral, this constitutes one of the main tourist attractions of St Albans as it contains some of the least disturbed Roman remains in the country - who knows what still lies undisturbed beneath the ground? But it is also used very intensively for leisure activities including sports and cycling. Keeping it safe and attractive is no easy task.

### The Roman Wall:

Full marks to English Heritage and SADC for desperately needed repairs to this 1700 year-old treasure, the crumbling state of which had become a potential danger both to itself and to anyone who got too close! Not quite so many marks for (a) not going far enough up the causeway, where such problems still exist and (b) not colouring the new mortar to blend with the old.



We hope the Heritage Watch notices inspire respect - but they deserve a neater and more durable solution than these cheap tie-ons, to match the stylish new information panels.

**The Slough of Despond:** First avian botulism and now the disgusting smelly sludge - what a dreadful impression for visitors. The sluggish flow of water through this large but shallow artificial pond means that silt accumulation and pollution are inevitable. Emptying and dredging would be prohibitively costly and temporary. SADC have been working with the Environment Agency to find a long-term solution (planting new reed banks to improve water quality is the favoured approach), but the immediate problem is now extreme. Mechanical removal of sludge in the south-east corner has proved ineffective and now Veolia are going to try sucking it up into tankers at the two most critical points. Sustainable maintenance of the lake is clearly a huge challenge - the future does not look good.

**Litter Bugs:** Regular removal of litter from the park is carried out by park rangers, but they cannot cope with all the unsightly scraps of brightly coloured paper, sweet wrappers and crisp bags, bottle tops and cigarette ends that require more painstaking collection. Councillor Jessica Chivers organises a happy band of volunteer litter-pickers for an hour on one Saturday morning each month, which certainly makes a difference. If you would like to join in please e-mail her ([jc4sadc@jessicachivers.com](mailto:jc4sadc@jessicachivers.com)) for the next dates.

More and larger litter bins are needed. The single small one at the southeast corner, close to a regular ice-cream van stand, is hardly adequate in this popular spot. Bins along the Roman Wall causeway should help - despite three benches where people sit and smoke, there are none. Cllr Chivers has agreed to investigate this.

## Car Parking Scheme and School Buses

APRA requests for a proper safety audit on the use of Romeland Hill as a *de facto* bus stop have been consistently dismissed. Following the consultation on merging parking zones B, Q and E, we pushed for a safety audit on the replacement of double yellow line opposite Welclose Street by parking bays - as a result that change has been dropped from the scheme. A double yellow line can be used for brief periods of loading and unloading, but not for prolonged waiting. We presented a draft Code of Conduct for School buses operating in the Romeland area to the Car Parking committee who are considering its adoption, to be discussed and agreed with the headmaster.

APRA officers had a welcome and productive meeting with the secretary of the Car Parking Working Party, followed up in writing. We understand that the following will be incorporated in the Traffic Regulation Order being prepared:

1. Permit-only restriction from 08.30 (not 08.00) to 22.00, 7 days.
2. School - Keep Clear signs in front of St Albans School entrance
3. Some additional parking bays suggested by the APRA committee

In addition, SADC are negotiating with NCP to allow permit holders the use of Gombards car park overnight until 08.30 am rather than 07.30, subject to cost implications.

Ward Councillors should have the revised TRO for comment later this month. Following final consultation in September, it is hoped that the scheme will start in December this year or January 2017

## Environment: Litter in the Conservation Area

Austerity and budget reductions have seriously reduced effective street and pavement cleaning - a problem that conflicts with householders having to put rubbish and recycling out on the pavement before collection. We all have to take responsibility for how we do this. Last year there was an issue near the top of Verulam Road where residents and a local business put bags out on or before Friday afternoon - partly blocking the narrow pavement over the weekend when spilled contents were inevitably spread around. Complaints by APRA member Mollie Kennedy were taken up by Cllr Edgar Hill, who successfully proposed that to Council that they should issue Penalty Charge Notices for persistent littering - a principle that now applies throughout the city. The fault in this instance was partly due to the conversion to residential premises without adequate provision for waste storage between fortnightly collections. Imminent changes to the schedule should ease this problem for everyone.

Litter has been imaginatively combated in the small bricked area behind this bench on the corner of George Street and Spicer Street. Thanks to the initiative of APRA member Jude Dyson, the City and Neighbourhoods Committee funded wooden planters to fill a gap that used to be a trap for discarded rubbish. So far this is being largely respected, albeit with regular attention. As the plants grow it should become even more attractive.



Herts County Council is responsible for maintaining and cleaning roads and pavements, and grass-cutting on street verges, work subcontracted to Ringway. Cllr Edgar Hill has raised a petition asking HCC to enforce the contract, which is certainly not being carried out effectively, if at all. The unsightly growth of weeds is now also causing such damage that renovation of the Victorian brick pavements (as carried out recently in parts of Lower Dagnall Street, thanks to County Councillor, Sandy Walkington) will need to be extended yet further.

**Road repairs are overdue and/or urgent throughout the area - Mount Pleasant is next in line, due during the third quarter this year.**

## Conservation - what does it mean to developers?

The Conservation Area has been experiencing intense redevelopment and construction works, including conversions of old business premises to residential use, where developers have taken full advantage of reduced Council planning control powers. It now seems routine practice to do the work first and apply for retrospective permission if complaints are made. In some cases basic Conservation principles and Article 4 Directions have been blatantly ignored. Moreover SADC Planning Department is grossly overworked and understaffed, and often seems to lack any real power when it comes to Enforcement, so that conservation is often compromised. Cllr Edgar Hill has reported some recent cases to Planning and is pushing for answers.



**College Place:** we are concerned about prolonged and damaging construction work in this narrow cul-de-sac, and more is threatened with a proposal to build three new houses on the privately-owned garage site at the far end.

**APRA is ready to support residents where there is a case to be made, so please inform us of any planning or building concerns you may have, especially if they affect you directly.**

Part of Lower Dagnall Street was closed for several days while a new external gas pipe was laid to this building without any prior planning permission. The pipe has now been boxed in but the balance of the classical portico is horribly distorted. APRA has complained to SADC and we expect them to insist that the supply is re-laid internally and the doorway restored.