

Our intention had been to produce a Newsletter for members annually, but for a number of reasons this seems to have slipped to one every 18 months or so. We hope that nevertheless you find it a refreshing, or perhaps sobering, look at what APRA is for and what has happened since the last one.

**** This issue will more or less co-incide with our 2019 AGM on 12 November at 7.30 for 8 pm in Spicer Street Church Hall - Please come, and bring a neighbour! ****

What does APRA do?

APRA was established to provide a focus for those who share an interest in the area and its environment by virtue of residence or direct business involvement. Our philosophy is represented by the strapline 'Protecting our Conservation Area'. As your representatives, the committee has a social role, carried out through sharing information and organising events such as our Midsummer drinks evening - in 2019 once more in the delightful garden of Parkside House with the generous agreement of Bishop Norman Banks. We also have a custodial role, interacting with local council and other authorities on the most pressing issues. Activities are reported at the AGM in November and via our website. We hope that you feel comfortable with and support the actions that we take: although we are non-political you have the power to elect and stand for the committee to present your views more strongly. Please give us feedback!

If you feel that you have seen items in this Newsletter before, you may well have done so - the wheels of Local Government in particular turn very slowly (if at all when the purse is empty).

Congratulations to Stephen Barrett on his election as Verulam Ward Councillor in May. He joins Cllrs Edgar Hill and Chris Davies. We also express our thanks to Jessica Chivers who stood down at the end of her term of office.

APRA 2019 Committee:

Peter Trevelyan, Chair, Abbey Mill End
Geoff Dyson, Vice Chair, College St
Andrew Yaras, Treasurer, Fishpool St
Robert Pankhurst, Secretary, College St
Justin Douglas, Membership Secretary, Lower Dagnall St
Kate Buckley, College Place
Norman James, College Street

New Committee Members needed!



Trees in the City

This year's APRA talk was given in February by Kate Bretherton, celebrating the re-issue of her book on "The Remarkable Trees of St Albans". This was very well received and it seems that urban trees have become the hot topic this year. Concern for trees topped a straw poll at the Conservation 50 exhibition in the new Museum (see elsewhere), and our Secretary participated in drawing up of the St Albans Civic Society Tree Charter, published in their autumn Newsletter (see www.stalbanscivicsociety.net). We joined Aboyne RA in objecting to the felling of trees in the grounds of Verulam House nursing home to make way for a building project.

SADC has bid for a grant from the Government-funded Urban Tree Challenge Fund for new planting in the city centre. There are rather few public trees in the APRA area (around the Abbey, Tankerfield Gardens and the Brickie) but trees in private gardens are equally important. Everyone who can should take part in 'greening' the city.

NB If you live within a Conservation Area and wish to cut down, uproot or prune a tree on your property you must give the Council six weeks' written notice before carrying out any work:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/environmentandwaste/trees-and-woodlands/treesinconservationareas.aspx>

St Albans City and District Council have declared a Climate Emergency. What does that mean for residents in terms of water, energy and waste services, traffic and pollution control?

We all need to take responsibility for our own consumption and contribution to the atmospheric 'carbon balance', although that alone will not be enough. Those who can should take an active interest in improving and maintaining our environment in a truly sustainable way.



There have been complaints throughout the summer, e.g., in the local press, about the ugly silting up of the lakes in Verulam Park (the small one has completely dried out). There are many reasons for this - the neglect of silt build-up in the past, the accumulation of bird mess and run-off from farmland and the immediate surroundings. But the main problem is the drastically reduced flow of the River Ver which should feed the lakes but no longer does this reliably.

This is NOT just a problem for St Albans - chalk streams such as the Ver are disappearing throughout eastern England, in part due to abstraction by water companies, in part due to climate change and more significant drought periods. There is no simple solution to this very complex problem, but we have reservations about the current Environment Agency plan for the river (which also requires funding that is not obviously forthcoming).

Streets and Pavements

We continue to press Sandy Walkington, our HCC Councillor, to improve the condition of our streets and pavements, which have been so neglected as a result of continuous cuts to Council funding. Together with Fishpool Street RA we are planning an area survey of current problems.

The modern world seems to be increasingly reliant on self-help. Would you be prepared to take personal responsibility for keeping the pavement in front of your house free of litter and weeds? Organise a Litter Pick? We can all try to keep our waste and recycling bins off the streets except for collection mornings - as explained at last year's AGM this is Conservation Area policy.



We hope that renovation of heritage lamp-posts in Spicer Street and at the top end of Lower Dagnall Street will take place soon, once the most effective way of dealing with old lead-based paint is decided.

The STOP sign on the road at the junction with College Street will be re-marked as this is a major safety issue.

APRA member Lucy Osborne deserves our thanks and praise for having the road-name sign outside her house restored and sensitively repainted.

The desperately needed re-laying of the road in College Place has been sensibly, if frustratingly, delayed until completion of building on the garage site at the end of the cul-de-sac. Residents and the pavements, both here and in Lower Dagnall Street, continue to suffer from the passage of heavy traffic associated with seemingly incessant renovation and basement development. If you see damage being caused please report it to HCC Highways (0300 123 4047) and photograph it if you can.



photo: Kate Buckley

Conservation 50



APRA Committee members were heavily involved in activities to raise public awareness of the St Albans Conservation Area in its 50th anniversary year, and to emphasise its relevance to our urban environment.



We hope that many of you were able to attend and appreciate the public events held during the summer: an Exhibition in the new Museum+Gallery, a Conference held in Dagnall Street Baptist Church, and a special walk illustrating conservation devised and led by the City Guides. There was also a highly successful visual arts competition for local Primary Schools (won by Fleetville): we hope to run another one in 2020/21 with participation of schools in our area as well!

The work of this group will continue as will the support and participation of APRA, together with other local Conservation Area Residents' Associations. See www.conservation50.org

City Centre Living

Living in a city centre has some great benefits for residents. We may also enjoy the bustle of a city and closeness to our neighbours. But there are times when we might feel that entertainments intrude on our expectations of peace and quiet. This has occasionally been an issue with open-air events accompanied by loud and excitable comperes or excessively amplified music, especially at night.

St Albans residents are also fortunate to have a number of parks and green spaces within walking distance. We are close to the largest of these - Verulamium Park, with its precious remains of 2000 years of urban history. Whereas it has traditionally been used for individual recreation and short organised sporting events, there is a growing national tendency for cash-strapped local authorities to look to larger public festival-type events that bring increased footfall and cash benefits, but also the possibility of much higher levels of noise over longer periods. Recent examples include the 2018 Christmas Festival, the Film Festival in the Abbey Orchard, the televised UK Strongman competition and, most recently, Pub-in-the-Park. They have had varied ratings of success in terms of public enjoyment and the potential for revenue for the city (direct and indirect).

APRA committee is in favour of the beneficial use of the city's historic and open spaces for the public good (including the new idea of a new Christmas fair based around the Charter Market in St Peter's Street). At the same time we believe that residents' right to enjoy their homes without undue interference (which is enshrined in the Licensing Act) should be upheld and we will support anyone who has justifiable cause for complaint. Achieving an acceptable balance is a priority for us and, indeed, for our Ward Councillors.

Engagement with SADC

Objections have been lodged with SADC Planning in respect of a number of applications for residential and commercial development. Copies of objection letters are posted on our website.

Members are encouraged to make us aware of their planning concerns, and also to make their own comments, e.g., via the SADC Planning website (access to which has recently been improved).



This is one of our most frustrating 'failures'. The owners of Heritage Place applied to extend the rear of two shops out to the edge of the overhang, eliminating part of the covered walkway. Despite strong objections from The Civic Society, Heritage Close RA and APRA, the case officer saw 'no harm to the character and appearance of the original locally listed building, or the street scene within the courtyard'. This gross commercially-based disfigurement is now proceeding.

We were invited to attend and address a meeting of the SADC 2019 Enforcement Task & Finish Group, concerning public dissatisfaction with the lack of action against breaches of regulations. Developers often seem to benefit from unauthorised work and/or increasingly common retrospective application for approval. We were disappointed with the discussion and followed up with a written submission jointly with Aboyne RA, who have similar experiences in the Conservation Area.

Local Crime

This summer our area experienced what seems to have been a sudden outbreak of (mostly) petty crime. Cars parked in the street overnight have been damaged - generally having tyres slashed or paintwork scratched, although there was one occasion on which complete wheels were stolen.

There has also been trouble outside Centre 33.

In response there has been some upgrading of CCTV capacity in the area by SADC. We are hoping for an update on local policing by PCSOs from the Safer neighbourhoods Team at the AGM, so please come prepared with your questions.

If you see anything suspicious (unfamiliar people apparently lurking, especially if you think drug-dealing may be taking place) contact the Police on 111 as soon as it is safe to do so.



School Buses



photo: Kevin Keenan

Traffic congestion, pollution, and the inherent risks to people, roads and buildings associated with heavy vehicles operating in the narrow streets of the Conservation Area have always been a major concern. The most regular of such unwelcome visitors are the double-decker buses and long-distance coaches used by St Albans School to transport pupils to and from the school gate in Romeland, daily during term time. Indeed, this was one of the main issues leading to the establishment of APRA in 2013. HCC have updated traffic and parking regulations, which has resulted in minor improvements.

One local resident has now paid for a private safety audit that underlines the risks to all, especially the school children themselves. Together we are continuing discussions with Fishpool Street RA, Councillors and the School, to try to make further progress. In particular we are pushing for morning drop-offs by the largest vehicles to be relocated to High Street, Holywell Hill and Chequer Street.

The School holds 6-monthly meetings with residents representatives and we hope to use these to argue for positive change. **We would like to see controlled entry to the Conservation Area for ALL heavy vehicles.**

Aircraft Noise



photo: Julie Collins

Increasing noise from aircraft has been highlighted with reference to Luton airport operations. APRA committee supports the STAND campaign (St Albans Aircraft Noise Defence). The airport authority is pushing to widen both the zone within which the noise of aircraft taking off is permitted and the night-time flying hours, as a preliminary to expanding the airport to massively increase capacity.

In some ways we benefit from the closeness of the airport but we cannot let it dominate or ruin our environment and quality of life. The only way to keep it under control is to protest - see www.stand.city to find out how.

Membership

If you are not already a member of APRA, please e-mail membership@apralbans.org or download an application form from the website. We continue to offer membership at £5 per person (£8 for two members at the same address), subject to AGM approval. Rental tenants are just as welcome as householders.

Paid-up membership is now up to 100 again, but takes a big dip each November after which we have to chase up unpaid subscriptions. It would be enormously helpful if members took out a Standing Order to pay each year.

Catherine Soave manages our website (now secured), where you can find past Committee Minutes. Group e-mail problems have meant a switch of the primary contact address (now secretary.apra@gmail.com). We believe that we are now fully GDPR-compliant - see <https://apralbans.org/uncategorized/apra-and-your-personal-data/>

APRA is a non-aligned voluntary association for local residents, principally in the area around the Abbey roughly enclosed by Holywell Hill, High Street, Verulam Road, Hill Street and Abbey Mills. It is also available from our website. Please send comments or queries to secretary.apra@gmail.com